

2010 - 2025 - 16TH ANNIVERSARY



POETRY & WRITING

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

A portrait of an elderly man with white hair and a full white beard, smiling. He is wearing a brown jacket over a dark blue shirt. His hands are clasped in front of him, and he is wearing a ring on his left ring finger. The background is a bright, slightly blurred indoor setting with a window and some greenery.

RANDHIR KHARE
*The Space Between
A Poet's Place*

COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY LAVANYA KHARE



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



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

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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Ulyseas
Publisher/Editor

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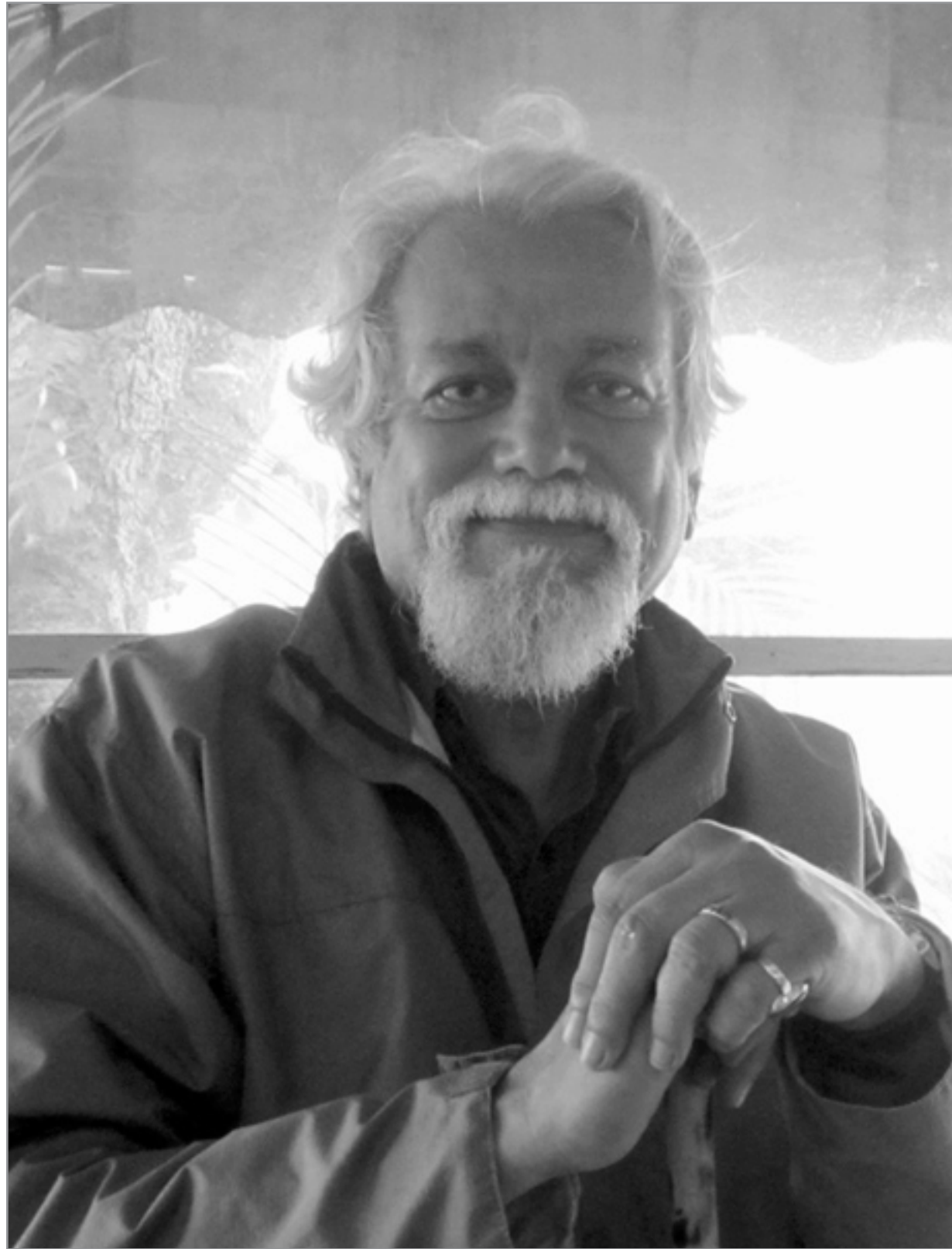
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CONTRIBUTORS

RANDHIR KHARE – GUEST EDITORIAL
ALICIA VIGUER-ESPERT
BRID CONNOLLY
DAVID DEPHY
ELIF SEZEN
ELSA KORNETI
HELEN DEMPSEY
IAN WATSON
IRINA FROLOVA
JULIAN MATTHEWS
KATE ENNALS
MARY SCHEURER
MAURICE DEVITT
MICHAEL SIMMS
PADDY DONOGHUE
RACHAEL STANLEY
RAY WHITAKER
SCOTT THOMAS OUTLAR
SHANTANU RAY CHAUDHURI
TIM TOMLINSON
TREVOR LANDERS
VALENTINA TECLICI



Randhir Khare is a national and international award-winning poet, writer, artist and folklorist. He has thirty-nine books to his credit, performed his poetry in twelve concerts, exhibited his art in seven solo shows and has inspired the work of photographers, artists and actors, and has collaborated with A.R Rahman who has set his poems to music. His work has over the years been published by Penguin Random House India, HarperCollins India, Niyogi Books, Sakal Publications, Silvercord Publishing, Rupa Books, River Books and a host of smaller presses. As an educationist and arts practitioner for the last fifty years he has brought alive literature for eight to thirty-year-olds through dramatic readings and performances. His novels *The Legend of Creaky* and *The Last Jungle on Earth* were adapted on several occasions for the stage and used for creative workshops for The Gallery of Modern Art in Mumbai and The Prithvi Theatre Summertime workshops. They have also been adopted by schools as rapid readers. As storyteller, he has collected and performed numerous folktales which he has performed for various audiences and collected them in a video titled *The World in a Story*. More recently he has performed for video a series of his original stories and used them in schools as discussion points and art activities. He is the recipient of the Sanskriti Award for Creative Writing, the Sahitya Akademi's Residency Award, The Palash Award for Lifetime Achievement in Education and Culture, The Pegasus Gold Medal for Poetry awarded by the Union of Bulgarian Writers and a host of other prizes that recognise his contribution to literature and Education. As director of The Rewachand Bhojwani Academy in Pune he has introduced a number of arts and literature programmes including the Library Alive project. Two books, THE BOOK OF DAWN and TARA, THE DOG WHO ALWAYS WAS have just been released.

<https://www.randhirkhare.in/>

RANDHIR KHARE THE SPACE BETWEEN A POET'S PLACE

When I was eleven, my environment and circumstances brutalized me. Poetry slipped me effortlessly into its forms and norms, faces and places, voices, moods, charades and unbelievable hope and love. I became a changeling. Like the secret life below a forest floor breeds its own amazing reality I did the same. Whether I was hungry or loveless or abused or abandoned, I dealt with experiences that came my way, they weren't challenges for me.

Interestingly, I never gave a single thought as to how I had gotten down there in the first place. Was it via a tunnel while following a 'rabbit experience'? Did I trip and topple in? True I was into experiences of all kinds but none of them as far as I know that could have ushered me into a new and unexpected world that has grown up around me with roots connecting across the world to the Bhilalas, Todas, Incas, Bantus, Australian Aborigines...the trail runs riot and I have long since lost the singularity of the scent.

But rather than abandon it I have held it close and it follows me where chance encounters take me...like a faithful dog without a leash.

Randhir Khare. Photo credit: Lavanya Khare.

I have had the good fortune of meeting others who carry worlds within and have been continually surprised by them. There was Loy, a friend of my youth, who lived with numerous selves long before I had got wind of them. He claimed that he had a lover who was a Polish trapeze artist and who had had a child by him. In the same breath he was the publisher of a small press who constantly wrote me acceptance letters for non-existent short story and poetry manuscripts, conducted an adventure festival to Mongolia with V.S.Naipaul, Bruce Chatwin and Gavin Young and finally got abducted by four men in black in a helicopter from the Vietnam War. Saw him a month later, subdued. He later actually published a volume of poems, 'City of Blood' and a novel, 'Thorns of Hope'.

When I left Kolkata, Loy remained there only to be replaced by E..., the dope smoking and bhang eating poet from Mumbai. There were worlds within him – but he was a stingy guy and rarely shared his experiences or the fantastical geographies of his spaces. Of course, he brought reports from the frontiers of his deep imagination about which of our friends were in the running for the Nobel Prize for Literature and who was due to marry an Italian. Of course there were other sundry predictions shared in sign language. When he was stuck for a plausible explanation, he would start intoning esoteric Buddhist chants and often force me to learn some by heart. I wish I had seen him more often and known him better...and read some more of his amazing poetry. With time and circumstance, we drifted apart. He had a doped out buddy whose name I can't remember. Couldn't find him either. Pity. Maybe there was a gold mine there. Can't go back. Times change. I haunted the little chai shops near the temple precinct by the sea with no luck.

Not long after, crawling with the years, I had the opportunity to meet Koda Sherry who was my colleague at work. Someone had picked him off the pavement chasing under a large raincoat in the rain. It took a while calming him down till he could live up to his role as a feature writer. Of course, he just about completed his assignments but in his spare time he actually started working on a novel based on his street experiences which was turning out to be stunning. I felt myself and my own writing pale into insignificance.

It was too good to be true till one day he returned to his ancestral home in Kerala then drank and smoked himself to death. His cot which was out under the palms was washed away to sea as his family watched him go.

A hollow farewell followed with everyone getting drunk and a fight ensuing after someone made out with someone else in the nearby bushes on the beach.

I remember feeling so sick that I vomited all the way to the local bus stand. Back at my apartment I thought of all those with forests beneath their feet. Some had slipped down rabbit tunnels and were lost forever. I believe the lost poems and stories are the best and all the others that have been laboured over and polished and made 'mighty' have amounted to mere rabbit holes which we are left to decipher.

And so the story makers and singers still keep coming but no one knows what's within, the forest beneath the feet. What grows there? What blooms there?

In Bratislava, before the Velvet Revolution, I had a couple of encounters with a singer-song writer- musician Miroslav. During our first meeting in a downtown café he babbled about dollars he needed to buy recording equipment. *Here's my lead singer*, he said, holding up a picture cut out of an old magazine. *Tia. Her name is Tia. We were children together. We would gather flowers, she liked red flowers, poppies mainly.* Slowly he slipped into the tunnel in the floor of the forest and took me with him to places where he had taken Tia...carried by his words. He had the endearingly soft voice of a serial killer.

The next time around, I saved him in the same café from being roughed up by the manager for trying to run off without paying his bill. I paid and he treated me to a haunting melody on his battered guitar. *This is my life. It is flooded with melodies. Original melodies. They come and they go. None of them are willing to stay. Who wants to stay at a time like this, you tell me, tell me. Everywhere there are shadows, people without faces, homes are places, no one belongs, where are you now?* He walked off into the dark.

