

2010 - 2025 - 16TH ANNIVERSARY



Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

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NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2025

LIMITED EDITION
Featuring select
GUEST EDITORIALS
published in 2025

COVER ARTWORK *Melody of Colour* BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



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Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



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

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

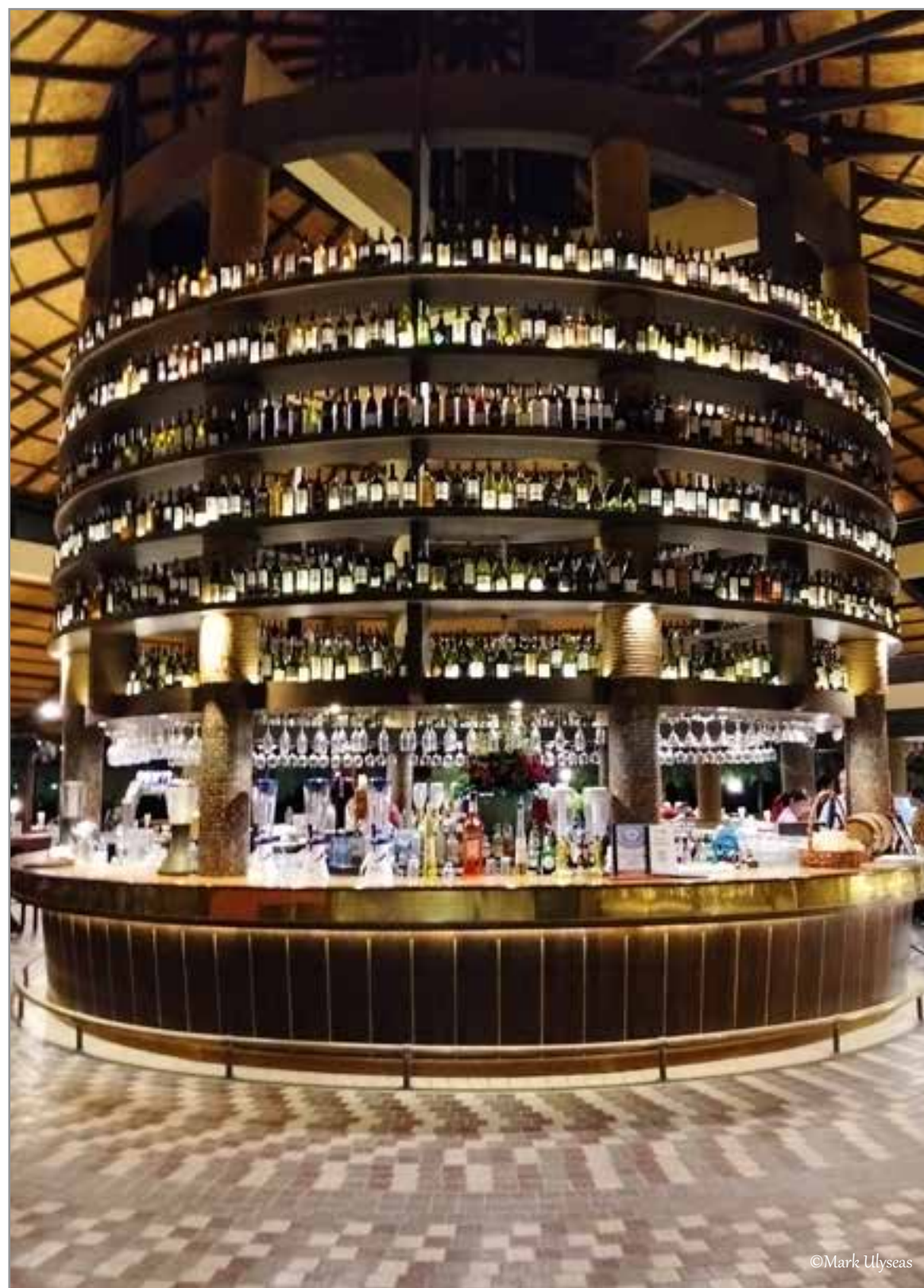
We are appealing for donations to pay for the administrative and technical aspects of the publication. **Please help by donating any amount for this just cause as events are threatening the very future of Live Encounters.**

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Ulyseas
Publisher/Editor

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Bar at Italian restaurant on Jomtien beach, Thailand. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

THE LIMITED EDITION
FEATURES ALL THE GUEST EDITORIALS
PUBLISHED IN LIVE ENCOUNTERS POETRY & WRITING 2025.

THIS IS TO HONOUR

TERRY McDONAGH
GERALDINE MILLS
DAVID RIGSBEE
ANGELA PATTEN
THOMAS MCCARTHY
CAROLYNE WRIGHT
MARK TREDINNICK
JANE FRANK
RANDHIR KHARE
DR SALWA GOUDA
JORDAN SMITH
MARK ROBERTS
TIM HUNT
ENDA WYLEY

WHO HAVE GENEROUSLY SHARED THEIR WISDOM
WITH OUR READERS WORLDWIDE.



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January 2025*

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TIM HUNT

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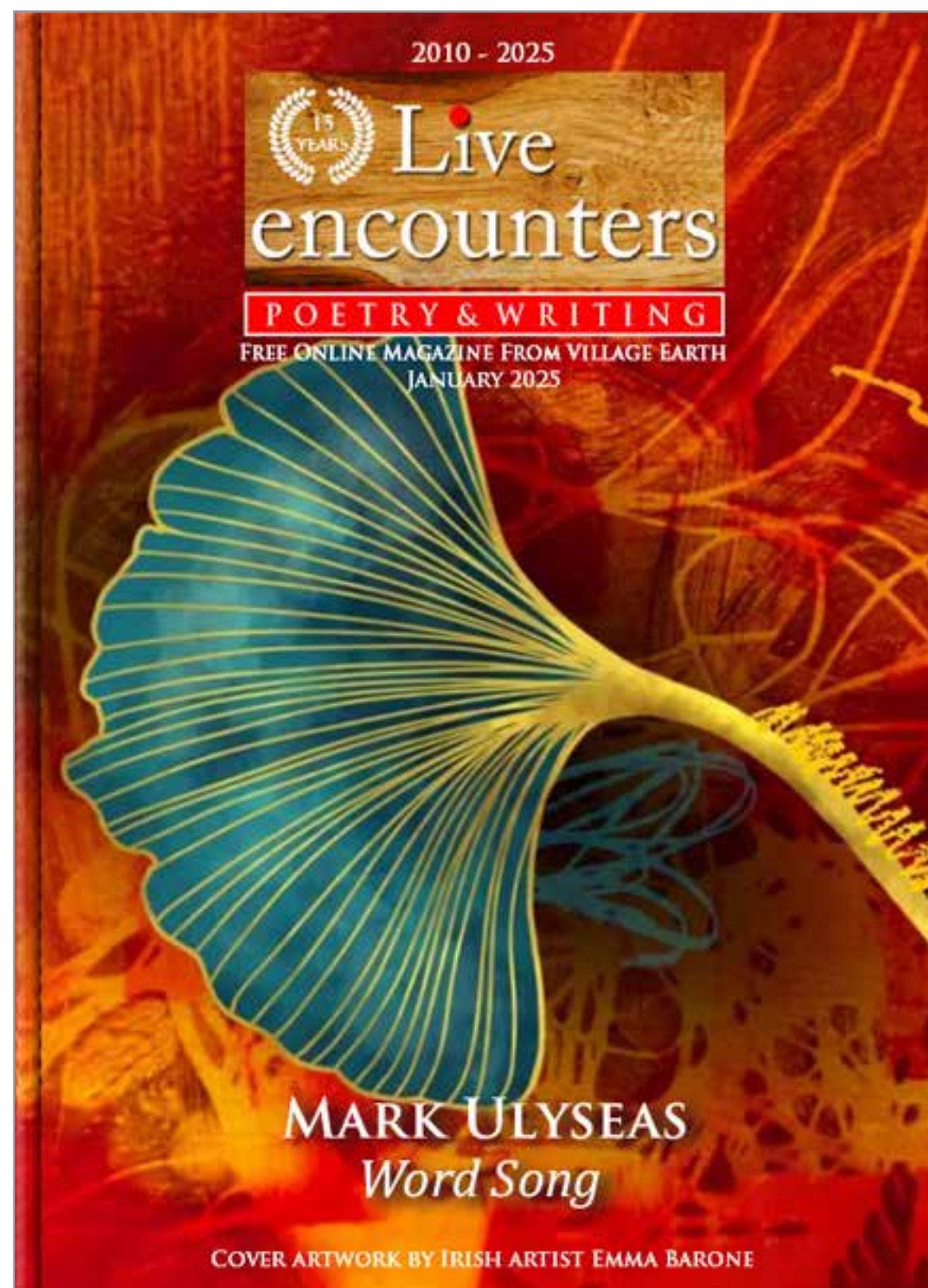
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Mark Ulyseas has served time in advertising as copywriter and creative director selling people things they didn't need, a ghost writer for some years, columnist of a newspaper, a freelance journalist and photo-grapher. In 2009 he created *Live Encounters Magazine*, in Bali, Indonesia. It is a not for profit (adfree) free online magazine featuring leading academics, writers, poets, activists of all hues etc. from around the world. March 2016 saw the launch of its sister publication *Live Encounters Poetry*, which was relaunched as *Live Encounters Poetry & Writing* in March 2017. In February 2019 the third publication was launched, *LE Children Poetry & Writing* (now renamed *Live Encounters Young Poets & Writers*). In August 2020 the fourth publication, *Live Encounters Books*, was launched. He has edited, designed and produced over *Live Encounters'* 300 publications. Mark's philosophy is that knowledge must be free and shared freely to empower all towards enlightenment. He is the author of three books: *RAINY – My friend & Philosopher*, *Seductive Avatars of Maya – Anthology of Dystopian Lives* and *In Gethsemane: Transcripts of a Journey*. <https://www.amazon.com/Mark-Ulyseas/>
<https://liveencounters.net/mark-ulyseas>



WORD SONG

Lyricism is the *Word*, a surreal dream state where poets scuttle between reams of remembrances, composing incantations to lure readers to embrace and ponder their messages of love, hope and enlightenment.

The path across eons is strewn with these messages that crumble under the thoughtless feet of those that seek meaning in every breath, instead of rejoicing in the *Word* itself.

Word Song continues to be fuelled by poets castigated by the frailties of humanity, and constantly reminded that *this* must continue to exist and grow from generation to generation, never halting for war, Nature's retributions, nor life's hardships. The lament is ever presence...

*"But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
 I have spread my dreams under your feet;
 Tread softly because you tread on my dreams."*

- William Butler Yeats,
Aedh Wishes or the Cloths of Heaven

Not everyone is a poet, just like not everyone can be a car mechanic or aeronautical engineer.

The poet creates and composes because the poet is born with a soul willingly held hostage by the lyrical world. There is little money to be found in *this*, but a rich legacy to be left behind for the generations to come. And there are no *hurrahs* for the poet stressed with the tedium of editing and rewriting to the litany of life's longings.

Standing in the aisles are the critics throwing brickbats and platitudes in rhythm to their own self-importance. Only a reader can be the critic, to accept or reject or worse, ignore. The reader is the solitary figure one sees walking down a deserted street.

Published or unpublished is the difference between heard and not being heard, nothing more. To be heard is to be remembered in time by someone somewhere unknown to the poet. And through this remembrance, the poet continues to breathe life in nothingness.

Poets and writers have travelled over the years through the pages of *Live Encounters*. Many have revisited on a regular basis, whilst others have cleared the undergrowth of the lexicon to create new pathways into other worlds.