I was afraid of bumping into him again. Of course I did. A couple of times. The last was when I gave him a couple of dollars and made a dash for, panting from lane to lane, the stink of the Danube in the air, shouting, *I don't want dollar anymore. In this country we now use stones.*

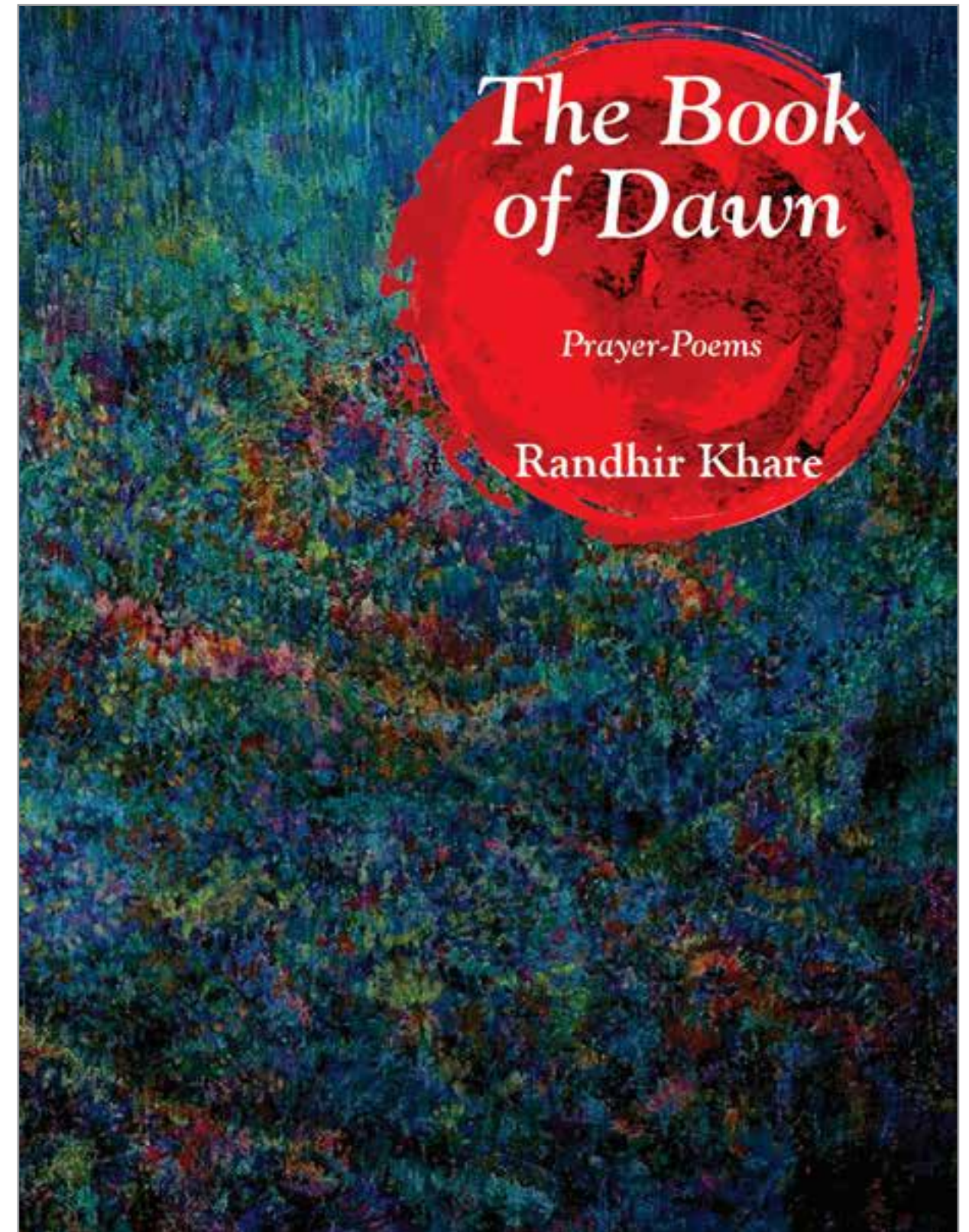
If anyone had guts and money, I'd recommend investing in Miro. He was a winner. A one-man enterprise.

A pure poet, the real poet is not a destination but the journey there, oftentimes straying into woods of flowers on the way, falling into tunnels, coming out, turning up in decrepit small towns and festering cities with the same sense of celebration. Many of you would say 'but nothing is complete and in some cases, doesn't even exist, it's still a figment of the mind'. Unfortunately, in the world we live in everything must be complete and gift-wrapped, have a name, have a label then it can be presented to the world.

Then how do we get to the real creations? If you are interested, through your senses, just being present wherever you are. Wholly present. Compassionate listening, looking, reading. My new role as an empathetic guide helps me understand each time a young adult talks to me about what they are creating. Poems, plays, stories. Most of what they are talking about doesn't tangibly exist but it is present and I get a regular report on progress. It gives them courage and confidence.

Poets, more often than other creative spirits, occupy the space between. For long, I too lived there. It was meanderingly pleasant, joyous and engaging. It was another reality. When I was resurrected, it was like Lazarus rising from his tomb. Very reluctantly at first. From the safety of my space to the bright scrutiny of the world. How I long to return – to the tunnel, to the connectedness of consciousness, to the tomb where all belong.

But a seed once open never gets back to its oneness. I paid a price.



The Book of Dawn: Prayer-Poems
available at <https://redriverpress.in/product/the-book-of-dawn-prayer-poems/>

Alicia Viguer-Espert, born and raised in Valencia, Spain is a four-times Pushcart nominee. Winner of the *San Gabriel Valley Poetry Festival* (2017) with her chapbook “Holding a Hummingbird.” Two chapbooks, “Out of the Blue Womb of the Sea” (2020) and “Four in 1” (2022) are published by Four Feather Press. She has published at *Panoply*, *Amethyst Review*, *LummoX*, *Altadena Poetry Review*, *Odyssey*, *Sin Cesar*, *Live Encounters*, *Galway Review*, and *Thimble* among others. Panelist for “Writing from Our Immigrant Hearts,” presented at: *LifeFest in the Dena Pasadena* (2023), *Avenue 50 Studio, Los Angeles* (2023), *San Diego Writers Festival, San Diego* (2024), *Burbank Buena Vista Library, Burbank* (2024), *Eagle Rock Library, Los Angeles* (2024)



END OF SEPTEMBER

Summer turns dark, suddenly
in this early evening hour
after gray clouds shed their load
softly laundering my garden.

Songs of rain, extended music
playing rhythmically on roof tops
do not offer consolation
to the melancholic, not today.

The pelted bougainvillea faints,
scarlet spills over the sidewalk,
the five white arms of jasmine flowers
wave good bye leaving sadness behind.

Like that wounded bird,
the one I cradled in my palm,
offered drops of water with my finger,
my broken wings can't navigate the stars.

Alicia Viguer-Espert

ABOUT THE RED BARN WE NEVER OWNED

There is nothing left
from the days before the red barn,
-the barn we never owned,
burned in the fire;
we never owned the fire either.

All that remains is the memory
of voices cracked with anger,
fear to expose old-time wounds,
and a red moon over the Turia River
watching flamingos' anxiety build up
because couldn't fly away fast enough.

Today I return to our old home.
From the window I see the burned barn
we never owned but you wanted to,
you wanted other things that were not me.

A smoky scent still dangles
from the rigid shoulders of hangers in the bedroom closet.
The transparent resilient fabric of cobwebs
stubbornly clinging to my hair has a lot to teach us,
but we were not teachable in those days
when the barn we did not own burned.

In a drawer I find a roll of 8-millimeter film
Examining the first frame over the window's light,
I see hands holding, our heads bent together
with laughter as sunlight leans over your shoulder,
but on the right upper corner, a dark cloud approaches.

TO THE HIDDEN ONE
AFTER THE FLOOD IN VALENCIA

I pray to understand the soul hidden in leaves,
the pyroclastic voice of summer thunder,
how minutes stretch into hours at sunset,

why the heart of my vibrant and beautiful sister
ceased to beat against her strong will, but I refuse
to rub against your thighs like a dog with fleas.

In this unrelenting flood lullabies cannot be heard
from the window heavy blackout curtains convulse;
piano lessons, lives, books from the library, gone.

And I remember how

at night I used to extend my arms tentatively
as if you were a new lover, other times I sat
with palms open hoping you'll materialize

on my hands a cluster of pearls for me
to touch the smoothness of your pearliness.
It's a mystery, you and I groping in the dark.

Now waves of dread rise up to my waist
as I wait for the rescue boat of assurance
that you'll stop my city from drowning.

Water keeps rising. I cannot purchase prayers
in the market and the snake in the storm hisses.
I should not have to beg, I'm your daughter

my inheritance rights are written on the forehead
of my heart. Talk to me. Teach me the secrets of love,
so, I can forgive you.

Bríd Connolly has had poems published in *Fire: Brigid and the Sacred Feminine*, *Storms IV*, *New Irish Writing*, *Flare: Readings from Dublin's Sunflower Sessions* and *Live Encounters*. Some of her poems were short- and long-listed in the Fish Poetry Competition, Anthony Cronin Competition, and Gregory O'Donoghue Competition.



ANOTHER MAYNOOTH SEPTEMBER

Virginia Creeper transforms
from jade, emerald, malachite
to flushing ruby, garnet, amber,
while rough squalls sever pearly stems
from entangled vines on hallowed walls,
to carpet tarry pathways with fallen leaves
rescuing the feet of fresh-faced students,
setting them on the bejewelled corridors,
towards fulfilling faith in future dreams.

Bríd Connolly

FIRST FROSTS

A skim of frost on the neighbour's roof
is like a dust of icing sugar
on the luscious chocolate cakes
that my mother made for my birthdays,
until I left childhood and started my own life.

As the sun sweeps by the chimneys
a huge image emerges, like Seán Scully's
Arrest with his signature themes and
tints and hints and pulse and bars
of night shades bisecting yellows and browns.

Meanwhile, down at the harbour,
two swans glide over astral waters,
their cygnets gone from the nest,
as the golden couple drift in the blue
skies of the October day's first frosts.

MARAUDERS

Musing on lunch,
what will we have,
pâté, confit, terrine?
we pass a wounded pigeon
on a mown lawn,
writhing, toiling,
its ash-pale wings flailing.

Further on, three grey crows
stalk and peck and jab and skip,
closing in on the besieged bird.

Six eyes inspect the floundering pigeon.
We *whoosh* them away,
our arms whirling.
The crows rise in a lumbering launch
and then,
land on our path, stabbing and gouging
and watching.

We waver. Should we rescue
the injured bird?
Or shrug and leave it to nature?
We walk on
faltering,
as the pigeon thrashes on the turf.

Later, when we return, after lunch,
sated with our chicken liver pâté
the grey crows are gone.
But
all that remains of the pigeon
is
the bloody breastbone
with imploring wings.



David Dephy is an award-winning American poet, novelist, multimedia artist, and the founder of Poetry Orchestra. In 2025, he received the Nassau County Poet Laureate Award in New York and served as the Poet-in-Residence for Brownstone Poets from 2024 to 2025. NASA, Lunar Codex, and Brick Street Poetry sent his poem, "A Sense of Purpose," to the Moon in 2025. Dephy was exiled from his native country of Georgia and received indefinite political asylum in the U.S. His wife and son joined him in 2023 after six years of exile. He is recognized as a "Literature Luminary" by Bowery Poetry, a "Stellar Poet" by Voices of Poetry, and an "Incomparable Poet" by Statorec. He has also been called "Brilliant Grace" by Headline Poetry & Press and praised for his "Extremely Unique Poetic Voice" by Cultural Daily. He lives and works in New York City.

IN SILENCE

In silence, you are searching for
yourself only.

Do you see the birds? They are words.
Heavens are the books.

Our breaths are written in those books,
by those birds, they need no explanation.

Do you see how the lovers are alone?
They need no witnesses.

Birds never chase headlines.
They chase horizons.

Just as passion does not fade—
It reverberates.

If we could see how beautiful
we are when we read each other's breaths,

we all would be immortal,
just as we were in our childhood.

In silence, you feel some strange fullness,
hear the voices from the other side of alone.

David Dephy

THE MAN WAS WALKING

The man was walking
on East End Avenue and 86th Street,
talking to himself:

“I spent my life believing
I had control over my work,
but in the end, I realized
I was just another piece
in the much larger game.

It is not what we imagine.

Information is perception.
Who controls perception
controls the world—
especially its past.

Its history.”



The bird that couldn't fly. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Elif Sezen is an Australian/Turkish multidisciplinary artist, bilingual poet/writer, translator. Her poetry collection *A Little Book of Unspoken History* was published by Puncher & Wattmann (2018), *Universal Mother* by Gloria SMH Press (2016). Her poems appeared in national and international journals and anthologies. She holds a PhD from Monash University, and currently lives and works in Melbourne. Elif's website: <https://www.elifsezen.com/>



MARBLES

Children notice everything others consider coincidental
Secrecy is irrelevant: a burden growing by itself
They pick up the quantum atoms of life as
glass marbles in their hands, skillfully
is this a game of yes and no
or a strategy of survival?

Growing, losing their valuable marbles through
wrong answers and irrelevant trade-offs
The traces of holy and maternal nourishments are lost
The soul is in hunger, its light is fading away
it is thirsty, suffocating, but cannot
figure out what it is searching for
and what it is absent of

Growing, that deserted tunnel
where something human compassionately awaits
some surrender of the small self

Elif Sezen

Active in organizing readings and events with other poets, Elsa Korneti was born in Munich, Germany, but grew up in Thessaloniki, Greece where she still resides. She is a Greek poet, essayist and poetry translator from English, German and Italian. Her career has been similarly diverse: studies in finance were followed by work as a journalist for well-known newspapers and magazines. She has published poetry, short stories, essays, book reviews and translations. She organized several successful poetry slams in her city and in Athens; she inspired and organized events, and staged original poetic performances. She has published sixteen books of poetry, short stories, essays and translations. In the recent years two of her poetry collections and one short stories collection have been distinguished as shortlisted for the National Award. Her poetry has been translated into several languages and is also featured in various foreign anthologies and magazines. Recent publications: *Poetry, Homo Aquarius* (2024), Short stories, *Rooms with teeth and other sharp stories* (2023).

IN AN INDEFINITE HORIZON

In a blue infinity,
Where the gaze
Rests calmly,
The little cormorant plows
His sea field.
Then he dives
For the first fish
Of the day.
The rower
Balancing,
Like the bird on the branch,
Struggles to tear
The calm water,
Moving his world
Rhythmically.
The world, busy,
For the persistent rower,
Ignores him.



Elsa Korneti

A DOG'S SLEEP

The dog
Lives his black-and-white life.
But in his dog's sleep,
He dreams his own dreams,
Which may be in color.
Then he jolts,
In the serene sleep,
Startled.

LOVE

Everyone loved him
From a distance,
The one so happy.
Everyone loved him
Persistently, the one so happy
Who stoically endured
The hammering of love,
Remaining, in the end,
Demonic,
Empty.

GARDEN

The whole world
Should be
An amaranth flower,
A garden,
Embedded in the mind
Of the robin.
He holds, in the secret garden,
The key to childhood,
For the robin
Is an anarchist bird.
It accepts no orders
From anyone
Except
From itself.

TREE

The tree
Shakes its leaves,
Bushy and ambitious,
Full of prophecies,
Juices, and graces.
From its last branch,
Suspicious
Of the coming storm,
Hangs a fruit,
Rotten.

Dublin-born Helen Dempsey lives in Rush, Co. Dublin and has had poems published in anthologies, magazines, online, local radio, readings and open mic sessions. She won Fingal Libraries' Poetry Day competition 2018, 2021; a commended and highly commended award in the Jonathan Swift Poetry Competition 2017 and winner in 2023. She was shortlisted for the Bridport prize, 2018 and 2023. Most recently her poems have appeared in *Live Encounters*, *A New Ulster*, *Flare*, *The Storms* and The Ireland Chair of Poetry Commemorative Anthology, *Hold Open the Door*. A member of the Ardgillan Creative Writers' Group, she holds a Masters Degree in Poetry Studies from D.C.U. *Planting a Pear Tree* her debut collection was published by Revival Press in 2024.
www.limerickwriterscentre.com



WHITE NOISE

Hearing aids heighten
background chatter
(I know there is an app
there always is).
Time has robbed me
of a quiet place
somewhere to be,
a sensory garden
soothing sounds
scratches of ballpoint on paper.
But no.
Let me appreciate the noise,
the hearing.
Listen for the tone of angst,
grief, exhaustion, pleading
in a vacuum of busyness
shouting in a space bubble
where no one takes notice
afraid of hearing too much.

Helen Dempsey

WHEN I FORGET YOU

(for E.K.)

They are my arms around you
when you embrace me.
Your kiss is on my lips.
They are still my eyes
though my blank stare upsets you.

My mind is not all of me,
I'm still here.

When you hold my hand, it is
the same one on which you put a ring.
Our children are part of us.
They have traits, gestures, sounds
I once showed, made, said.

When I forget you,
think of our young love,
the better not the worst,
the health not the sickness,
the richness of all we have cherished.

My mind is not all of me,
remember for us.

GARDEN STAGE

He watches there
often;
on the fence post,
possessor of his territory.

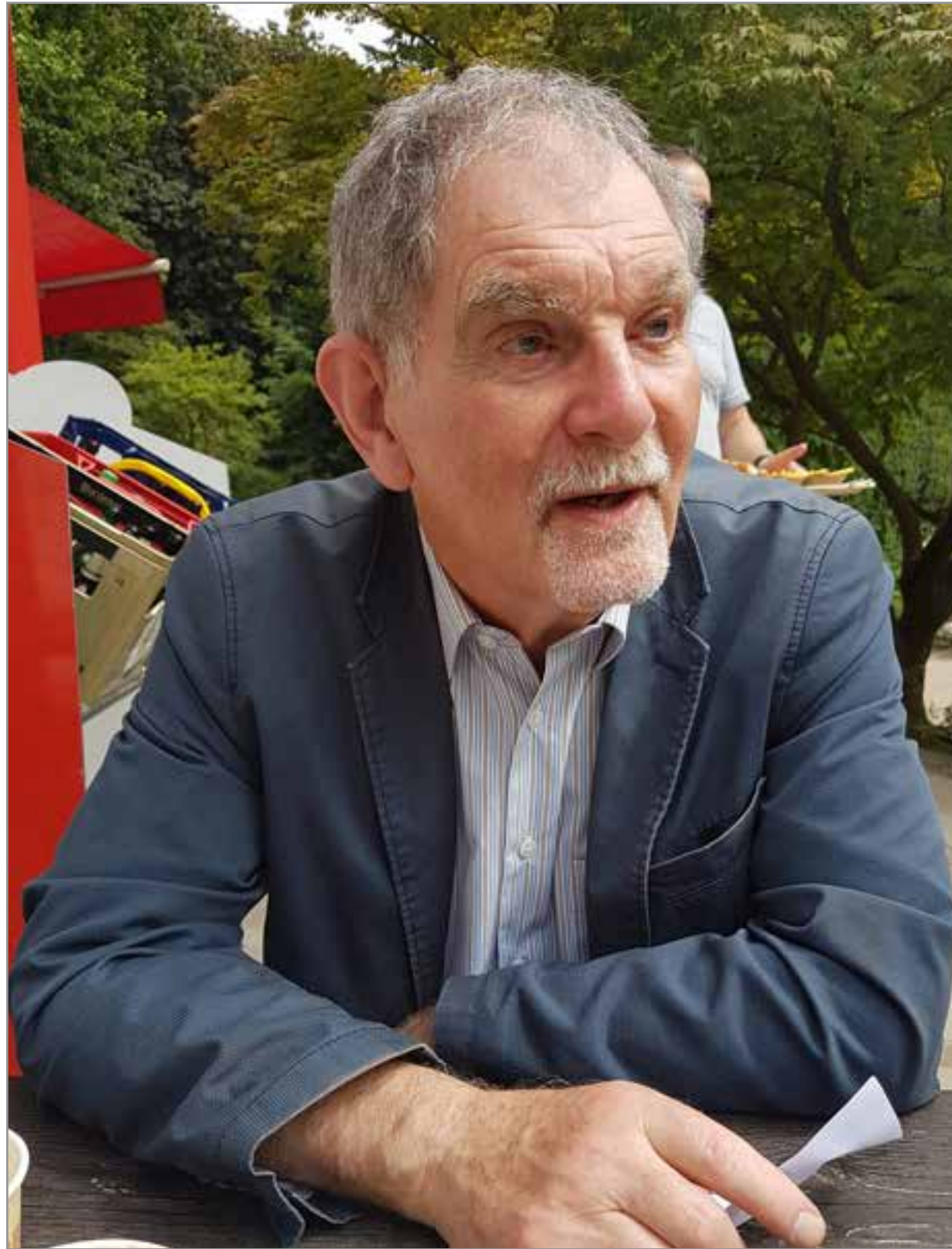
Wary
of the artificial hawk
circling the limit
of its tether.

The *oystercatcher* cries
desperately
caught between the fence
and *escallonia* hedge

in its panic
it cannot see a way out.
The redbreast utters
siren notes

messages from a visiting soul.
Reassurance for family lore,
flutters. The *oystercatcher*
registers its escape

Ian Watson is originally from Belfast but lives in Bremen, Germany. He is the author of two poetry collections in English: *Riverbank City* (Blaupause Verlag, 2013) and *Granny's Interpreter* (Salmon Poetry 2016); a further collection *Somewhere, Far Away, a Radio*, is forthcoming. His poetry has been published in anthologies in Ireland, Britain Germany and the United States, and his recent German-language non-fiction includes *Spielfelder: eine Fußballmigration*, on football and identity, and *Bremen erlesen*, a literary and cultural guide to his second-home city in Germany (both with Edition Falkenberg). He also publishes translations of poetry from and into German and English. He has worked regularly for radio and also made the film *Cool to be Celtic* for German and French television (arte 1999). He has completed his first novel, *East Antrim* (working title). He is a steering committee member of the Literaturhaus Bremen.



THE LAST SUPPER

In the Cathedral Museum, Bremen

Thirteen colleagues round a groaning table;
the gaffer is eating what looks like a cat. The traitor
with the very prominent nose prays
ostentatiously. The bread of treachery
is passed from hand to hand from an oval dish.

The decent squeak of smooth oak floors, designer
lighting, hushed and reverent tourist chat;
a smattering of Russian or Ukrainian.
How plain all this must seem to someone orthodox.

No mediaeval smell, no draughts, no damp,
a volunteer guide who talks to everyone
a polished dagger beyond stainless glass
shining rustless steel from a time
when nothing ever stayed stainless

The crypt is hidden, as a crypt should be
cold oozes from the floor
to my left in the rock wall an electric socket

Warm brown and orange candles
trams rumble from afar
the orange and brown of the bishop's clothes
what were the original colours?

An elderly volunteer with a farting shoe
replaces the candle. Taking notes, I hear him return.

Ian Watson

THE CHAIR

'The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne ...' (Antony and Cleopatra, II, ii, 190)
'The Chair she sat in, like a burnished throne ...' (The Waste Land, II)

The chair she sat on, like a lean great aunt,
 sits straight-backed, tight-lipped and spindly-legged;
 its features are gaunt, its tone disapproving
 of a story it will never tell.

The sofa she chilled on, like a stranded whale,
 gasps briefly at him, creaks as he passes,
 oozing bereavement, leaking loss.

Books she never read, like bookends of themselves,
 whisper their titles in the shelves: *Flesh and Blood*,
After You'd Gone, *An Evening of Long Goodbyes*,
The Sense of an Ending, *Paradise Lost*.