Some poets, whose work had featured in *Live Encounters*, have migrated to another Time, and they are missed. But their legacies remain in hard copy and online for others to be enriched by their words, among them being – *Philip Casey, John Maxwell O'Brien, Kevin Higgins* and *Breda Wall Ryan*.

We are grateful to them for sharing their work with us.

Live Encounters will continue to be a beacon of hope for lyricists and their readers around the world who are smothered by hate, violence and rancid politics.

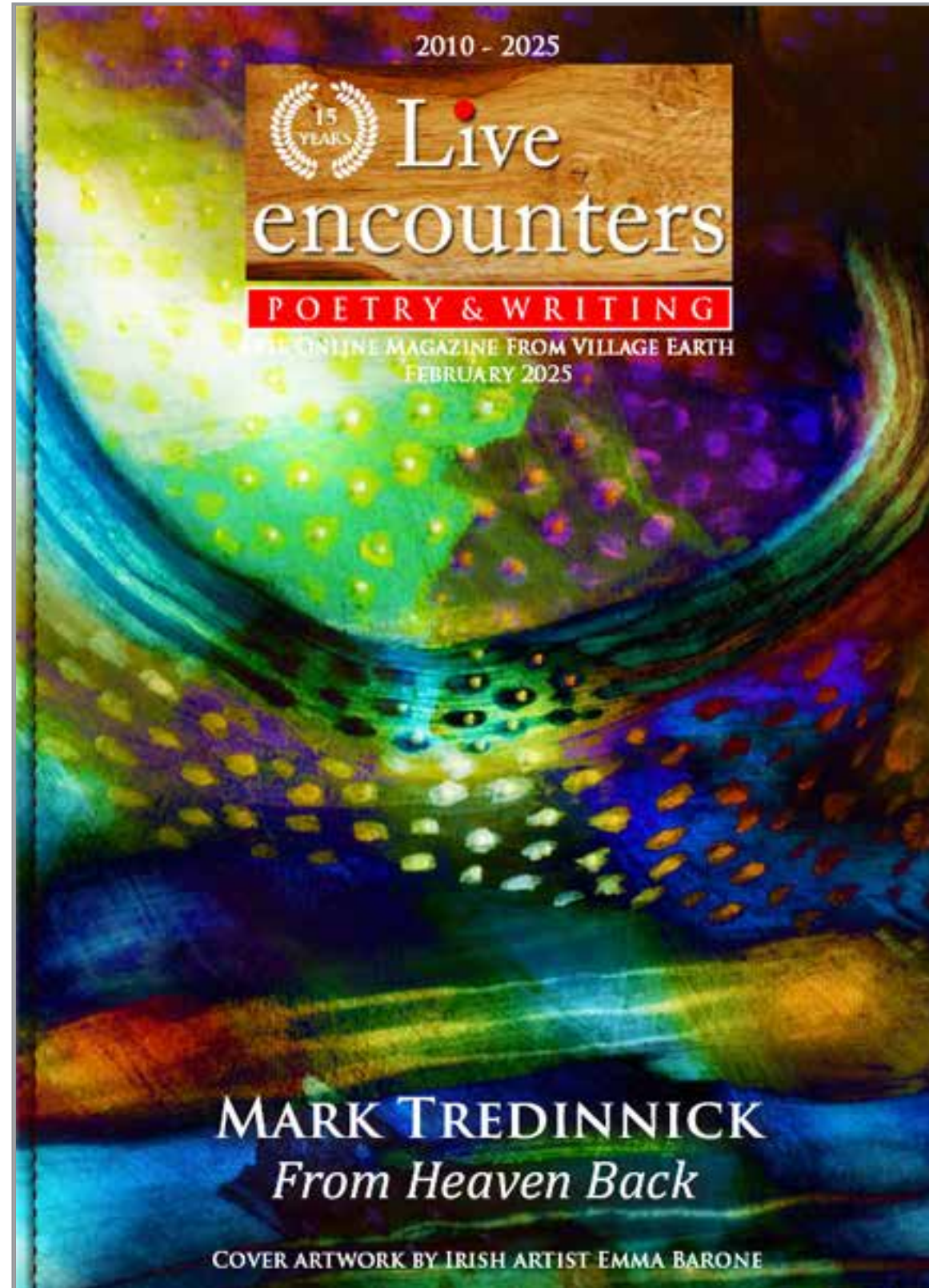
There is much work to be done in 2025 by this august gathering of poets and writers.

Peace and Love

Mark Ulyseas

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Tredinnick, the author of twenty-five celebrated works of poetry and prose, is the author, most recently, of *House of Thieves*, *One Hundred Poems*. His books on the writing craft have touched the lives and works of many. He runs *What the Light Tells*, an online poetry master-class, and teaches at the University of Sydney. His edited collection of essays for Robert Gray, *Bright Crockery Days*, is just out from 5 Islands Press, whose managing editor he is. Mark lives and works southwest of Sydney on Gundungurra Country.



NOTWITHSTANDING

Meantime, though, life is the same
miraculous gift it always was.

The Lenten air is in, and the last
two mornings have been cold.

I love it like this: the humidity
almost spent, the days wider open

than summer windows, the nights
a meadow of broken-down stars,

each dawn, a down, a life you feel
now just about worthy to claim.

FROM HEAVEN BACK

One day last year they took down
one hundred years of poplars along
the railway line in town.

This May, one morning in calm
bright weather—a High run aground
overheard and the Southern

Ocean streaming quietly in
along the isobars—I stand
where the trees had till last year

stood, and I look across
the new car park and the old tracks
at the thin amber palisade abandoned

there. The poplars, a skeleton staff,
have put out a deeper yellow this year
(to stand in, I guess, for all the yellow

that will not ever constellate
the eastern flank again), and I am
a thousand phantom cyan limbs.

Lombardy poplars thin, I notice,
from the top down, and when my time
comes, may I, too, leave so well,

falling down from heaven
back to earth. Each day,
less time, more space. More light,

Less shade. Each night, more sky.
From one hour to the next,
less here about me, and more there,

and only small good
sunlit phrases left to say.
Each syllable one more dying star.

AND ...

... autumn, in the morning,
had put up a city of light,

and now the one grey cottage
that had thought itself out of the woods

was a buckle in the mortgage
belt, an outer suburb

ringed by amber roads,
the morning a high urgency

of tone. Through which I drove
early, to buy you, I recall,

a tie from the school shop
to replace the one your brother,

that prodigal, had bartered
or burgled or lost,

and the suddenness of the season,
waking up by falling fast

toward its close, seemed
a passing comment on these middle

moments of one's days.
And then, as I took the bend

at Osborne, there was
the currawong

who flew upside down
across my sightline

and hung by the tips
of the fingers of a peppermint

limb (the one green note
in all the yellowness of things),

and I guess it sipped
there on scarlet blooms a second,

while I pulled over
to get some of this down, or else

just showered brightly
in the light blue

rain that had deigned
at last to fall. Love always

was our best idea, I think—
and always just a bit too big

for us. But still the (spinning)
world goes on

showing us, if we're lucky,
how love's done.

HUNGER

For Phil Harmer

Standing on the stilts
 of her other
life, as if she meant to
 extenuate the depth
 of the darkness
that saturates the shallows
she divines,
 the blue heron bunches
her blue shoulders and bundles her slender
 daylight form inside the soft carapace
of her night-time self.
 Her hunger is the stillness
of a sleepwalking stream.
 And waking is a wrinkle
 in the fabric of the tide, above where a brown
bass on the gravel bed has no idea
 he's making ready
 to become breakfast.



©Phil Harmer

Photograph courtesy Phil Harmer

PINOAK DAYS

After Christmas, the days lose their shape;
The numbers fall from the calendar.

One year's almost as good as the next,
And this particular year, Tuesday

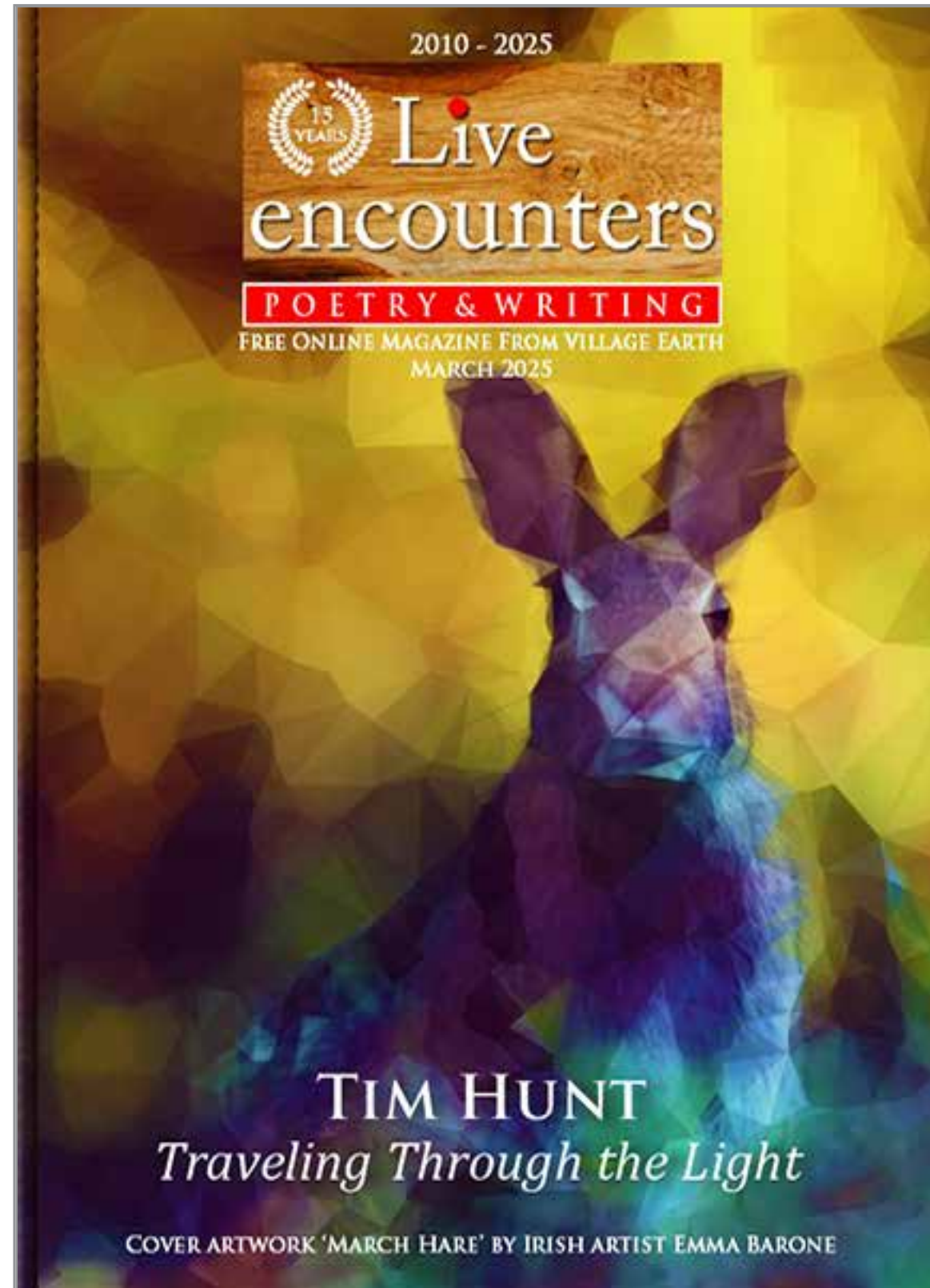
Morning—if, as it claims, it's Tuesday—
Grows bulky and true as the pinoak,

Which leafs out where, for two lives at least
Of women and men, generations

Of hours, it's held its form and waited.



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. <https://www.broadstone-books.com/shop/p/voice-to-voice-in-the-dark-poetry-by-tim-hunt>
<https://www.broadstonebooks.com/shop/p/western-where-poetry-by-tim-hunt>



TIM HUNT TRAVELING THROUGH THE LIGHT

With time, memory fades...and sharpens. Or perhaps it's more that the things we hold onto, as we rehearse them to ourselves, open over time, and we come to understand more of how, or why, they have mattered to us. 1987. The centennial of the birth of the poet Robinson Jeffers is being celebrated by a series of notable poets, each reading a poem or two from Jeffers' rich canon. I've forgotten some of the people who read that night. I do, though, remember Czeslaw Milosz ascending to the stage cloaked in the aura of his Nobel Prize, but not which poem he read. And William Everson, his fringed buckskin shirt, an eagle claw dangling from wrist, the waist-length white hair, acknowledging his debt to his poetic mentor, but not which poem he read. And Gary Snyder's easy command as he looked out at the lecture hall as if we were, as we were, part of his community.

Here, again, I don't remember which poem Snyder selected. It might have been "Salmon Fishing" or perhaps "Fire on the Hills." If this were fiction, I would tell you it was "Oh, Lovely Rock," because that would blend with what I do remember: the seemingly off hand anecdote he shared of camping in the Sierras with the too-little remembered poet Lew Welch. And Lew looking up from the campfire to ask, *Gary, what do you the rocks think of the trees?* And Snyder in his memory, *I don't know, Lew. What do the rocks think of the trees?* And Welch, *Well, you know, they're just passing through*, as we all shared a bemused laugh.

That night, I was charmed by how Snyder took a moment to talk as if to, or with, those of us gazing up at him. Now, nearly forty years later, what strikes me are the implications of Welch's answer to his question—how it erases the divide between animate and inanimate, nature and human, by imagining them as different scales of time. From the geological time of the rocks, the Douglas Firs looking down on the campfire are a brief, transitory instant. For the trees, the two poets, sipping their camp coffee, are even more fleeting—a flickering presence as their flickering campfire dies to reddened coals. The rest of Snyder's moment on the stage that evening has faded away (or perhaps I've let it fade away) but not Snyder recalling Welch musing about the rocks and trees and how recognizing the temporality we share with the trees and rocks—even though their temporalities differ from our own—draws us outward from our own moment of being to an awareness of being within the world's more comprehensive being.

And William Stafford read that night. And I do remember what he read: "Vulture," a late Jeffers poem. And I remember how he read it as if he, white-haired and craggy featured, were the poem's elderly speaker, resting on the hilltop, eyeing the circling bird as it inspected him. And as if he, too, were bemused in realizing that the bird might think he was already carrion and willing "To be eaten by that beak and become part of him, to share those wings and those eyes" and sensing too that this would be a "sublime end of one's body," a soaring "enskymment" in death, through death, beyond death.

Even then I sensed that Stafford was not simply acknowledging another poet by sharing one of his poems but celebrating Jeffers by becoming the poem.

A few years later I moved to the Portland area and Stafford invited me to come see him. In his campus office that afternoon, I asked about Jeffers, and he told me that he had, as a young man in the 1930s, hitchhiked from Kansas all the way to Carmel, California hoping to meet Jeffers. He told me that he found his way to Tor House and stood at the gate looking across the garden at the house and the stone tower Jeffers had built, and how he started to reach for the gate's latch, then, instead, turned and hitchhiked back to Kansas. He ended the story there. I think I remember a wry but not rueful smile, and too, understanding that I wasn't being invited to ask him to explain. And didn't. I do remember the trees outside his window filtering the afternoon sun and believing that he was sharing something with me that mattered to him—and that he was choosing to share this because he thought it should, or maybe only could, matter to me.

Over the decades I've remembered that story and the telling of it and wondered why Stafford, having hitchhiked all that way, didn't knock on the door of Tor House. The most obvious is that he thought the reclusive Jeffers would see his earnest homage as an unwelcome intrusion. Perhaps, at that moment, Jeffers was too intimidating a figure to approach. But I've continued to think that Stafford was sharing this moment as something other than a glimpse of the naiveté of his youthful pilgrimage, and over the decades I've come to believe that he sensed, as he looked across the garden at the door of that stone cottage, that the person who would answer his knock was simply a person who wrote poems—a person who could, through the writing of poems, enact (and for moments be) a self beyond the self. And in recognizing this, Stafford, I've come believe, sensed that the Jeffers he wanted to meet, to know, to acknowledge, could only be known in and through the poems. And I've come to believe that this was why Stafford shared that story—as a text for me to study, a lesson I might come to understand and thus better understand how Jeffers' work might matter for my own attempts to write poems that might matter—both for myself and others.

In the 1970s, it was the fashion to understand the relationship of younger poets to those who influenced them through the lens of Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence*. Bloom argued that the poet son was inevitably competing with the poet father (yes, a patriarchal model and, if I remember right, explicitly Freudian). To accept the influence of the father doomed the son to writing *weak* poetry. To kill off the already dead poet father through a willful misreading of the elder was the only way to achieve *strong* poetry. In Bloom, influence is the result of resisting influence. And perhaps this was the case, as he proposed, for Wallace Stevens. But Stafford's pilgrimage to Tor House and his reading of "Vulture" that evening some fifty years later suggest a different possibility—that influence, if that's the right term for it, can also happen through accepting the imaginative world of another poet as a possibility to be explored and drawn upon—a resource that enriches, and in some small way even enables, one's own work. Instead of the *yes, but* of Bloom's *agon* of influence, the *ah, yes*, and *oh, this also of dialogue*.

By the time Stafford was recognized as a poet of significance, Jeffers was no longer seen as a major poet—was indeed nearly forgotten. And Stafford's plain speaking seems unrelated to Jeffers' voice, but the young Stafford's pilgrimage to Carmel and the way he gave himself to Jeffers' "Vulture" that evening in 1987 show that Jeffers mattered for him.

And his early, often anthologized “Traveling Through the Dark” shows that Jeffers was not, for Stafford, a figure to be resisted, as Bloom would have it, but a presence to engage, an informing possibility that was much deeper than matters of technique and deeper, too, than the mystery we refer to as *voice*. In the poem, the speaker is driving a mountain road and comes around a blind curve where a deer has been hit, killed, and left in the roadway. He stops to push the carcass, a hazard for other drivers, over the cliff side, then realizes the dead doe is pregnant with a still living fawn. The poem ends:

Beside that mountain road I hesitated.

The car aimed ahead its lowered parking lights;
under the hood purred the steady engine.
I stood in the glare of the warm exhaust turning red;
around our group I could hear the wilderness listen.

I thought hard for us all—my only swerving—,
then pushed her over the edge into the river.

One key to the poem is the fifth of these lines. If we read the poem as treating the wilderness as simply a scene or setting for the speaker’s dilemma (treating the world of nature as one thing and the human world as another), the *listening* is necessarily figural (“I could hear the wilderness *as if it were listening*”). But if the wilderness has being or is a being, then the speaker is not imagining the “wilderness” *as if it* is listening but is instead, in a heightened moment of awareness, actually hearing the wilderness as it listens, and the “us” in “for us all” in the next line includes the wilderness. In “Traveling Through the Dark,” the wilderness is an aspect of Nature, and Nature is the being within which the speaker, the doe and fawn, the rocks and trees cloaked in the darkness beyond the red glare of the brake lights, and the river below all have their subsidiary being. Although the tone is entirely different, this is also Lew Welch’s sense of nature when he wonders what the rocks think of the trees. And, too, it is Jeffer’s sense of nature. And this helps explain the impact—the resonance and implications—of “my only swerving.” In hesitating, the speaker is holding back from what must be done. He is momentarily allowing his very human empathy for the fawn that will not be born to obscure his vision of nature’s more fundamental terms and his obligations to and within nature. In the human frame, the scene *is* tragic.

In Nature’s frame, the scene is. And the speaker momentarily swerves, then comes to accept this and acts as he must. This dilemma, the drama, of human consciousness both within and at odds with nature’s being is also at the center of Jeffers’ “Hurt Hawks,” where the speaker hesitates to put a severely injured hawk out of its misery. In Jeffers’ poem the speaker, caught between his recognition of Nature’s indifference to the hawk’s pain and his human, humane, pity at its stoic suffering, delays giving the hawk the “lead gift” of death. In Stafford’s poem, the speaker recognizes and quietly acknowledges his “swerving.” In Jeffers’ poem the too-often misunderstood outburst “I’d sooner, except the penalties, kill a man than a hawk, but...” registers his similar, but not identical, “swerving.”

Whether or not Stafford had “Hurt Hawks” explicitly in mind as he wrote “Traveling Through the Dark” (and I doubt he did), Jeffers’ poetry, and perhaps particularly “Hurt Hawks,” offered him elements that he could draw from, extend, and reshape as he confronted his moment on that mountain road (which I choose to believe was an actual moment). And however Stafford’s mapping of the dialectic of our human being within nature’s greater being might differ from Jeffers, his relationship to Jeffers through Jeffers’ poetry was not the *agon* of anxiety where the younger poet contests the elder, but the *and also* of dialogue. And if so, this offers a glimpse of a different kind of tradition than the one T.S. Eliot sketched in “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” where each poem is an element in a set mapped on an atemporal chart and the game, the competition, is to have a piece added to this collection called “tradition.”

Stafford’s connection to Jeffers (and Snyder’s as well?) suggests an alternate tradition where each poem—its mode of being—enables further poems, further explorations of being. Perhaps this alternative tradition might be thought of as *tradition and the communal talent*, or perhaps *tradition and the dialogic talent*.

And in the spirit of that, perhaps I can be forgiven by closing with this piece occasioned by that afternoon in Stafford’s office years ago, and too his sharing of “Vulture” that evening even more years ago and offered in what I hope is the spirit of dialogue—of *and this also*.

TRAVELING THROUGH THE LIGHT

*Recalling William Stafford recalling hitchhiking
from Kansas to California hoping to meet Robinson Jeffers*

In time you would come to know that the poem
is everywhere and all things:

Emily at her kitchen window
glimpsing the cochineal blur
of a hummingbird—
the morning mail riding on to Tunis;

the workers loading and unloading their wagons
as Walt, at ease with the late summer sun,
imagines he is one with their manly joy, the rowdy
camaraderie and glistening sheen of broad shoulders.

But I was too young to know these things
when you were telling me of your pilgrimage
—hitchhiking from somewhere in Kansas
all the way west to Carmel hoping to meet the poet.

You were what, nineteen, as you made your way,
ride after ride: the clattering of the Model Ts
and jouncing farm wagons and maybe
a salesman or two with a shiny sedan—

the lull of the thrumming tires and motor's hum
deepening
your first glimpse of the western mountains.

And, too, the desert, then again
the mountains, the Sierras, and at last,
as you walked down the hill through the village,
the ocean—sun-glittered through the trees,

then opening vast and endless.