Bottles she drank from, like bowling pins,
 clink dustily together at the breeze-kissed curtain,
 trapping the light and bending it green,
 certain of nothing but the bottle bank –
 wishing for it just to be over.

Enduring Love, like an oblong coaster,
 still lies on the wicker stool, bookmarked
 halfway, red wine on the cover.

REMOTE

Up, out on the Mournes it was just him and the sheep
 Now the whin is dark and rainswept
 There is a whistle in the chimney

Once a week to Tesco's in the Fiesta
 and pick up the Social Security
 Newry and Belfast for clothes and bigger stuff

He had noticed her growing aloof
 her constant trips to 'Out' in the Mini
 Was that business with the ewe the start of it

Her indifference grew into distance
 The week with a girlfriend in Hull
 a weekend with her sister on Inishmore

When he called round the neighbouring farms
 to ask the farmer's wives if they'd heard
 some were standoffish, some didn't come to the door

He looked for her everywhere: in the next-to-one village pub
 in the ladies' toilet of the Loyalist Working Men's Club
 behind and before the counter of the nearest Food Bank
 He cross dressed into a meeting of the WI, appealed
 to the audience at the Country Women's Guild

In the end he even stuck his hand down
 the back of the clapped-out chesterfield

INTENSIVE CARE

Somebody stole his umbrella in the waiting room.

He'd only been with her a quarter of an hour;
she was easily tired but her responses were good.
She could now not only just shake her head, but nod;
no mean feat with that long neck scar.

There were five of them, before and after.
Were they all there together, stuck on standby
for the same news from inside? Or had
they got to know each other in a parallel wait?

When he saw it was gone
(he'd thrown it casually into the corner
when the intercom said he could go through),
he asked of course, but nobody ...

They must have taken it by mistake, was all
one lady could say – the one who claimed he'd
taken it in with him. *No, he didn't* (the one who could
have been her daughter): *In the corner – there, against the wall.*

Outside, it was pissing down loud and hard and vertical,
bouncing off the pavement as he hiked up his hood.
As he crossed the forecourt in a rotting vegetable mood,
he too was gathering beasts: of revenge – and none of them verbal.

If they'd nicked it and he'd caught them with it
sitting in the visitors' café, they would have been
in A&E or back up to Intensive Care post-haste.

But then: if it had been inadvertent,
maybe if they'd received bad news in here,
he just hoped they wouldn't be standing soon
under a red-and-yellow checked umbrella
at someone's open grave.

Irina Frolova lives on Awabakal Country in Lake Macquarie, NSW with her children and fur babies. Irina's work explores life and belonging through cultural, feminist, psychological, and neurodiversity lenses. Her creative highlights include her poetry collection *Far and Wild* (Flying Islands, 2021), the second prize in the 2021 Deborah Cass Prize for Writing, and poems recognised in the 2023 University of Canberra VC International Poetry Prize, the 2023 Heroines Women's Writing Prize, the 2024 Liquid Amber Poetry Prize: Poetry of Change, the 2025 Poetry d'Amour Love Poetry Contest, and winning The Australian Haiku Society 2025 Autumn Equinox Kukai competition.



UNTOUCHABLE

We skype with my family.
Babushka calls you *darling boy* and
Мишенька.

The name lands
 softly
 like a wish on a dandelion.

Here, the space left for me dissipating,
 I hold my breath whenever I spell *my* name
 to a stranger.

I turn to you, who sees
 the unspeakable, the (under)current,
 holds the untouchable.

Your hand on mine, we sigh—
 in this moment, free
 to exhale.

Note: *Мишенька* – Michael

Irina Frolova

LEAF ANGELS

I believe nothing
will remain of us
but this

moonlight
on the lake’s ink
a twinkle of

wonder
in the dark eye of night
an indigo shimmer

where the horizon rests
undefined
& indefinite

and by this
I mean nothing
but song

whirling
in winter’s air
over the silhouettes of birds

nothing will remain
in the way
but this

silk of the spider web
quivering
with drops of rain

where the sun sifts
through the tangle
of trees

and by this
I mean something
like chaos

growing evergreen
in the rustle of yesterday’s
leaves

dry with grief
we can burn
or fall

arms flailing
leaf angels
in love

and by this
I mean
everything

Julian Matthews is a mixed-race poet from Malaysia. He was nominated for the Pushcart Prize by Dream Catcher magazine/Stairwell Books, UK, in 2022. He is published in *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Beltway Poetry Quarterly*, *Loch Raven Review*, *Live Encounters* and *New Verse News*, among 60 other literary journals and anthologies in 17 countries. <https://linktr.ee/julianmatthews>



FOOTNOTE

If I wrote a poem about you
There would an asterisk at the end of every line
Each will shine like a tiny dark star at the edge of the universe
Each will lead you to a footnote explaining the ambiguity
of sadness from your absence
My poem can't, won't, will not stand on its own or be self-explanatory
Your questioning eyes will dart up and down the page
from asterisk to footnote:
line-asterisk-footnote,
line-asterisk-footnote,
line-asterisk-footnote
Trying to make sense of it all
Until you reach the last line which wouldn't need a footnote
Because by then you would understand
That you are gone, no longer here, unalive
And all that remains is this grief
And your unexplainable presence still kicking around
and footnoted in my life forever

Julian Matthews

SUNDAY ENCOUNTER

This Sunday evening, I briefly encountered Hope and Peace.
I was out for my usual three-mile walk around the park.
“Hope” was in bright yellow font on a t-shirt of a buff young man,
huffing from a workout, on the right side of my path.
“Peace” was in dull white lettering on a faded t-shirt
of an older woman on my left, who looked harried
as if in a rush to get home to prepare dinner.
My journalistic instincts kicked in and I thought of capturing
the moment on my phone.
After all, it is not everyday you are confronted by Hope and Peace.
But it was already too late and too obvious.
So I just looked quizzically at one, then the other,
and they each looked quizzically back at me – for staring.
And since they were parallel to each other,
neither knew what the other’s t-shirt bore.
I do not consider myself a spiritual man,
and have grappled with my faith for decades,
but somehow felt lighter today for the coincidence.
A stressed, aging Peace, and a muscular yet tired Hope
came up the road and the universe winked at me.
And I realized, not a thing in this weary-shouldered world
has changed in centuries.
Stubbornly, denying humanity’s fate,
I walked an extra three-mile round.

THE BAKER

i sprinkle flour like stardust,
press and mould this ingrained pain
into a pliable dough i can bear

each of us is an untested recipe
waiting to mix it up, improvise,
share our unleavened, salty souls

we fear the burn yet stir and churn,
measure out the weighted repercussions,
butter the beaten batter, stuff the ovened hurt

sometimes the crust hardens, cracks
start to show, the temperature’s too high–
you can’t preheat a woodfire heart

yet, i persist: my webbed words knead
this gossamer interplay, spread sugary
crumbs to draw you into this messy galley

i am not sour, though – just slather me up,
melt the cheese, raise a toast, let’s be open
to whatever sweetness may come next

Kate Ennals has published poems and short stories in a range of literary and on-line journals (Crannog, Skylight 47, Honest Ulsterman, Live Encounters, Boyne Berries, Stony Thursday, Crossways, The Ogham Stone, Poetry Ireland Review, plus many more). She has published three collections of poetry. *At The Edge* (Lapwing) was published in 2015. *Threads* (Lapwing), was published in April 2018. *Elsewhere* (Vole Imprint), in November 21. Her fourth, *Practically A Wake*, will be published shortly (Salmon Poetry). Her blog can be found at <https://kateennals.com/>.



THE BIRDCAGE BY MY BED

For Lesley

It came filled with wild, white plastic flowers
but now I have stuffed my birdcage with pink sunrise,
blue sky, brown, muddy estuaries and vast green oceans.
Strands spill out through its narrow grey bars,
all broken creations. Caged like this, they vie for space
a mass of mohair, alpaca, angora, arran, merino
every thread knotted, twisted, and tangled
no longer the colour coded, matched, pristine
balls of chunky lined up in a wondrous display
full of temptation and desire. Instead, they are looped,
disordered fibres, damaged dreams entwined with bright
coloured nightmares. Ideas gone hideously wrong. Yet
still, each one holds a vestige of hope, of becoming...
something a round, a row, a part of a whole in the world.

Kate Ennals

Mary Scheurer lives by the Alps and derives immense joy from the astounding nature that surrounds her. A retired Philosophy teacher, she integrates two active poetry groups: 'Poetry Quartet' (with Jim Burke, Carolyn Zukowski and Peter Wise) who have read at the Limerick April festival ... and 'The Leman Poets' whose recent 25th anniversary book - 'In the Half Light' was published in summer 2025.



SHEHERAZADE

A willing suspension of disbelief.

The Earth is flat. At least that's one version,
battered by mallets to a thin paper pulp
fine as tissue paper, holes and rips appearing
faster than lies and confusion can be spread.

It used to be round, (the other account)
as Aristotle found centuries ago, or as Magellan
confirmed when he sailed past the edge and didn't
fall off.

Now it resembles a Persian rug, yet stripped of
its enchanting and well-woven designs.
God knows what has been swept underneath -
a flying carpet even Aladdin can't control.
To save ourselves from becoming unhinged
we cling to the fringes so we may delay the fall.

Scheherazade spins many yarns to her sultan
charms him into sparing her life. Such skill,
such thrilling cliff-hangers every night. He waits
with bated breath for every next chapter.

Here, on our flat/round Earth, confused, though
far from spell-bound, we dread each coming episode;

we may never know the end of the story,
better that way perhaps.

Mary Scheurer

RESIDUE

Fossilised nests of Potter wasps
trace graceful patterns
as we wander along the coastal path.
These insects, now extinct here,
leave their mark, so not completely gone.
We look and wonder.

Below, the sea speaks and gulls cry
as they glide effortlessly above.
Love of the ocean swells and ebbs.
And my father's voice seeps through spume.

A favourite song:
'I must go down to the seas again ...'
Focus.
'A wild call and a clear call'
All of it comes back.
In the front room, my sister at the piano;
melody and lyrics etched in memory.

A lone egret

strikingly white against black volcanic rock,
shocks the eye. My father's hair was light,
eyes pale grey. He aspired to the tones
of some great tenor: Caruso, Gigli and such
yet his form was lean, like the bird's.
Elegant in spirit, lacking clout, outdone
by feeble heart and lungs,
ever reaching for those sky high notes.

The melody runs on to closing lines:
*'And all I ask is a quiet sleep
And sweet dreams
When the long trick's over.'*

Surf seethes and foams pitilessly.
Time ticks on.

SING, TEDDY

Teddy swims
through veins
melodies charge
bloodstream
Sostenuto

Teddy swims
troubled currents
weathers waves
salt spittle softens
Moderato

Teddy swims
calm strokes
sure to shore
groove soothing
Andante

Teddy swims
smooth, humid
wet words skin
caresses
Glissando

Teddy swims
stabs surface blur
staccato strokes
piercing
Pizzicato

Teddy swims
hastening pace upbeat
brace heartbeats
race the tempo, chase it
Crescendo

Teddy swims
think of him
ever bear-hugging
back
Mancando

Teddy swims
think of him
drowning not waving
flailing
Fine

A past winner of the Trocaire/Poetry Ireland and Poems for Patience competitions, he published his debut collection, 'Growing Up in Colour', with Doire Press in 2018. Curator of the Irish Centre for Poetry Studies site, his Pushcart-nominated poem, 'The Lion Tamer Dreams of Office Work', was the title poem of an anthology published by Hibernian Writers in 2015. His second collection, 'Some of These Stories are True', was published by Doire Press in 2023.



SPRING

We know it's arrived, when the neighbours
clamber, bleary-eyed, from the bunkers
they've been living in all winter
and we have a rollcall on the street,
watch as friends declare themselves safe
from the vicissitudes of the confined
domestic bliss, take note of the unexpected
silences, the faces that are missing.
A man from the council, whose brother
I knew in school, proceeds to check our health
and fitness, interrupting his notetaking to pepper us
with news and weather highlights
he thinks we might have missed, unaware perhaps
that our wife is at least as good as his.
He climbs back into his van, and we start
to re-acquaint ourselves, share what we watched
on *Hibernation TV* – moose migration,
a particular favourite – fix our gaze
on the summer months, as though we believed
every choice was ours, focus on the little tasks
that make us happy, keep us distracted,
and all the while we are thinking of the sea,
whether it has inched any closer.

Maurice Devitt

THE NIGHT YOU DIED

That afternoon I followed my usual Saturday routine:
immersed myself in the match day commentary on BBC 2,
the distinctive burr of James Alexander Gordon,
his predictive rhythm pitched perfectly
as he unveiled the results. Juggling the scores in my head,
I scurried up the stairs to your bedroom,
pouring them out to you before they were lost,
yet failing to notice you were already slipping away.
The following morning, I woke early, lay still
and noiseless in my bed, listening for the unfamiliar
sound of visitors staying over, the muffled clip
of their heels on the lino floor and the soft voice
that would peel up the stairs, call me down
to a kitchen filled with faces and few words,
just enough to tell me what I somehow already knew.

THE ORIGINS OF FAME

You lived in the most mysterious house on the street:
squat and assertive, with just one wink of a window
facing on to the road, as though throwing an eye
up the sweep of newer, less distinctive houses.
Hunched around a garden of black apples and white
plums, distribution of the trees based on a puzzle
plucked from a Lewis Carroll book you had never read.
The puckered front door, wedged into the deep stucco wall,
forced even the smallest of us to stoop into the cavernous dark,
layout deliberately unfamiliar, rooms just fulfilling
the purpose of concealing other rooms, the phonogram
in the corner playing Steve Hillage on repeat, light
never bright enough to recognise ourselves, as we half-
expected a Brontë, or two, to walk through. On quiet days,
the echo of last week's drum practice seemed to hang
in the air, the snare drum always a sharp rebuke to those of us
expecting the comfort of tea and scones, so it was perhaps
no surprise, when you arrived breathless, on the green that day
and proceeded to tell us about finding a moose's head
in the attic. This is where the escapade began.

Michael Simms is an American poet, novelist and publisher. He is the Founding Editor of Autumn House Press and *Vox Populi Sphere*; and the author of five collections of poetry, six speculative novels and a textbook about poetry. His poems have been published in *Poetry* (Chicago), *Scientific American*, *Plume* and *Poem-a-day* (Academy of American Poets). Simms grew up in the cowboy culture of Texas, but since 1987, he has lived with his wife, the philosopher Eva-Maria Simms, in the historic neighborhood of Mt Washington which overlooks the three rivers of Pittsburgh. Simms has won awards for his environmental activism, and in 2014, Simms was awarded a Certificate of Recognition from the Pennsylvania Legislature for his service to the arts.



THE BABYSITTER'S HOUSE BESIDE THE RAILROAD TRACKS

We slept two in a bed next to the trains
rocking the house as they passed
through the middle of our sleep

in the back room. The smell of grief
seeped beneath the closet doors
and kept me awake. I moved like a ghost

among sleeping children and stood
at the window, the roar of the night
pushing against me as if

the windowsill opened to a hurricane
of dark and light carrying the dead
to the next life. The mosquitoes on the glass

were lost angels and the babysitter's
dead husband still wanted his tea
and pickles. Sometimes an open boxcar

passed by and I could almost see
the straw where men rested on their way
to the nowhere I remembered years later

when I ran from my father's fists
following the rails that might lead to my real home,
and a dark man named *Jesus*, just a man,

Michael Simms

continued overleaf...

not god or angel, but a man
walked beside me and asked where I was born
which was somewhere miles behind in the railyards

where my grandfather was spending his life
in unconscious penance
because his father had been consumed by fire

when the locomotive he engineered
jumped the track on a curve and crashed
into a lumbermill killing a dozen men.

There were rules that governed such things.
Rules we understood and others we didn't.
When two boys shared a bed, for example,

no touching. The space between you is fraught
with confusion. No breathing in each other's faces
either. Your brand new bodies should be turned away

like strangers who've fallen asleep on a train.
The room was full of children carried through the night
on gleaming rails. The train ran through our sleep

the way a fire moves through dry leaves, dark smells,
wavering light, and a boy in cotton underpants
at the window in the heavy summer air

THE SHORE

When I left home at eighteen I knew
I'd come back only as a ghost,
not as someone dead but as someone who no longer believed
the net of fictions that kept my parents alive and trapped.
I won't call them lies because the intent was not to deceive
but to survive. My mother was happy with her life
as long as my father got the final word.
We were unhappy in the way that Tolstoy says
all happy families are the same. But who's to say
our unhappiness was unusual?

My father used to slap me around
when I got home late at night after rehearsals
for *The Trojan Women* where I was the Tech Guy
shining blue and amber light on Hecuba, Queen of Troy,
who sat in partial shadow on the shore
beneath the walls of her burning city. Her grief
for her son Hector, a prince who loved his wife and son
and died defending his people, was exquisite.

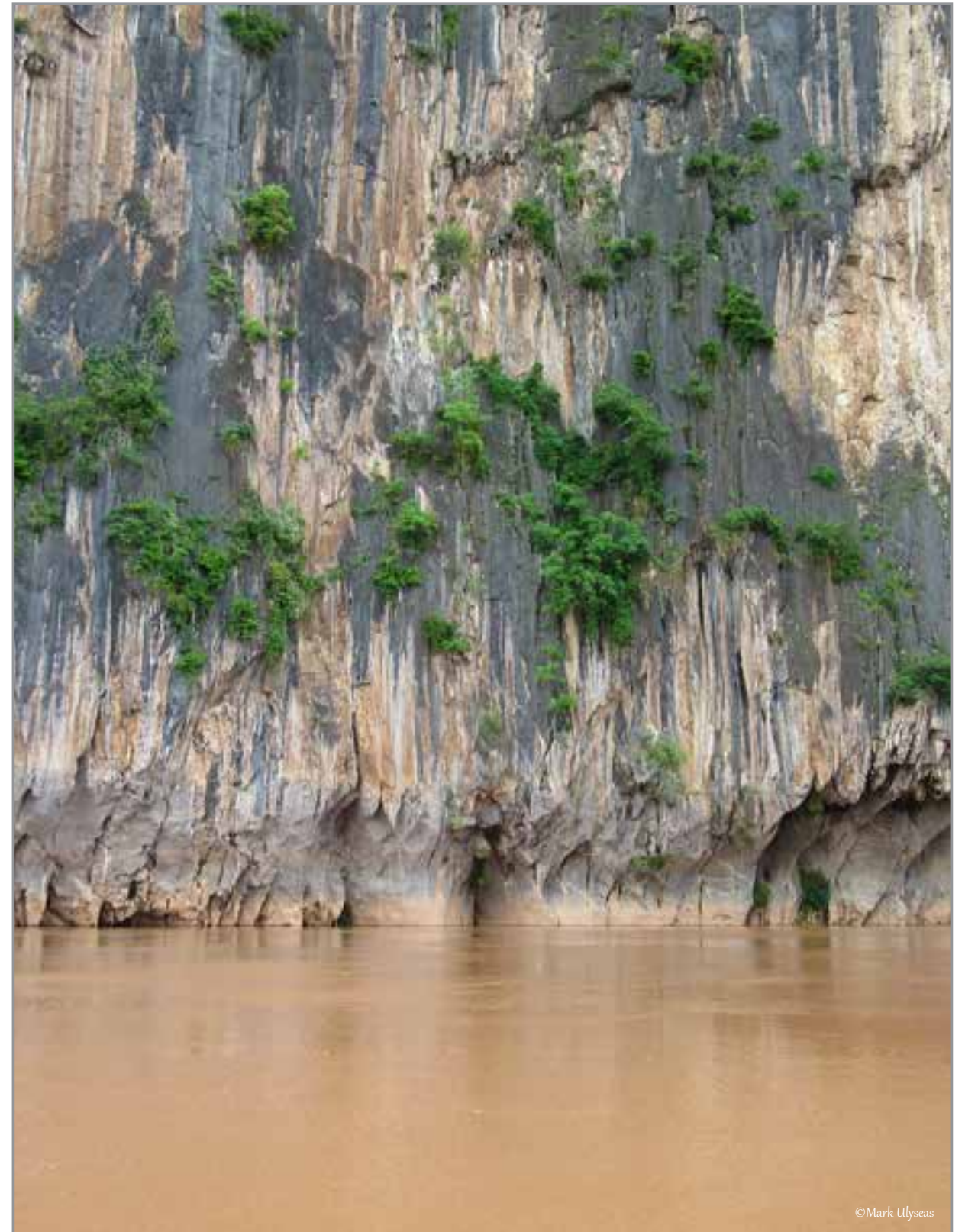
I never understood how anyone could love his family
the way Hector did until years later when I watched my son
being pushed into the world after a night of labor.
He was born blue. The midwife gently massaged his chest
until the first breath squeaked out of him in a weak scream
that grew until it filled all the spaces inside me
I'd never known were empty. Later as my wife and son slept,
I went outside, stood between maples green and dripping
in the summer night and looked up between the branches
and saw only a few stars, faint and far away, but persistent.

continued overleaf...

Back in the day, I didn't know my father was teaching me
how to be the good man he wasn't, but thought he was.
He showed me the wrong path, so I'd know the right one.
Weird isn't it, how everything works out in the end?

The last thing my father said to me was I'm sorry.
He didn't say why, but we both knew.
I know now he was lost, fumbling in the dark
for the key and when he finally found it and opened the door
there was nothing on the other side. Nothing at all.
He'd waited too long.

He died ashamed. As if everything he'd ever done was wrong
which wasn't true of course. I imagine him by a river
which looks a lot like the Llano with its ragged cliffs and quick rapids
where we poured his ashes mixed with my mother's.
My father still stands there on the shelf of blue granite
while the boatman lingers. My mother has crossed already
at last breaking free, but my father is waiting for me.



Rock face on the mighty Mekong. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

THREE YOUNG POETS DRINKING ALL NIGHT IN THE CEMETERY OF THE BLACK ANGEL, IOWA CITY, 1977

Empty of need and pity
wanting something to feel, something to say
hoping to rob this place of its sadness, fodder for our poems

as if we could carry away the urn
of grief long dead parents felt for their child
lost to diphtheria, typhus, pox or pure accident

of snapped neck, bruised heart, cracked skull
dropped, tossed, spiraling through darkness
to land here as we ourselves landed here, drunk

and stupid. Behind the black angel
a tall white column with a spiral of stone roses
and a name I mistook for my own. It seemed
I died at the age of three in 1879.