Or maybe it was still morning and the waves
sighing out
from beneath the retreating fog

as you turned south, walking on,
the hillside pines on your left, sand
spits and granite on your right
until you came to the poet's gate

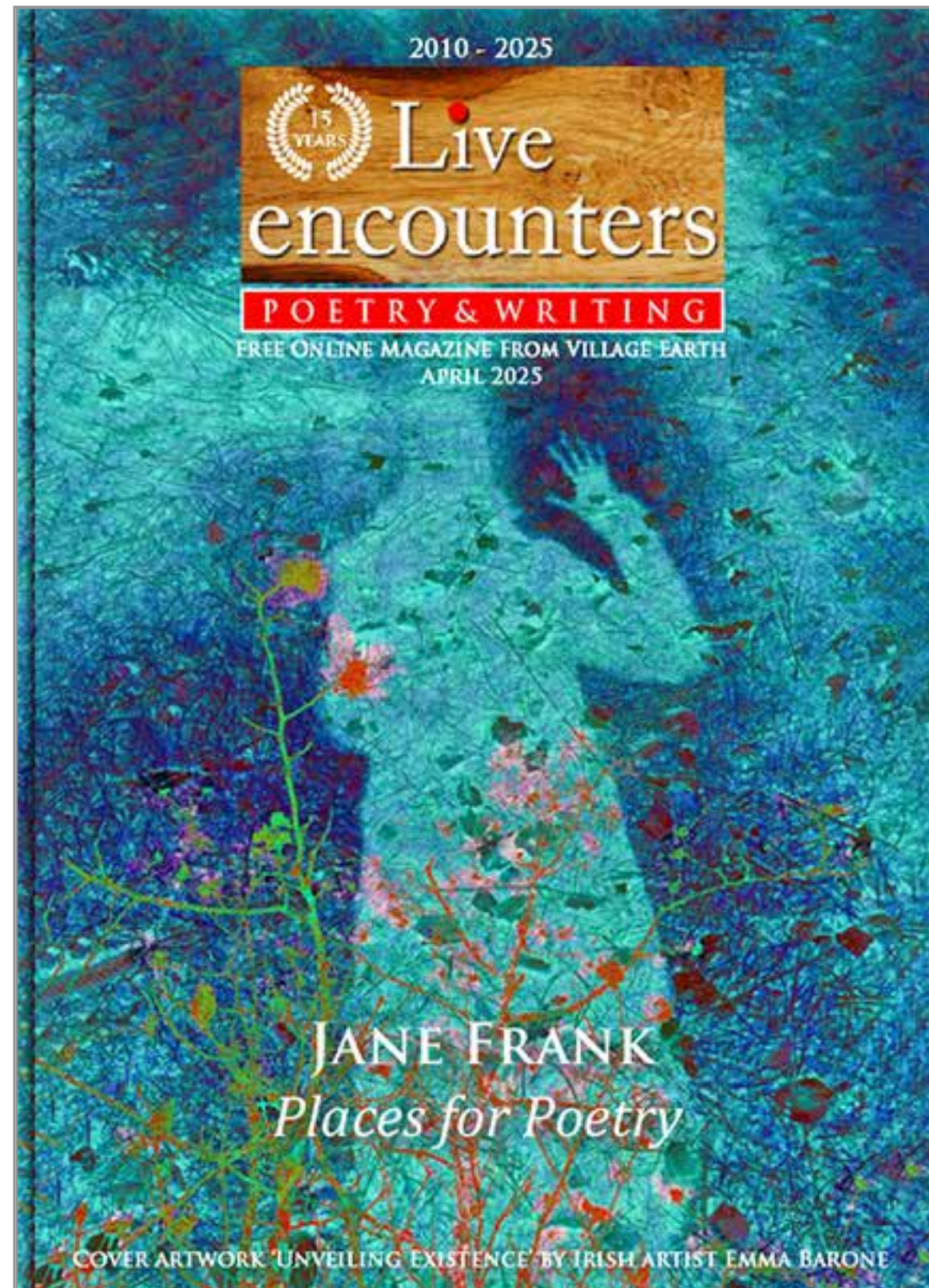
and stood there

looking across the patch of garden
at the sea-worn stones,
the tower and cottage framed by the Eucalyptus.

Then turned and hitchhiked all the way back
to Kansas: the clattering Model Ts,
the farm wagons and maybe a salesman's car,

the desert stars
and mountain stars those nights,
then again the Kansas prairie—
as if this were the pilgrimage

and that moment of almost
reaching for the gate's latch
your only swerving.



Jane Frank is an award-winning Brisbane poet and academic, originally from Maryborough in the Fraser Coast region of Queensland. Her collections *Ghosts Struggle to Swim* (2023) and *Wide River* (2020) were published by Calanthe Press and her work is widely published in journals and anthologies in both Australia and internationally including *Antipodes*, *Australian Poetry Journal*, *Westerly*, *Cordite*, *Takahē*, *Meniscus*, *Shearsman*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *The Mackinaw*, *StylusLit*, *The Memory Palace* (Ekphrastic Review, 2024), *100 Poets* (Flying Islands, 2025), *Poetry for the Planet* (Litoria Press, 2021), *Poetry of Change: The Liquid Amber Prize Anthology* (Liquid Amber Press, 2024) and *Faith: 2024 ACU Prize for Poetry Anthology* (2024). She has a PhD from Griffith University and previous qualifications in both art history and arts and cultural management. Her monograph *Regenerating Regional Culture: A Study of the International Book Town Movement* was published in Palgrave Macmillan's Sociology of the Arts series in 2018. She teaches in the School of Business and Creative Industries at the University of the Sunshine Coast and is reviews editor at *StylusLit* literary journal. Read more of her work at <https://www.facebook.com/JaneFrankPoet/>



JANE FRANK

PLACES FOR POETRY

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

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

continued overleaf...

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(Earth Hour, UQP, 2014: 54)

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

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

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

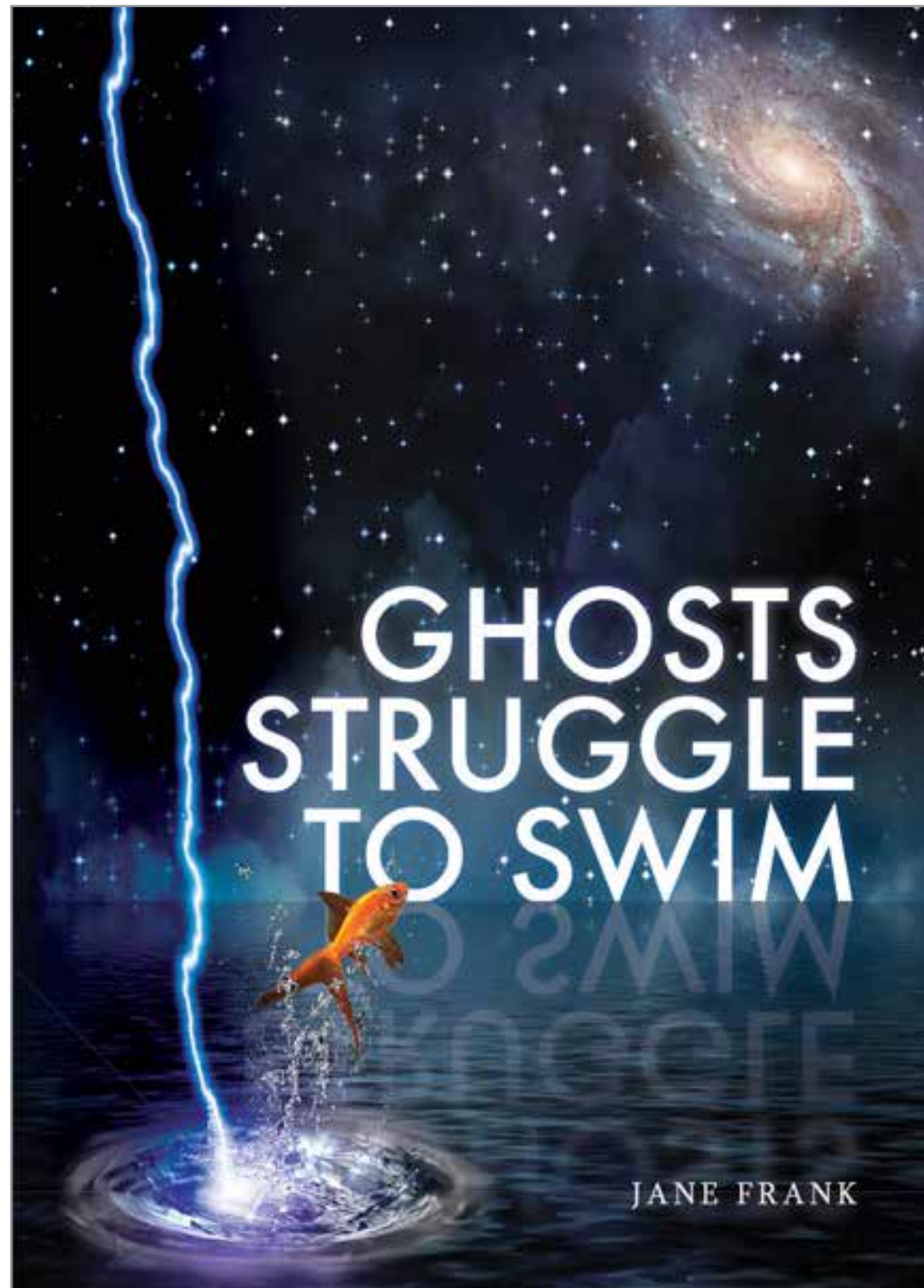
*The harbour is an ironing board;
Flat iron tugs dash smoothing toward
Any shirt of a ship, any pillowslip
Of a freighter they decree
Must be ironed flat as washing from the sea.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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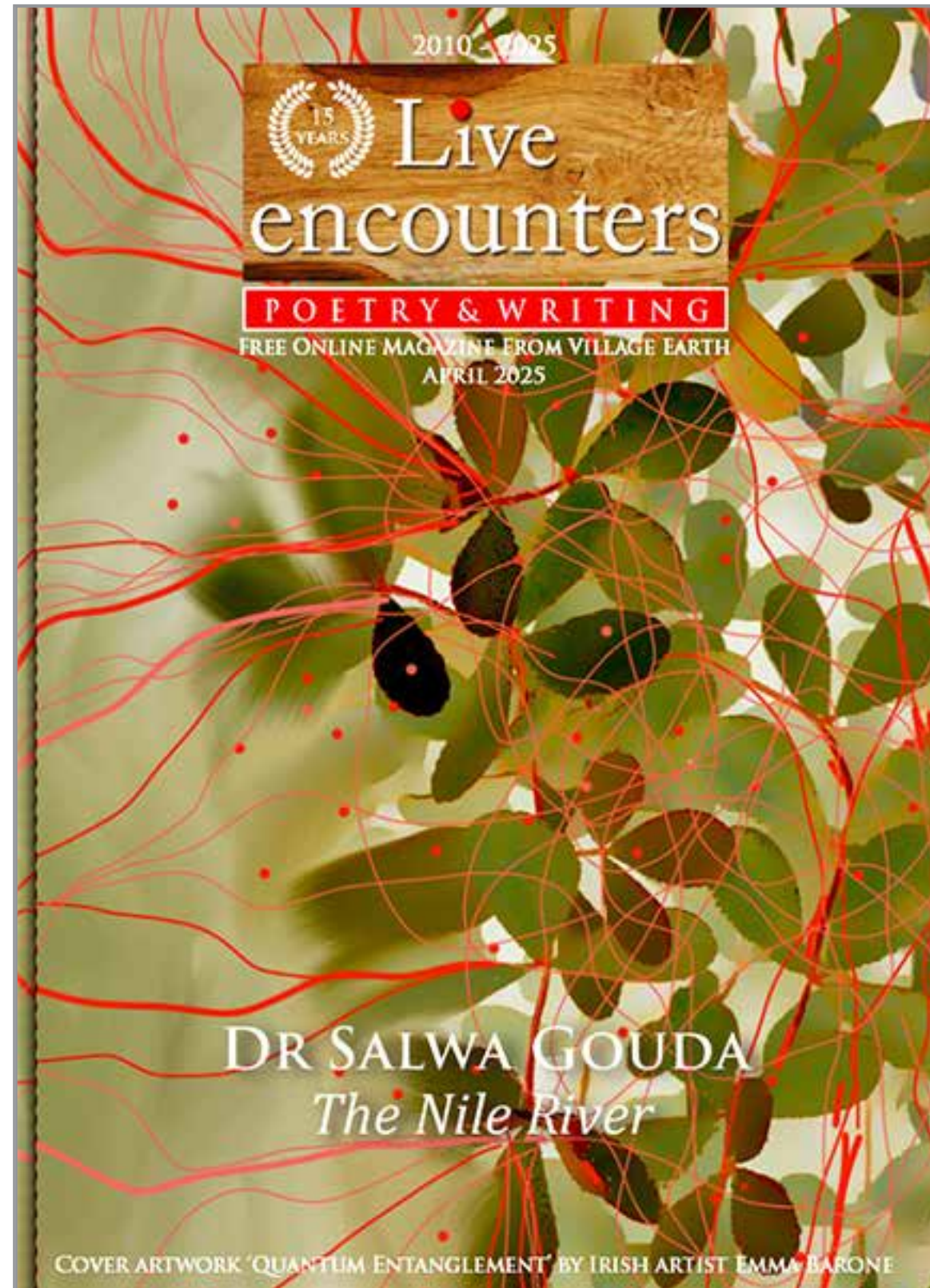
A STORY OF WALKING