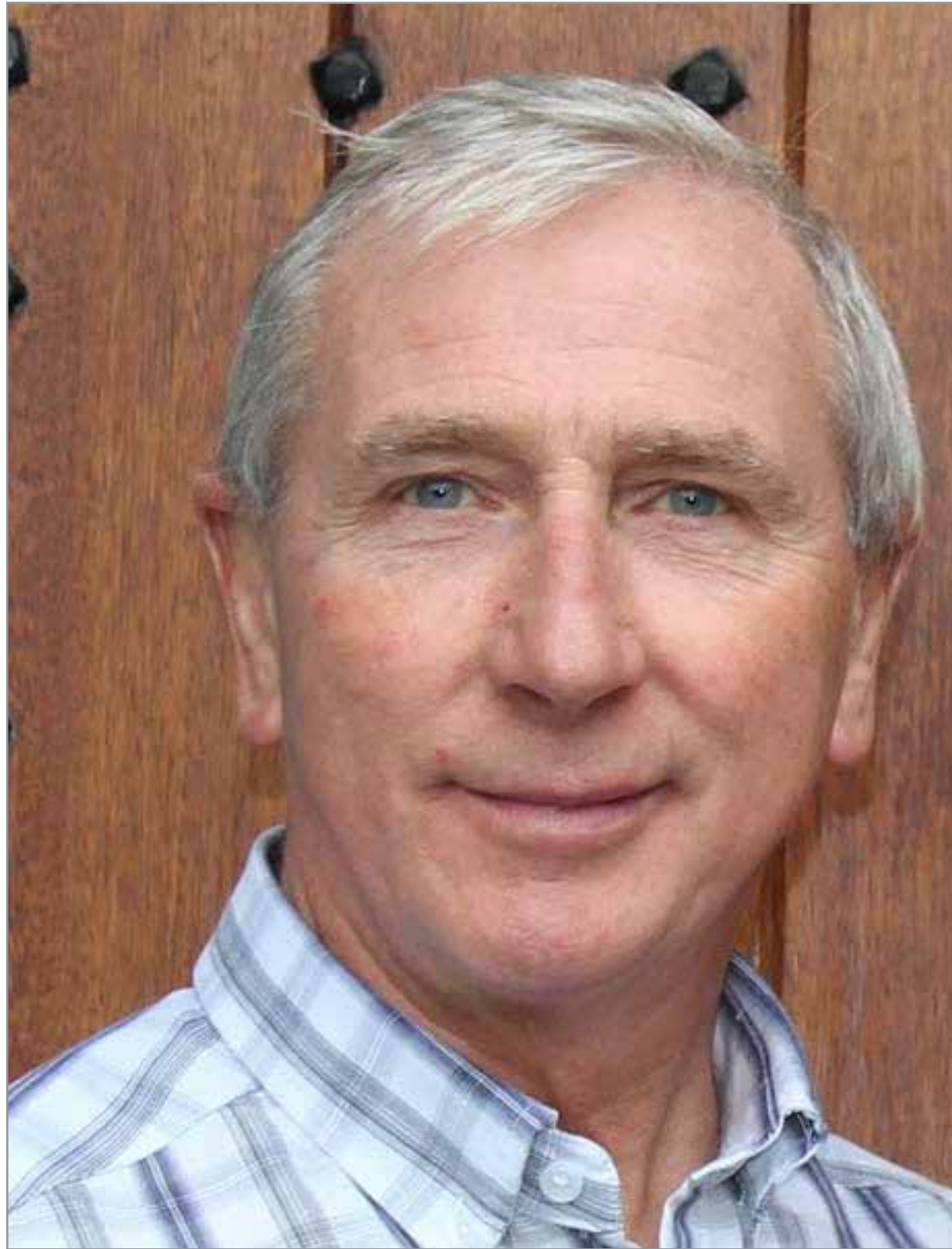
I turned to tell my buddies,
but they were swigging and laughing.
Frank said he needed to piss and stumbled off to the far edge

of the cemetery where it dropped off, sloping down
to the street that led to the river.
The other guy whose name I no longer remember
stood beneath the black angel, swaying.

His face emptied and became
childlike, as if he'd returned to a time before
cynicism, before this profane joking
that sustained us.

Then we walked home through the long shadows
of the dawn, and the birds began singing
softly at first, then louder

Paddy Donoghue was born in Glencolmcille but now resides in Bundoran, Co. Donegal. Writing poetry since secondary school days, he has had several pieces published over the years, in many literary journals and magazines. He has won awards for his poetry in both the Irish and English language. Read his work at several literary events including, at Cúirt, Scríobh and the Macklin festivals. Paddy facilitates writing workshops and was a founding member of the original Bundoran Writers group and the current Atlantic Writers Ink group. This year he was selected as the Bealtine poet and facilitated at workshops across Donegal. His collection, *Leave Taking*, published in 2024, has been shortlisted for the CAP Awards 2025 in the anthology/poetry section.



SOTTO VOCE

In the slow season of changing colours
with pavements carpeted in gilded leaves
parks, woodlands - radiant in autumnal light
rivers and streams meander quietly
as if gathering time and
everything changes shape.

Days usher nights into darkness
with more urgency and
almost unnoticed his mind begins to slide
into the dungeons of memory
where alone he must battle the terrors
that rise from their annual slumber to taunt.

Shutting the world outside, he slumps
each evening in his chair waiting patiently
as he knows he must for come they will
spreading their tentacles their venom
coursing his veins like iced blood
feeding the desolation.

His mind screams into the stillness
body recoils - crumbles into the abyss
for he knows the darkness has begun
and in a quiet voice he capitulates
knowing that his time in melancholy
has begun.... again.

Paddy Donoghue

THE LINE

For a young Palestinian girl, aged 9
Lest we forget.

Herded between makeshift barriers
two – three abreast
shuffling forward
towards the white tent – in the distance
one could be forgiven for imagining
it were a queue for concert tickets.

The tent, clearly marked – top and side
with a red cross
distribution point
for medical and food supplies to a destitute
people, waiting days for relief - for food
the currency of life in a war plundered land.

A young girl, clutching a red plastic bowl to
her fragile body –
with both hands
wide eyed - her arid skin hanging
lifelessly to her protruding bones – the
way rags might hang on a branch to dry.

Invisible to the world (to all but herself).
A scowling bark
beckons the line
to *keep moving* forward – toe to heel
inch by inch - weaving a crescent shape
agonisingly listless - edging ever closer.

Suddenly, the puncturing wail of gunfire
rapid exchanges –
screams and cries –
the line breaks, the young girl – alone
drops to the ground, dust scatters and
a red plastic bowl blows with the wind.

Rachael Stanley is from Dublin. She has been published previously in Live Encounters and in many journals and anthologies, most recently in Drawn to the Light Press, issue 15 and Flare 25. Her first collection *Back to Infinity* was published by Revival Press in May 2024 and received favourable reviews.



CLEMATIS

Each April they flowered
sprouting into pink magnificence
trailing the old wooden fence
till the wind rose and pushed
with gale force strength.

Little by little, the fence kept tilting
till it collapsed under its weight
like a beast burdened with a heavy load.
Admitting defeat in the face of continual storms,

we dismantled the fence
and cast the flowers aside.
Farewell Clematis dressed to your
best in glorious pink and hiding the oil tank
now fully visible in its urban ugliness.

Yet, years later at a different spot
Clematis has sprung up once again
leaning over in abundance from a
neighbouring garden, as if these
harbingers of spring insist on returning.

Rachael Stanley

DISTRACTIONS

Go full Lidl this summer
the ad blasts out from my tv screen
and the words *this summer*
catch me off guard
prompt the question
how many more summers do I have?

What day of the week will it be?
What year?
Will I be calm or fearful?
Will I feel ready or unprepared?

Avoiding these questions
I revert back to the fleeting ad,
as I get side tracked
by Facebook, by Instagram
by people shouting abuse
at each other on X
as I go full throttle into an abyss of
twenty-first century
d i s t r a c t i o n s!

THE DREAM CATCHER

i.m. Martin Luther King Jr.

In the pain of his people
he envisioned a different world.
Now I pray that we invoke his spirit
as we witness the nightly
bulletins of destruction.
For he followed the dream
like a dream catcher
releasing its feathers into the light.

Ray Whitaker has five books published, and two chapbooks. His work has been published in thirteen different countries. He's working on two new manuscripts now. Ray was a Delegate to the 2024 and 2025 Writer's International Panorama Festival. He participates regularly with several zoom poetic events worldwide. Among them, he has been spotlighted on a US National Poetry broadcast from Quintessential Listening Poetry Online Radio In April, '24; and also an International Poetry Recital hosted by The Fertile Minds out of India this past April 19th, 2024. In July of 2025, he has been the featured poet reading in David Leo Sirois' Spoken Word Online, associated with Spoken Word Paris; and a featured poet for the Chicauga Arts Festival, in Plamer Lake, Colorado. He is Moderator for Michael Lee Johnson's FB "My Voice, Your Words- Poetry In Action" page; and an Editor for Masticadores Canada Journal.

ONLY SO MUCH

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.



Ray Whitaker

A BOISTEROUS ACT OF EXPLANATION

Wondering how the puzzle pieces
would fit
if there was no illustration
to model on
long shapes, multi colored
tabs that don't quite go.

Woke up hungry
nothing, and everything to do with food
hungry for interactions
and avoiding tasting a bloody lip

the fork sliding into the entree
an appetite from dreaming
of that, that is possible
the voraciousness in a table setting
a carving knife held
in eager anticipation,
salting the portions.
Thinking ahead to the how of it
contemplating the why
of the spoon placed on the left.

Those conversations around
the dinner table
a boisterous act of explanation intervened
with God's words
as he chews on a drumstick,
the phone rings
that conversation
stopped for a second or two
electronic trumpet ringtone
a fanfare ignored
this feast more important
than anything outside of it. The long table is vibrant
with people. God too, making points
gesturing with cutlery and bones
no spilt wine tonight.

PETROGLYPH

High up on a canyon wall
a long panel of sheer desert lacquer inscribed
sunshine just breaking thru
illuminates the symbols there.

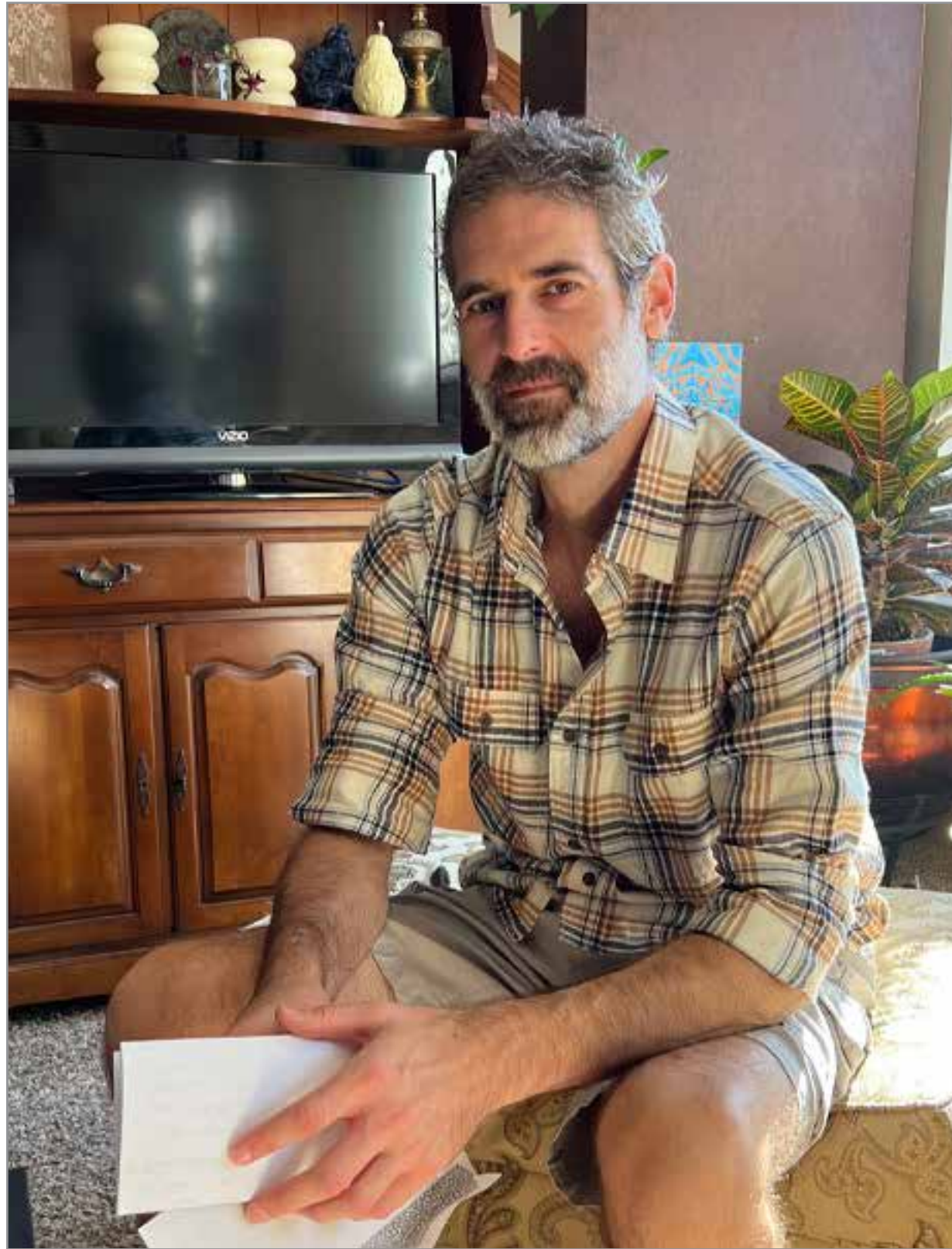
Leaving us to wonder
those man-like figures bring questions to we moderns
standing sententials for a thousand years
centurions now for lost meaning
a two dimensional showing
the rock face hammered so long ago
perhaps by the artist of that Clan
who, like all artists was little understood
by the rest of his clan, who were only concerned
with the next meal, or the children.

A way of well-being placed just so,
not perched on a wooden ladder
leaned on a cliff face
drawing a male figure for time to interpret.



Mesa Verde, Colorado, Usa - Constructions by Native Americans circa 1200 years.
Photograph by Ray Whitaker.

Scott Thomas Outlar originally hails from Atlanta, Georgia. He now resides and writes in Frederick, Maryland. His work has been nominated multiple times for both the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. He guest-edited the Hope Anthology of Poetry from CultureCult Press as well as the 2019-2023 Western Voices editions of Setu Mag. Selections of his poetry have been translated and published in 15 languages. He has been a weekly contributor at Dissident Voice for the past 10 years. More about Outlar's work can be found at <https://17numa.com/>



TITAN'S NOOSE

Three cyclops in the forest
one vision triangulated
with eyes closed, the signal
unfurls a mighty ruckus

Melee in the viper pit

Above us, vibrating wings
the hum of orioles hymning
their way through the wind

A gentle breeze
cusp of spring
in its sendoff
surrendering to summer

Octave bellows the waves
moon pulse, tide bereft
of calm or comfort

The teasing lane of resilient sails
approaching confusion
of contusion
capsized, brittle thunder

Scott Thomas Outlar

PULSE ELECTRIC

dust of seven ages
squeezed like fresh daisies
with centrifugal gears
itching as scratched platitudes
in sore eyes
sordid sight, first rhyme I
digest tonight

and fade one degree deeper
into a feeling of comfort
two shades off the beaten path
of numb tingling and wizened orbit

a leaf, fluttering, freefall
enter the wishing well of dandelion portal

now ripped through the great divide
neuron cabinet whips out archaic relics and recipes

stir up divergent opinions in the pot
while vultures and ghouls point shadowy fingers

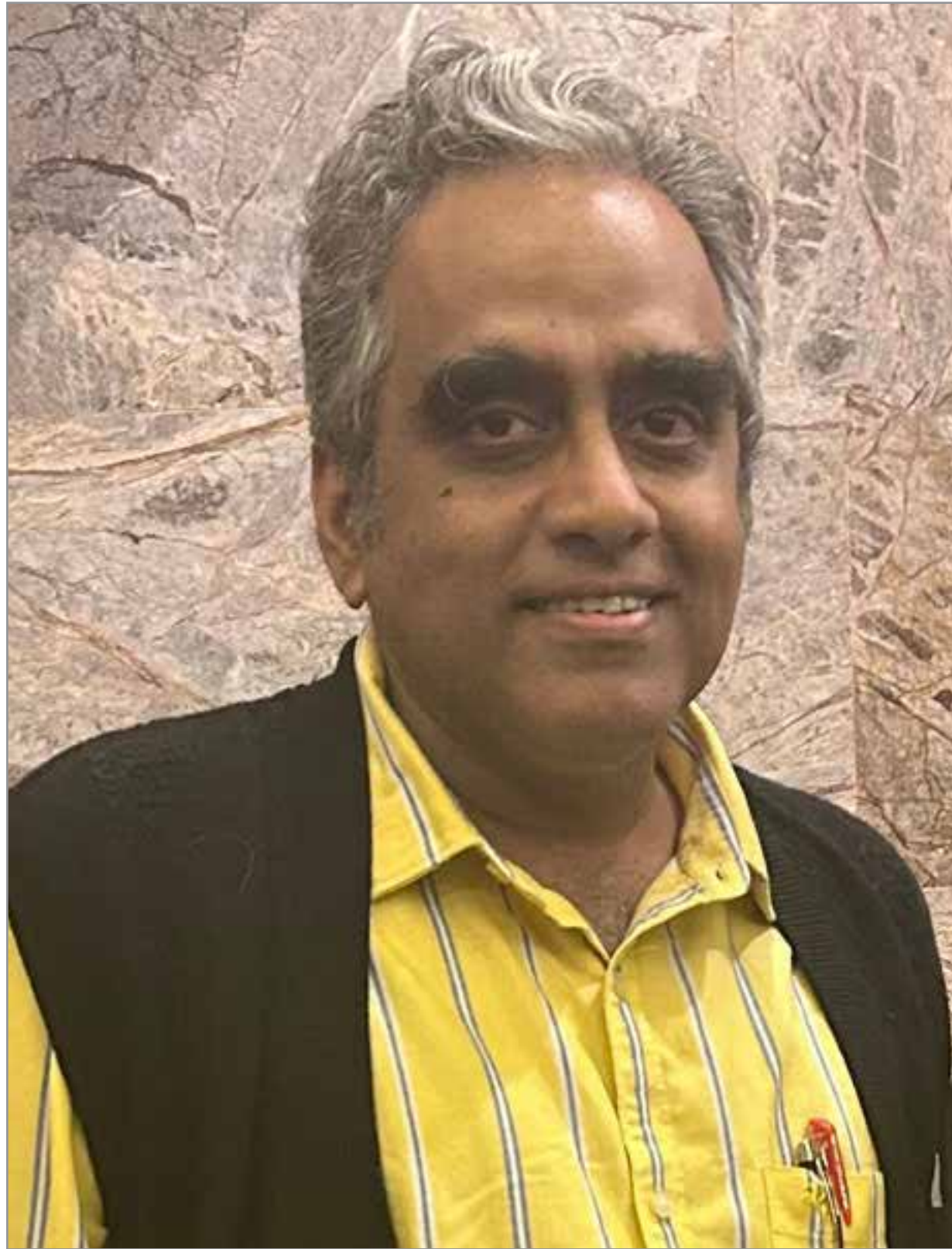
if you learn to grow through disillusion
the jeweled net of contentment stretches out wider
during novel periods of arcane virtue

as all the perching peacocks of inverted righteousness
slip from precarious angles of moral hypocrisy

crumbling into the heap of virtuous stones
they've been tossing over the spit-stained ledge

tear ducts barren
cut with shattered glass
sands of cultural hours
turned over, spilling tide
on tip of tongue
dots trace blood
taste of change and copper sizzle

Shantanu Ray Chaudhuri is either an 'accidental' editor who strayed into publishing from a career in finance and accounts or an 'accidental' finance person who found his calling in publishing. In 2017, he was named Editor of the Year by the apex publishing body, Publishing Next. He has edited leading authors in India, and books he has worked on have won a number of National and other awards. As an editor at HarperCollins and Penguin Random House, he has published and edited some of India's leading poets like Gulzar, Joy Goswami, the collected works of Keki Daruwala and Dom Moraes, Ranjit Hoskote, Amy Singh and others. He is also the author of a book of poems, *Whims*, published by Prof. P. Lal's Writers Workshop. His poems have been published in The Yearbook of Indian Poetry in English in 2023 and 2024. He writes on music, films and books for a number of platforms and on his website <https://shantanuraychaudhuri.com/>.



Shantanu Ray Chaudhuri

WHAT THE STAR MEANT

after Rilke

If only the world would hush –
this raucous turning of wheels,
shouting neon, sirens chewing the dark,
the endless cough of the city's breath.

Then, perhaps, I could hear
what that star – yes, that one –
tries each night to murmur
through its patient trembling.

It leans close, I know it,
daring the veil of smoke and sorrow
to part for a moment,
to let its silver syllables fall through.

But the noise here is thick with forgetting.
Even silence is crowded,
and the skies are smudged
like old parchment too often rewritten.

Still it persists,
a single vowel of light,
spoken again and again
into the unlistening void.

I want to become so still
I might once more be sky.

And in that sky, the star,
at last, would speak.

THE COW THAT LIVES BY THE GITA

There she sits,
a slab of calm
in the molten fever of the noon,
the sun hangs like a question
and she,
with flies haloing her flanks,
offers no answer.

Rickshaws groan, brakes squeal,
horns bleat like goats in existential crisis,
and yet her eyes,
half-lidded, ancient,
gaze somewhere beyond eternity.

A pack of dogs erupts
snarling, teeth on the cusp of narrative,
they lunge, bark, circle.
She does not flinch.
The dogs retreat, confused
by such impenetrable indifference.

Traffic divides like a river meeting stone.
A man on a scooter curses,
a child waves,
someone takes a photograph,
the world
moves *around* her.

Not of it.
Not against it.
A creature neither rushing towards nor away.

The Gita spoke of this,
to remain
as untouched by praise
as by the sting of insult.
To feel neither the fever of arrival
nor the chill of loss.

She lives that ancient text
wearing the wisdom of the uncluttered.

Not apathy,
but a stillness earned through
a million monsoons of becoming.

Be like her,
says the wind that parts for her.
Be the unmoved in the moving world.
Sit in the centre of the road,
and let life
learn how to pass,
even as you learn how
to let life pass by.

Tim Tomlinson is the author, most recently, of *Listening to Fish: Meditations from the Wet World*. Other books include *This Is Not Happening to You* (fiction), and *Requiem for the Tree Fort I Set on Fire* (poetry). He is the director of New York Writers Workshop, and he teaches in New York University's Global Liberal Studies.



Tim Tomlinson

EGYPT

I knew a man who'd spent a lot of time in Egypt. He liked people to know that about him, that he'd lived there, in Egypt. That he spoke Arabic, got into scrapes, over legal issues, civil issues. In Egypt. In Egypt he'd been both plaintiff and defendant.

You might not know this, he'd tell you, but in Egypt they wipe their ass with their hand. Their left hand, always the left. Never shake an Egyptian's left hand, in Egypt or elsewhere, he'd say. Best to keep that as a general policy, no matter where you are. And to remember: if an Egyptian offers you his left hand, well, you, sir (or madam), you have been insulted.