after Michel de Certeau

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

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

Dr. Salwa Gouda is an Egyptian literary translator, critic, and academic at the English Language and Literature Department at Ain-Shams University. She holds a PhD in English literature and criticism. She received her education at Ain-Shams University and California State University in San Bernardino. She has published several academic books, including "Lectures in English Poetry, and "Introduction to Modern Literary Criticism" and others. She has also contributed to the translation of "The Arab Encyclopedia for Pioneers," which includes poets and their poetry, philosophers, historians, and men of letters, under the supervision of UNESCO. Additionally, her poetry translations have been published in various international magazines.



DR SALWA GOUDA THE NILE RIVER: A LITERARY LIFELINE THROUGH TIME

The Nile River, a meandering lifeline that carves through Africa's deserts, has long transcended its role as a geographical marvel in Arabic literature. It stands as a symbol of life, a silent witness to history, and a mirror reflecting the soul of a civilization. From ancient hymns to contemporary novels, the Nile has carried the hopes, struggles, and dreams of countless generations. My own bond with the river runs deep, as I spent my early years in a family home perched on its banks. Back then, the Nile flowed with a tranquil grace, not only in its journey from south to north but also in the hearts and veins of the Egyptians who revere it. It has long been a cradle of civilization, a muse for poets, and a testament to nature's enduring generosity. For millennia, its waters have nurtured cultures, inspired mythologies, and sustained ecosystems, creating a tapestry of human and natural grandeur that remains unmatched. This editorial delves into the river's evolving portrayal across Arabic literary traditions, revealing how it has both shaped and been shaped by the cultural and political tides of the region.

In ancient Egyptian poetry, the Nile was often depicted as a divine gift, embodying the gods' benevolence and the pharaohs' might. The river was not merely a source of water but a sacred entity that sustained life and symbolized the cyclical nature of existence. In the *Hymn to the Nile*, attributed to Pharaoh Akhenaten, the river is celebrated as a source of fertility and abundance:

*"Oh Nile, you rise in the heavens,
And your waters flow to the sea.
You bring forth the lotus flowers,
And the fish swim in your streams."*

This hymn captures the reverence ancient Egyptians held for the Nile, viewing it as a celestial force that connected the earthly realm to the divine. The river's annual flooding, which deposited rich silt onto its banks, was seen as a manifestation of the gods' favor, ensuring bountiful harvests and prosperity. The Nile was not just a physical entity but a spiritual one, deeply intertwined with the identity and survival of civilization.

The ancient Egyptians also personified the Nile as a god, Hapi, who was believed to control its waters. Hapi was often depicted as a figure with a potbelly, symbolizing abundance, and carrying offerings of food and water. This personification underscores the Nile's centrality to Egyptian life, not just as a natural resource but as a divine presence that demanded reverence and gratitude.

Early Egyptian poets, influenced by Pharaonic reverence, wove the river into their verses as a sacred blessing. With the advent of Islam, the Nile's symbolism deepened. The Abbasid poet Al-Mutanabbi, during his visit to Egypt in the 10th century, immortalized it as a manifestation of cosmic justice:

*"Egypt—a land where all good flows,
Its Nile runs with the essence of justice."*

Also, the river's literary presence flourished during the Islamic Golden Age. The Andalusian scholar Ibn Hazm, in his treatise *The Dove's Neckring*, likened the Nile's constancy to enduring love. Travel writers like Ibn Battuta marveled at its role in sustaining Cairo's vibrant markets and intellectual hubs. In chivalric romances, such as *The Adventures of Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan*, the Nile became a stage for epic quests, symbolizing both abundance and danger. Its dual nature—nurturer and destroyer—resonated in folk tales, where floods could signify divine wrath or mercy. The Nile's duality is particularly evident in Islamic folklore, where it is often portrayed as both a giver and taker of life. In one tale, a flood is sent as punishment for human arrogance, only to recede when the people repent. This narrative reflects the river's unpredictable nature and its role as a moral arbiter in the collective imagination.

The 19th-century Arab Renaissance reimagined the Nile as a symbol of Egyptian identity and a national icon amid colonial rules. Ahmed Shawqi, the "Prince of Poets," blended Pharaonic pride with anti-colonial sentiment:

*"The virgin Nile, ransom of ancestral land,
Flows with our glories, as time itself marvels."*

Similarly, the poet Hafez Ibrahim portrayed the river as a silent ally in the struggle for independence. Prose writers like Rifā'a al-Taḥṭāwī linked the Nile's fertility to Egypt's intellectual revival, arguing that its waters nourished both fields and minds. This period marked a significant shift in the Nile's literary portrayal. No longer just a divine or natural entity, the river became a political symbol, embodying the nation's resistance to foreign domination and its aspirations for self-determination. The Nile was no longer just a source of life but a source of pride, a testament to Egypt's enduring legacy and its capacity for renewal. Also, the Nile's annual flooding, which brought nutrient-rich silt to the land, was seen as a symbol of renewal and rebirth. The poet Salah Abdel Sabour wrote:

*"The Nile's floodwaters bring us life,
And the land is reborn with the coming of the rain.
The river's bounty is a gift from the gods,
And we are grateful for its life-giving waters."*

The 19th century also saw the rise of travel literature, where European and Arab writers alike marveled at the Nile's grandeur. For European travelers, the river was often exoticized, a symbol of the "mysterious East." For Arab writers, however, it was a reminder of their heritage and a call to reclaim their narrative from colonial distortions. Following the 1952 Egyptian Revolution, the Nile emerged as a voice for the marginalized. The vernacular poetry of Abd al-Rahman al-Abnudi infused the river with a proletarian spirit, narrating the hardships of farmers:

*"The Nile laughs at dawn, shouts at oppression,
Waters palaces and waters the shacks."*

Further, Nobel laureate Naguib Mahfouz set his novel *Miramar* (1967) in an Alexandrian pension overlooking the Nile, using the river to reflect Egypt’s class divisions. The contrast between luxury hotels and fishermen’s huts along its banks underscored the nation’s social inequalities.

Moreover, Sudanese literature offers a unique perspective, capturing the Nile’s role in both unity and conflict. Tayeb Salih’s *Season of Migration to the North* (1966) juxtaposes the river’s serenity with postcolonial upheaval, symbolizing the tension between tradition and modernity. The Nile, in this context, becomes a metaphor for the nation’s struggle to reconcile its past with its present, to navigate the complexities of identity in a rapidly changing world. In the 21st century, the Nile’s literary identity grapples with environmental crises and globalization. Sudanese poet Al-Saddiq al-Raddi laments the river’s exploitation:

*“They shackle your flow with cement and iron,
But who can shackle dreams or love?”*

The Nile’s journey through modern Arabic literature reveals its remarkable adaptability. From a nationalist emblem during the renaissance to a voice for the oppressed in social realism, and now a rallying cry for ecological justice, the river remains a mirror to the region’s soul. As Sudanese American poet Emtithal Mahmoud writes:

*“The Nile does not forget—
It carves its path through stone,
A testament to what persists.”*

The river’s journey through Arabic literature is a testament to its enduring resonance. It has been a divine gift, a nationalist symbol, a witness to oppression, and a casualty of modernity. Yet, its essence remains unchanged: a symbol of resilience. As Mahmoud Darwish once wrote,

*“The Nile flows within us... Not above,
It is the story, and the story remains.”*

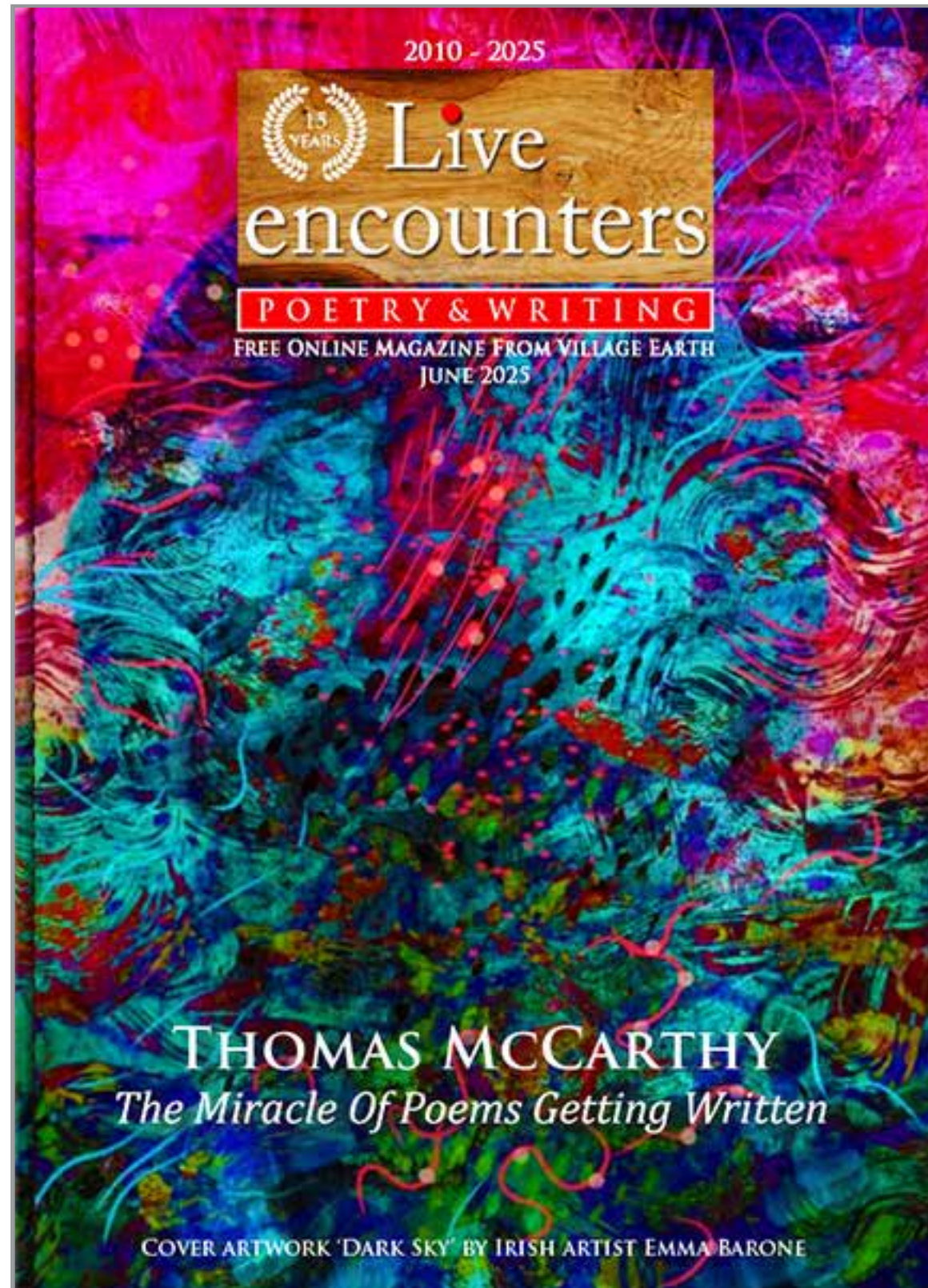
Darwish also wrote:

*“The Nile is the artery of Egypt’s heart,
And its waters flow through our veins.
We are children of the Nile,
And its legacy is our heritage.”*

In every era, the Nile has mirrored the Arab world’s triumphs and trials, proving that literature, like the river itself, is a force of perpetual renewal. Its waters, once sung by pharaohs, now inspire tweets and treaties, ensuring that the Nile’s story flows endlessly.

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Thomas McCarthy was born at Cappoquin, Co. Waterford in 1954 and educated locally and at University College Cork. He was an Honorary Fellow of the International Writing programme, University of Iowa in 1978/79. He has published *The First Convention* (1978), *The Sorrow Garden* (1981), *The Lost Province* (1996), *Merchant Prince* (2005) and *The Last Geraldine Officer* (2009) as well as a number of other collections. He has also published two novels and a memoir. He has won the Patrick Kavanagh Award, the Alice Hunt Bartlett Prize and the O'Shaughnessy Prize for Poetry as well as the Ireland Funds Annual Literary Award. He worked for many years at Cork City Libraries, retiring in 2014 to write fulltime. He was International Professor of English at Macalester College, Minnesota, in 1994/95. He is a former Editor of *Poetry Ireland Review* and *The Cork Review*. He has also conducted poetry workshops at Listowel Writers' Week, Molly Keane House, Arvon Foundation and Portlaoise Prison (Provisional IRA Wing). He is a member of Aosdana. His collections *Pandemonium* and *Prophecy*, were published by Carcanet in 2016 and 2019. Last year Gallery Press, Ireland, published his sold-out journals, *Poetry, Memory and the Party*. Gallery Press published his essays *Questioning Ireland* in September; and Carcanet published a new collection, *Plenitude*, in April 2025.



THOMAS MCCARTHY THE MIRACLE OF POEMS GETTING WRITTEN

The miracle is that new poems get written. It is something for each of us to consider carefully, especially those of us who are aging and subject to moments of depression and dejection about the whole poetry 'business.' Yesterday in Dublin we said farewell to the poet Paul Durcan who had just died in a nursing-home. In Ireland Durcan was as famous as our Nobel Prize winner, Seamus Heaney. Possibly more famous, or at least more familial, more familiar. His poems 'The Kilfenora Teaboy,' 'The Drimoleague Blues,' 'Making Love outside Aras an Uachtaráin,' 'The Berlin Wall Café' and 'The Haulier's Wife Meet Jesus on the Road to Moone' were universally loved and quoted constantly by fashionable commentators as well as devoted followers of the poet. His funeral Mass in Ringsend was a real Dublin farewell, with the President of Ireland and his aide-de-camp in attendance, and Durcan is to be buried with his own people in faraway County Mayo on the West coast of Ireland. His greatest claim to fame may be his nearly four-minute contribution to the superb Van Morrison track 'In the Days Before Rock 'N Roll,' Durcan's voice intoning a litany of old European music stations, Luxembourg, Hilversum, Armed Forces Network, and his urgent crying of "Justin! Justin!" It is an extraordinary piece of music, more than that, a cultural performance, a cry from the wilderness of youth trapped in old Ireland. It is more Durcan than Van Morrison, and yet the Morrison music envelops the poet's pleading voice with an uncanny, ghostly power. Listen to this track today, if you can, to remember a great lost poet.

On the day of his funeral Mass in Dublin I was reminded that the world of poetry goes on inside its own world when I attended an exquisite reading to launch three new Gallery Press collections in the Notre Dame University Centre in Dublin's Merrion Square. A fine, prosperous, enthusiastic crowd, a number whom I'd seen at the Durcan funeral Mass, assembled round the three poets as Peter Fallon introduced them with immense pride: Frank McGuinness, Vona Groarke and Ciaran Berry. Vona Groarke read quietly from what is truly a jewel of a book, *Infinity Pool*, the title poem itself a gem:

'And I am folding it now, this pool,
corner to corner, line to line,
so as to carry about with me
its deep blue scrap of lie.

But carrying folded water
isn't feasible. You know that.'

Her writing is precise, chiselled and instructive for anyone learning how to write well. She is a poet of clouds, sea, light, summers and mothers. Her lovely poem 'Setting My Mother's Hair as an Ars Poetica' has the force and delicacy of the best Sharon Olds' poetry: 'She'll sit under hair that's like corn on the cob...' And the prose poem 'Tipping Point' is a real beauty, exemplary, worth buying her book for this alone, to see how successful a successful prose poem can be. Ciaran Berry's *States* is a more widely conflicted and dramatic creature, all the poems stitched tightly into a large Amish quilt of American anxieties – though Dublin-born with Galway and Donegal connections, Berry has made an American life of his adulthood, teaching at the exclusive Trinity College in Connecticut. He tries to make sense of being an 'Alien' in a land that always seemed like family territory to Irish people (after all, quarter of the officers in Washington's Continental Army were born in Ireland, his officer list reads like the Army List of King James at the Battle of the Boyne). In complex, meditative narratives and odysseys Berry outlines how he ended up in Queens, how he cinematically gets 'lost in the spectacle and miss the allegory.' He is where Marilyn Monroe's white dress rises in a rush of air, where he's watching French films in 'our fifth-floor walk-up on Amsterdam and 106th, where he is immersed in 'that horde of Darkseekers' in more ways than one. His 100-page *States* is both photography and myth-breaking, a collection that will repay much re-reading; a full summer-long of reading.



Photograph courtesy Thomas McCarthy.

‘The children of Pompeii should have listened/ to their elders, if not betters, who preached caution – beware of the god that tastes of goat’s milk, / the milk of that same goat will drench your city...’ writes Frank McGuinness, revered Donegal playwright and equally dedicated poet. His new collection, *The River Crana*, is dedicated to the memory of two dear friends and admirers, Tom Kilroy and Gerald Dawe. With them he shares a poetry of drama, political commentary and sacred places and *The River Crana* is heaving with human drama, with drifting desire, impatient love. In the very fine sequence ‘Touch, 1976’ he creates five scenarios of such need and love:

‘Is that all I can tell, the end of a night,
fellows in their cups, admitting that once
I lay with a man, another man’s arms,
A beautiful Yank who asked – will you stay?’

Brief encounters and the failure of attachment are crucial obsessions, lovers that a poet watches walking away ‘not looking back, never again looking/ the length of his life and out of my own.’ The humanity, the sensitivity, in these poems is astonishing, nearly overwhelming, but such qualities will not be a surprise to those who know McGuinness’s work in theatre. Precisions and particulars create the propulsion in almost every McGuinness poem; the pleats in his mother’s skirt, the hands of Barbara Warren, the thermals and gloves of Gertrude Jekyll, Eileen Battersby in a UCD Anglo-Saxon class. These are the details that own the world ‘me not the full shilling,/ sentenced to admire the work of giants...’. Such beauty in this book, such challenges and importances in all three collections, launched on a warm day in Dublin, on a day when the poet Durcan went quiet.

These books are sitting on a chair beside me as I write, but for companions they have three other newly published collections by other Irish poets, Afric McGlinchey, Anne Rath and Noelle Lynskey. These other collections are a reminder of how extensive, embracing, individualistic, *continuing*, the world of poetry truly is. It continues. It continues. Wonderful poets die and are gathered up into the Pantheon of the great, but poetry as something happening in our daily lives continues with an unexpected energy. This creative energy is real, as real as air.

At one time I had a discussion with my son when he was a Short Form Producer for Disney Europe about the possibility of making a short drama, maybe nine minutes long, let’s call it ‘Poemberg News’ or ‘Poemberg TV.’ A fast-paced, hectic-hectic, dynamic cut of interviews, blurbs and sales charts from publishers, with streaming segments/ charts beneath the interviews on the rise and fall of poetic reputations since the 1640s, also panels and arguments about bookshops, agents, readings, demonstrations, protests, reviews, all compressed into 9 minutes like a segment of Bloomberg TV or CNBC. Just imagine how mad that would be. Who is writing the poetry of the real world, who is offering a bit-coin poetry, an ambiguous literary value, who is a fake, who is the real thing, the Warren Buffet of poetic value? I thought it would be a brilliant way to show the dynamism of poetry, at this very moment. A dynamism I felt at the Gallery Press launch and in the lively, scurrilous, gossiping discussions after Paul Durcan’s funeral Mass. it could be done but it would require shit-hot editors and marvellous sound engineers – as well as the oversight of a law firm.

I launched the collection, *Ashe and Bone*, by Anne Rath (published by the dynamic Revival Press) a few days ago in Cork City Libraries. The new Revival Press design is beautiful, it reminds me of the exquisite collections by Marvin Bell and Bill Merwin published by Atheneum of New York in the Seventies and Eighties. You never saw such a crowd as the crowd at Anne Rath’s launch, such a wonderful, buoyant crowd; and such huge sales of a book. Anne read brilliantly, with that authority and calm she has, as the audience listened, rapt and spellbound, to poems of illness and loss, of attachment and memory, of grief and renewal: ‘Let my prayer be a bowl/ spun from all that is broken,/ braided with sedge and seagrass,/ lined with the luminous lost. Oh, just perfect poems like ‘Twilight Thrush,’ ‘Dear Body’ and ‘The Banshee Wails.’ Afric McGlinchey launched her book at Waterstones in Cork recently, an unusual, amazing work called *à la belle étoile; The odyssey of Jeanne Baré*, published by Salmon Poetry in a book that must be one of the most beautiful poetry-book designs of the last decade, designed in this instance by Michael Ray. The entire collection is a sequence in celebration and exploration of the life of Jeanne Baré, the Frenchwoman who was the first woman to circumnavigate the globe. She achieved this feat in the 1700s by disguising herself as a man. McGlinchey’s poems give Baré a voice. In ‘Slipknots, North Atlantic, 1767’ she writes:

‘My neck cloth hides the lack of a throat-ball,
I’ve grown goat-solid, the softness has sheered from my voice
And, so far, fortune is with me...’