As a guest at dinner parties, not in Egypt but in Manhattan's Upper East Side or Long Island's East End, this man would bring and conspicuously place an aluminum bottle alongside his setting at the table—the left side. It resembled a thermos, a plain unadorned gunmetal silver cylinder.

Excuse me, the guest to his left might at some point inevitably say, I'm wondering about the, um ... thermos.

Chuckling, this man who'd spent a lot of time in Egypt would explain, No, no, no, that's not a thermos, you see. It's an *ah-BREE*.

That's the way he said it: *ah-BREE*.

To which the guest might reply, Oh. And exactly what is an ...

ah-BREE, the man who'd spent a lot of time in Egypt would say, tapping a napkin to his lips. Do you know, the man who'd spent a lot of time in Egypt continued, that I've spent a lot of time in Egypt? Ah, of course, you don't know, how could you know, unless you read the papers, or the journals, or visit the bookshops—the good bookshops, mind you, not the ones with the drugstore fiction and the faux-histories by desk-bound academics. I'm talking about the real bookshops, the ones that stock the hefty histories, the from-the-field accounts that test scholarship against lived experience.

Adding, almost as an after-thought, Such as the several I've published.

About Egypt, I'm guessing, the guest might say.

Indeed, the man who'd spent a lot of time in Egypt would say, Egypt. And you see, over there, in Egypt—

and this is the part where the man who'd spent a lot of time in Egypt would inform the stranger about Egyptian practices of post-evacuation hygiene. The *ah-BREE*, he'd explain, contains water, room temperature to warm. When you've concluded your business, you reach for the *ah-BREE* — with your right hand. Then you pour warm water into your left, and you ablute.

So no toilet paper? the dinner guest might say.

Toilet paper! the man who'd spent a lot of time in Egypt would exclaim. To an Egyptian, to half the world for that matter, toilet paper doesn't exist, even the idea of toilet paper. It's nonsense. American nonsense. Like dog food. You want to feed your dog, you scrape your plates. You want to wipe your ass, you use your hand. Your left hand. I've seen some fool Americans coming out of restaurant bathrooms in Egypt with puzzled looks on their faces and water dripping from their right hands. Their right hands! Fools! And of course, the diners (this is especially true in Cairo), the diners are too polite to call attention to the faux-pas. They might look away and generally provide a wide berth, as if to say, let him or her through, and get them the hell out of here as quickly as possible.

And burn the silverware? the guest might say.

The silverware, the dishware, the tablecloth and table, the man who'd spent a lot of time in Egypt would add. But as I say, the left hand, always the left, and water from the *ah-BREE*. Followed, of course, with a rigorous soapy scrubbing of both hands, with particular attention paid to the left, especially around the fingernails.

Here, palm in, he'd hold up his left hand for the guest's inspection. At each fingertip, the barest sliver of white nail edging the flesh.

To the quick, he'd say. For obvious reasons. Those on the right hand you can leave like the fingernails of a Chinese emperor.

If pets were allowed at a host's home, the man who'd spent a lot of time in Egypt liked to bring his dog, a brown Labrador named Mwt (pronounced "mwt"). Mwt was a well-behaved dog who'd curl beside his master's chair and wait quietly for a scrap. People would comment on his excellent behavior and inquire after his name.

The man who'd spent a lot of time in Egypt would say, Oh, him? Allow me to introduce Mwt, and the dog's ears would lift.

People would say, Mutt?

No no no, the man who'd spent a lot of time in Egypt would say, Mwt. M-W-T, Mwt.

Oh, what an ... original name.

It's the pronunciation, the man who'd spent a lot of time in Egypt would say, of the ancient Egyptian hieroglyph for phallus.

You don't say, people would say.

I do say, the man who'd spent a lot of time in Egypt would explain. You see, I've spent a lot of time in Egypt.

He was rather proud of the size of Mwt's balls, too, which were no larger, no smaller, than your average brown Labrador's balls, but the man who'd spent a lot of time in Egypt was convinced otherwise, and he liked to indicate their impressive orbicularity to anyone who might be interested. But that's another story. This story's about the *ah-BREE*, and what the *ah-BREE* can teach us about the way regional customs inform our treatment of assholes.

Trevor Landers was born in Hāwera, Taranaki and grew up on a farm in Kaupokonui. He has tribals links to Ngāti Airani, Taranaki and Ngaruahine, thus has Gaelige, Pākeha and Maori whakapapa (genealogical links). He has been a University lecturer, National Advisor, hospital orderly, and worked in the public sector in national roles. Most recently he was the Strategic Relationship Manager for Te Heru Māpara. He holds five Masters degrees, including a Masters of Creative Writing (First class). He currently lives in the Belgian capital, Bruxelles.



Trevor Landers

THE LEGACY OF COLONIALISM IN TARANAKI

Watch, see him burn his eyes in the
discomfiture of substandard housing,
follow the arc of his breath, the wheeze
and rattle, his musical inhalations sing back
to him; discordant songs of rebellion, resilience.
A treasonable offence, punitively enacted,
dispossession of whenua, the land. You will
likely die before you get your super, e hoa.
Remember to smile, through gritted teeth,
emit cheery countenances as springs of hope.
His body still afire with injustice, his breath
igniting a flame, cunningly deflected:
somatisation of anxieties, the imprint of trauma.
Touch his pellucid skin, marvel at transparency,
wrestle his bones slowly transmogrified to powder,
sufferance on the floor, wet-stained with the vagaries
and vicissitudes of lost arguments, splenetic rages
the way abraded flesh stains stone, and now only a
quavering voice, given subalternity by the whims
of the poet-ventriloquist; the scent of mourning stirs
incredulous primordial griefs, the vale of tears
constant phallation & perfusions from
successive governments limiting culpability
evading the spirit of Te Tiriti window-dressing
short confessions of remorse & contrition.
Settlement passed, there is still the entanglements
o te karauna wheke the head almost
indistinguishable from flailing limbs,
that incurable Leviathan, but abutments:
resilience and resurgence, revitalisation
tino rangatiratanga, answer back in the affirmative,
a flaxroot nius indefatigably waged, trumps the
codification of power and privilege,
the possibilities and potentialities excite
new dawns offered with pearled promise

Valentina Teclici, Romanian born, immigrated to New Zealand in 2002. In 1999, she completed a PhD in sociology at the University of Bucharest, with a thesis about street children. Her debut book, *De la noi din gradiniță* (From our Kindergarden), Ion Creangă Publishing House, 1986, was awarded a national prize. Poems and excerpts from her books for children are included in the bibliography and textbooks for primary and secondary education in Romania. She has published several books of sociology, poetry and stories for children in both Romanian and English. Her work has been translated into French, Te Reo and Spanish, and published in many magazines and anthologies in New Zealand and overseas. In 2016 and 2018, Valentina edited and translated the bilingual collection “Poetical Bridges – Poduri lirice” (Vol I & II), Scripta manent Publishing House, Ltd., Napier, that includes the work of 24 Romanian poets and 24 poets from New Zealand. Valentina has been a member of Writers’ Union of Romania since 1993, and of The Theosophical Society since 2022. Valentina enjoys playing the piano, painting, reading and traveling. She lives in Napier with her husband Robert.

HAIKU

on the rain’s dress
strings of beads -
sky’s tears

sleepless night
harvest moon
inside her belly

on the chestnut’s candles
white symphony
moon’s gaze

two lovers
sharing the rainbow
after the storm

moonlight beams on search -
in the battlefield
hidden peace

new lace patterns
on the spinach leaves-
snail’s art session

sound of honeybees
into the scented flowers –
celestial music



Valentina Teclici

continued overleaf...

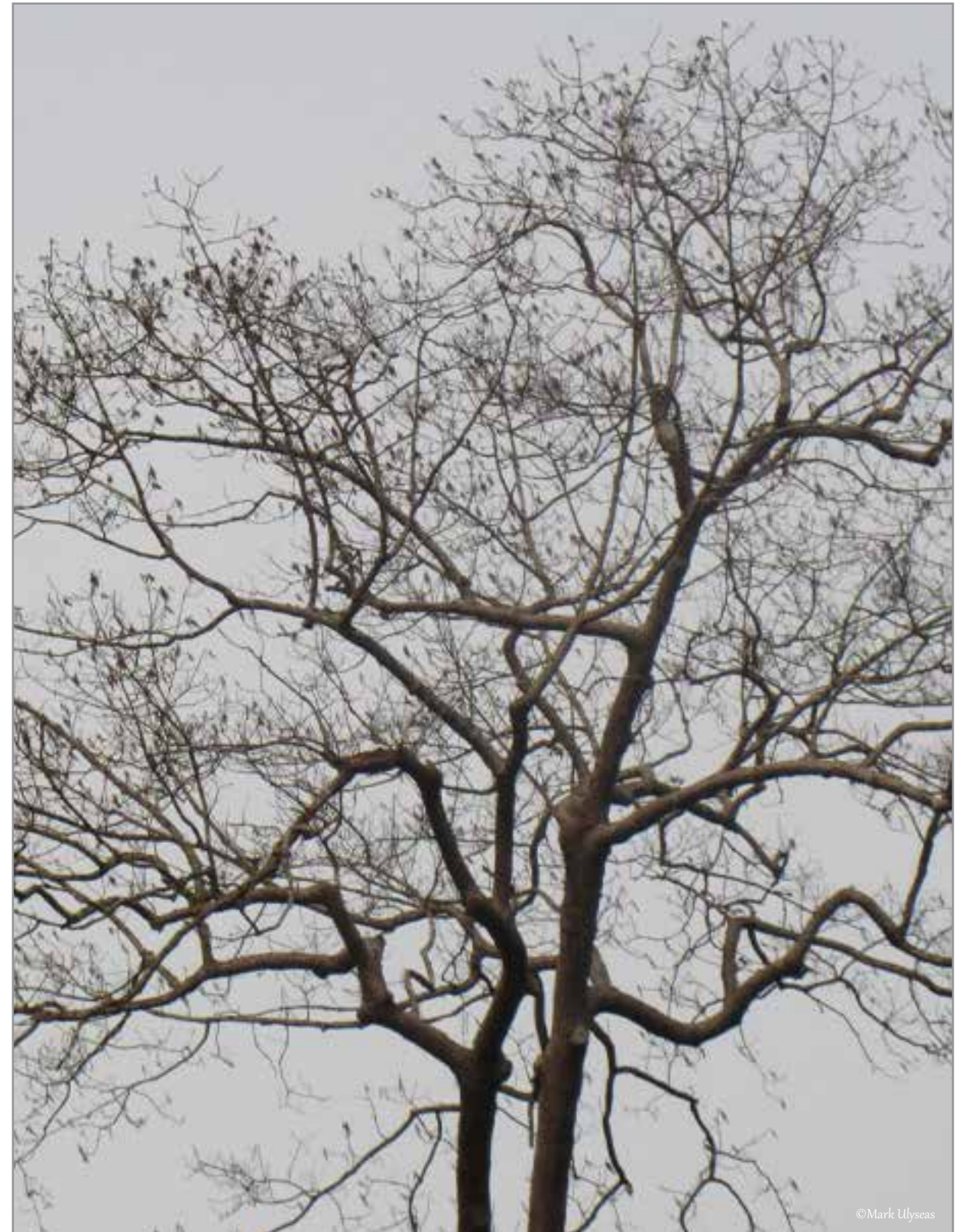
sacred history -
on the rimu's bark
fingerprints

crispy morning walk
sunrise shared
by lady and dog

survival shelter
in the rainforest –
hope stops by

fresh spring blossoms
young couple's eyes
on cell phones

tall on its feet
a dead tree -
life's lesson



©Mark Ulyseas

Tree in winter on the banks of the Mekong. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

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16
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Live encounters

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