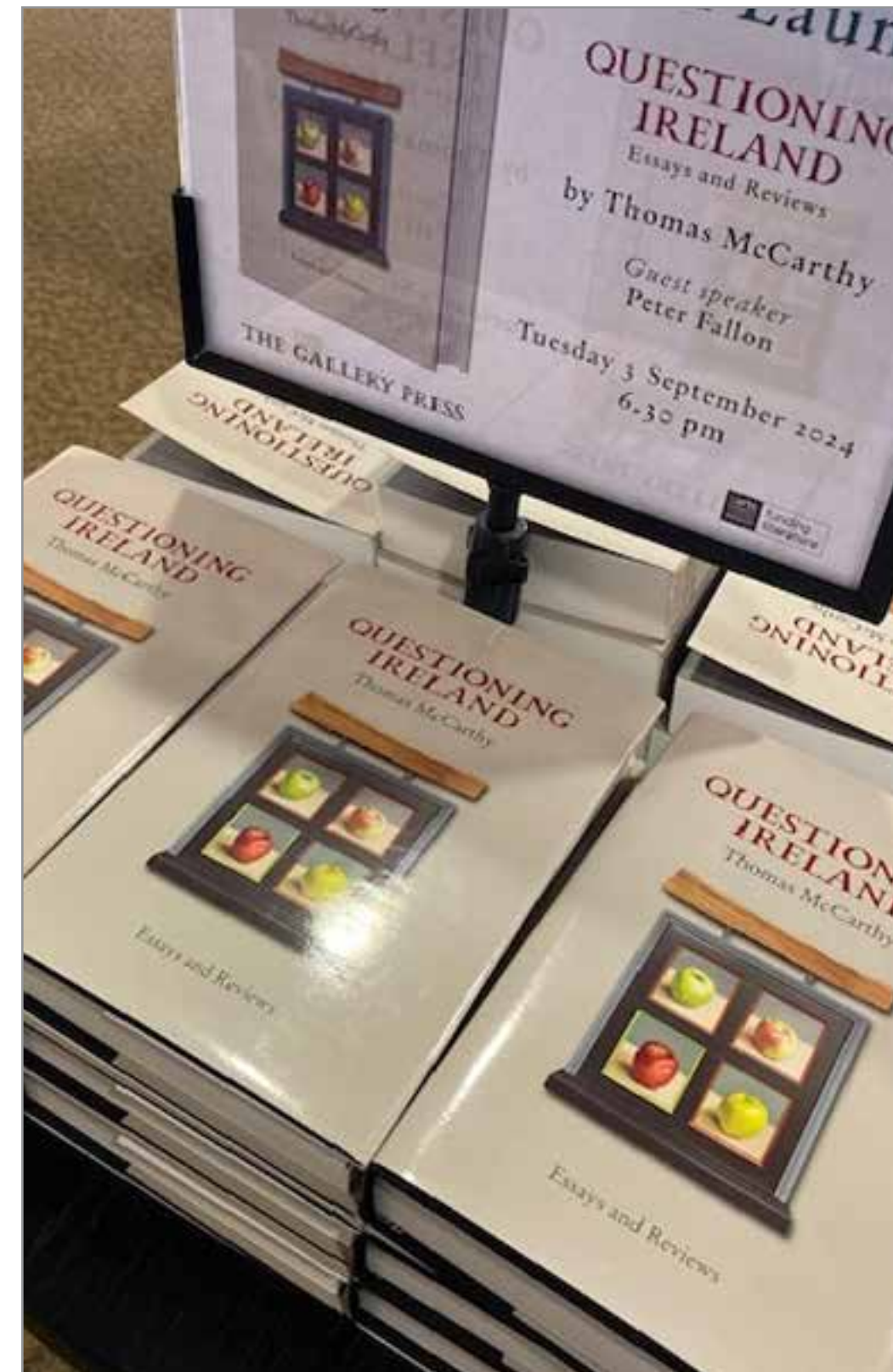
The poems are wonderful, voiced as the ship moves through the Straits of Magellan, the Solomon Islands, Java and Samoa, all the while giving us the physicality and terror of life at sea intensified by the perils of gender. It is brilliant work.

Arlen House recently published Noelle Lynskey's *Featherweight*, a beauty of a collection from a really accomplished poet who I met briefly in the churchyard after Paul Durcan's funeral Mass (Ireland is, after all, a small place and the poetry community even smaller). The poems here are absolutely sure of their ground, poems of Portumna, of music (music is a crucial presence in the book), grandmothers and funerals, including the funeral of Edna O'Brien. But Lynskey is the poet of craft and music:

'On Thursdays, the day for New Inn,
with imperfect perfection my trio pours into the car,
violin, viola and cello in a weekly divining
at the musical well.'

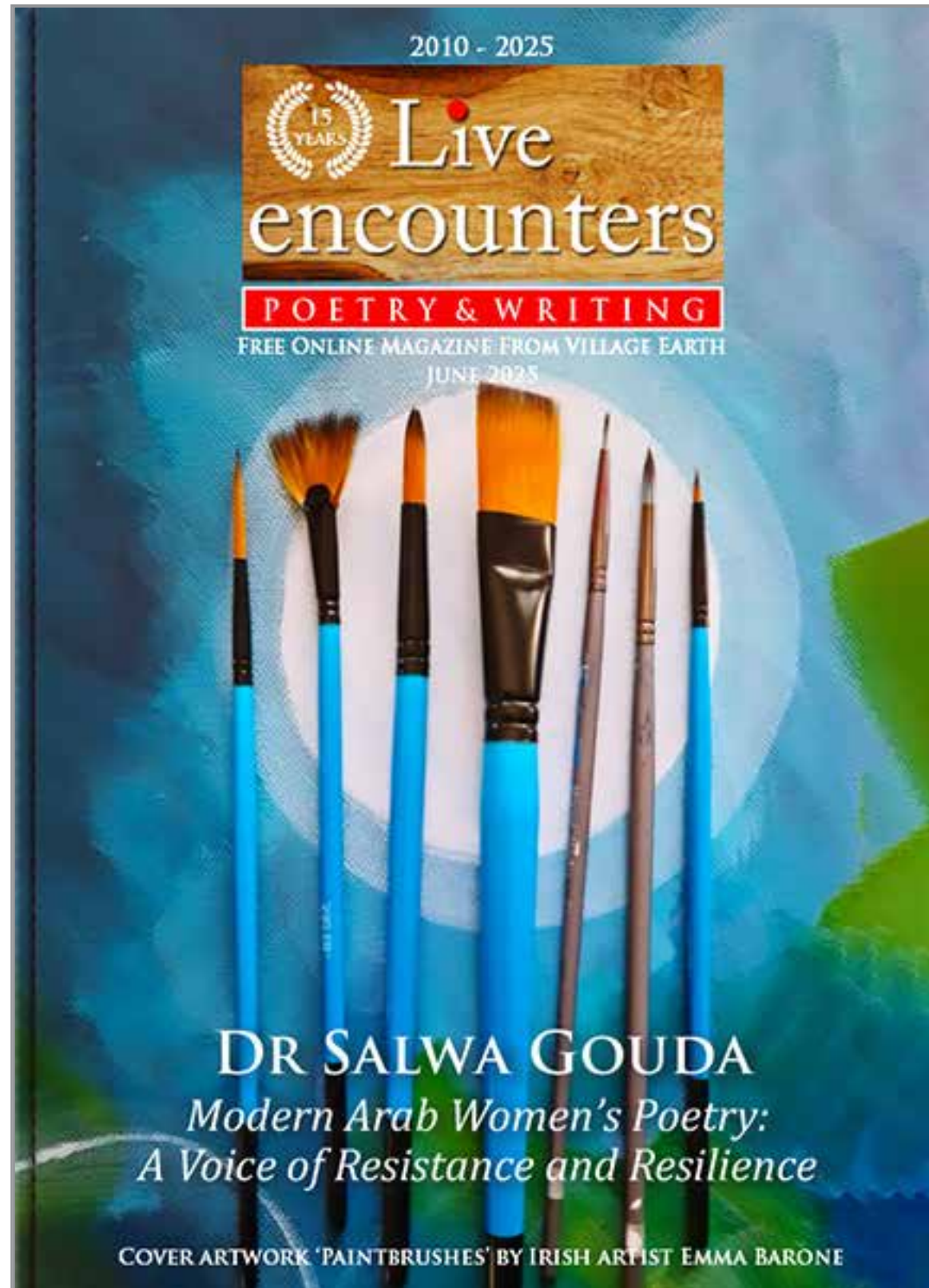
The metaphor is one of music and communal value, key components of Lynskey's world view and a moral value that saturates this vibrant, life-affirming collection. Such jewels of poems: 'Brown Coats,' 'Reeling Her in' and 'Carmen Cygni,' it would be difficult to choose which one to love the most.

But six collections, and there are others, ones I haven't brought upstairs to my library yet. I need to read more of the new Patrick Cotter collection, for example, and a new collection by the poet James Harpur, *The Magic Theatre* from Two Rivers Press. But these six new collections right now on the chair beside me, still un-shelved, they sing of a summer of high creativity. They are a reminder of how living, how breathing a thing, poetry is – it is as thistledown in the sunlight, or whitethorn blossom with which the hedgerows of Ireland are currently smothered. It insists itself into life with a circadian ferocity and certainty. It will not be silenced, especially by those who believe in just one canon of poetry, those who believe they should issue licenses. Our attitude to new poetry books should be one of welcome: a child has run in from the battlefield of this life, welcome, poet, sit here awhile beside me.



Available at: <https://gallerypress.com>

Dr. Salwa Gouda is an Egyptian literary translator, critic, and academic at the English Language and Literature Department at Ain-Shams University. She holds a PhD in English literature and criticism. She received her education at Ain-Shams University and California State University in San Bernardino. She has published several academic books, including "Lectures in English Poetry, and "Introduction to Modern Literary Criticism" and others. She has also contributed to the translation of "The Arab Encyclopedia for Pioneers," which includes poets and their poetry, philosophers, historians, and men of letters, under the supervision of UNESCO. Additionally, her poetry translations have been published in various international magazines.



DR SALWA GOUDA MODERN ARAB WOMEN'S POETRY: A VOICE OF RESISTANCE AND RESILIENCE

Poetry has always pulsed through the veins of Arab culture, serving as both mirror and compass for societies navigating the complex terrain of tradition and modernity. For Arab women, the poetic tradition has been particularly transformative - a sanctuary where silenced voices find resonance and a battleground where patriarchal structures face relentless challenge. The Iraqi poet Nazik al-Mala'ika's haunting lines from *Cholera* (1947) - "In the darkness, in the silence, the wails rise... Who will tell the mother her child is gone?" - marked a seismic shift in Arabic literature. Not only did she pioneer free verse in Arabic poetry, but she demonstrated how women could transform personal anguish into powerful social commentary, using their pens to document collective trauma through an unflinchingly feminine perspective.

The mid-20th century witnessed Arab women poets radically redefining their literary landscape. Palestinian poet Fadwa Tuqan, whose work earned her the title "Poet of Palestine," exemplified this transformation in *Enough for Me* (1967): "Enough for me to die on her earth/be buried in her/to melt and vanish into her soil/then sprout forth as a flower." Tuqan's genius lay in her ability to intertwine nationalist resistance with intimate corporeal imagery, positioning the female body as both metaphor and medium for political expression. This revolutionary approach created space for subsequent generations to explore increasingly bold themes. Syrian poet Maram al-Masri's *I Look at You* (2004) pushed boundaries further with its raw eroticism: "I look at you/as a starving woman looks at bread/as a prisoner looks at the horizon." Such verses didn't merely describe desire - they weaponized it, asserting women's right to articulate their own sexuality on their own terms.

The contemporary landscape of Arab women's poetry reveals an extraordinary diversity of voices grappling with urgent political realities. The late Gazan poet Hiba Abu Nada, tragically killed during Israel's 2023 bombardment of Gaza, left behind verses that pulse with defiant love: *"I shelter you, Gaza, with my last heartbeat/with the ink of my veins I write you."* Her work exemplifies how Arab women poets document war not as detached observers but as embodied participants, their words forged in the crucible of personal and collective survival. Egyptian poet Fatima Naoot's *A Sheep's Life* (2015) demonstrates another form of bravery, confronting religious authoritarianism at great personal risk: *"They told me: Be a sheep/The butcher's knife is kinder than the wolf's teeth/I said: I prefer the howl of wolves/to the silence of the flock."* For these poets, writing is never merely an artistic act - it's an existential stance, a refusal to be silenced or subdued.

The thematic breadth of modern Arab women's poetry reflects the complexity of their lived experiences. Saudi poet Hissa Hilal's explosive appearance on *Million's Poet* with *The Chaos of Fatwas* (2010) - *"I have seen evil in the eyes of fatwas/at the doorways of darkness/where they shroud the light of day"* - demonstrated how poetry could become a public challenge to religious extremism, even within conservative societies. Meanwhile, diaspora poets like Somali-British Warsan Shire have given voice to the migrant experience with visceral immediacy: *"no one leaves home unless/home is the mouth of a shark."* Their work complicates simplistic narratives of Arab womanhood, revealing layered identities shaped by displacement, memory, and cultural hybridity. Tunisian poet Amina Saïd's *The Saffron Lady* (1999) represents yet another dimension, weaving together Islamic mysticism and feminist consciousness: *"She undresses the sky at dusk/with hennaed hands/teaching the moon/how to wear its light."* These poets collectively demonstrate how Arab women are reclaiming and reimagining their spiritual and cultural heritage.

The institutional challenges facing Arab women poets remain formidable. Censorship boards across the Arab world routinely suppress works deemed politically or morally transgressive. State surveillance and religious fatwas create climates of fear, while mainstream literary circles often dismiss women's writing as lacking in universal significance. The Palestinian poet Maya Abu Al-Hayyat articulates this struggle in *The Cake*: *"They told me my poems are too small/that they don't tackle the big issues... as if the occupation of my body/isn't the original occupation."*

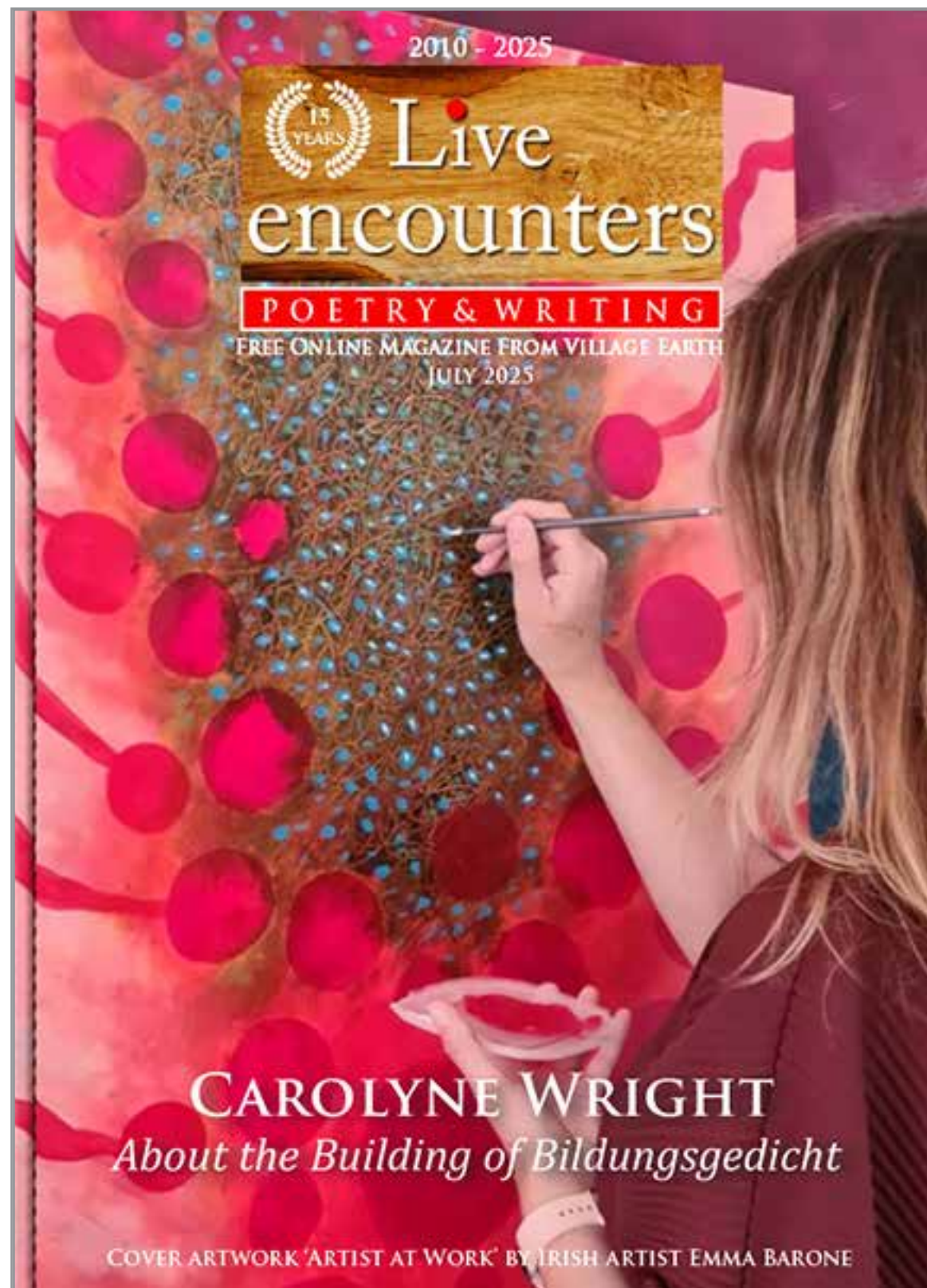
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Despite these obstacles, poets are finding innovative ways to circumvent restrictions. Digital platforms have become crucial alternative spaces, with Instagram poets like Bahraini American poet Amina Atiq and Kuwaiti poet Mona Kareem building international followings. Kareem's *So You Know You're Not Alone* (2016) captures the diasporic experience in haunting fragments: *"This is how we love:/with exile's grammar/every verb irregular."* Such works demonstrate how technology enables new forms of creative expression and solidarity.

The future of Arab women's poetry lies in its fearless hybridity and adaptability. Younger generations are increasingly blending poetic forms with multimedia art, performance, and activism. Syrian poet Golan Haji's collaborations with visual artists, or Lebanese poet Joumana Haddad's experimental typography, point toward an exciting interdisciplinary future. The rise of collectives like the Palestinian Women's Poetry Network and online journals such as *Jadaliyya* suggests growing institutional support for these voices. Most importantly, the poetry itself continues evolving, as seen in the work of emerging voices like Emirati poet Afra Atiq, who blends Nabati traditions with spoken word, or Sudanese American poet Safia Elhillo, whose *The January Children* explores postcolonial identity through fragmented lyricism.

What makes contemporary Arab women's poetry uniquely powerful is its refusal to be categorized or contained. It is at once deeply personal and resolutely political, rooted in tradition yet radically innovative. As Syrian poet Najat Abdul Samad wrote in *When I Am Overcome by Weakness* (2016): *"I bandage it with the outcry of a mother/who lost her child to a bombing."* These words capture the essential duality of this poetry - it is both wound and suture, bearing witness to brokenness while insisting on the possibility of healing. In classrooms and protest marches, on social media and in underground journals, Arab women's poetry continues to "sprout forth as a flower" from the hardest ground, as Fadwa Tuqan prophesied. Its resilience lies not despite adversity, but precisely through its unflinching engagement with it - a lesson in how art can survive, and even thrive, under the most oppressive conditions. For readers worldwide, engaging with this poetry isn't passive consumption; it's an act of solidarity with voices that refuse to be erased, and a recognition that their struggle for expression is inseparable from the universal human fight for dignity and freedom.



Carolyne 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, Carolyne lived in Chile and traveled in Brazil on a Fulbright Grant; on her return, she studied with Elizabeth Bishop at the University of Washington. Carolyne 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.



CAROLYNE WRIGHT ABOUT THE BUILDING OF "BILDUNGSGEDICHT"

Poets often get asked what influenced them to start writing, and what made them fall in love with *poetry*—of all things—since (as the unvoiced subtext to this question often goes) of all literary genres it is the most poorly remunerated. This poem evolved as my response to that question. It's called "*Bildungsgedicht*," which is a play on *Bildungsroman* (formation novel), the German term for a novel about the artist's early education and development. Examples are Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel*, and most of the books by Hermann Hesse. These are autobiographical novels about a gifted, but lonely and melancholy, misunderstood young man—in these novels it's always a young *man*—who gradually finds himself, and becomes a brilliant and renowned writer through a series of transformative adventures and encounters in late adolescence and early manhood.

These life-changing encounters usually begin with a less talented but trusty and valiant pal or side-kick of his own age, who serves as foil and sounding board, until our hero moves on to his first romantic involvement, often with an unselfish older woman who serves as an early "muse" or (Jung's term) "anima," and who often—so unselfish of her!—initiates him sexually. After he learns what he needs from her, he moves on again (some would say he dumps her) to a connection with an older man who serves as teacher, mentor, spiritual guide, and—frequently—the first important contact in the wider world of publishing. This final encounter and interaction—with a powerful man—is really the key one, for which the others serve as mere preludes, since it launches our hero into the realm of his true identity and life's work.

Until my graduate school days I didn't much question the fact that all of the *Bildungsromanen* I was aware of were written by men, with male protagonists. But once I began to think about my own formation as a writer and poet, I grew skeptical of this male-centered literary paradigm. What about the writer who is female, I asked, and who writes *poetry*, of all poverty-inducing literary genres? How could I tell *her* story. . . my own story? It would have to be in poem form. So in good Germanic style, I invented (I thought) a compound word for "formation poem": *Bildungsgedicht*. Several years later, glancing through a German-English dictionary, I discovered that the word already existed! Well, the wheel was no doubt invented independently by several different Neolithic geniuses on different continents during the same Ice Age.

In any case, *Bildungsgedicht* recounts how I first fell in love with poetry by falling into an infatuation, during the summer I turned sixteen, with a self-proclaimed poet—"Johnny Dee," as he called himself—a Bob Dylan wannabe from the Boeing-industrial suburb of Renton who spent a lot of time "making the scene" at the Seattle Center. That was the same summer that Dylan "went electric" at the Newport festival, scandalizing the folk music elite, so Dylan was on every hip young person's mind. I remember sitting in the downtown Seattle office of an acting studio where I was registering for a summer class, and hearing for the first time Dylan's new song, "Like a Rolling Stone," playing on a radio in one of the studio rooms. It was electrified—and electrifying.

I wondered, with all of Dylan's sneering contempt for the woman he addresses in the lyrics, if I would be able to avoid becoming the subject of such competitive disdain if I got anywhere close to fame, or to famous people, or even to wannabe famous people. I had been through the Beatles craze phase, hearing them perform at the Seattle Coliseum the previous year—but I was not one of the screamers! I was fascinated by their work and their world, but also already skeptical. I could see, in the fast-paced, glamorous, and thoroughly macho culture of rock music, that there was no place for creative, independent women. The only role for cute young girls my age was as "chicks"—groupies, pieces of arm candy, and worse. Even at sixteen, I knew that I wanted to create art—whether in the theatre, graphic arts, or literature, I wasn't yet clear—but I was certain that I did not want to be a chick: the fluffy poultry, and paltry, subordinate of some macho male artist.

Such as the Dylan rock star-wannabe Johnny Dee, who simply showed up one day in the Piccoli Theatre at the Seattle Center, where my summer acting class was rehearsing its final project, a full-length production of *Kind Lady*. He presented an immediate problem of emotional conflict—he had that bad-boy air so attractive to girls my age, the (no doubt carefully cultivated) Byronic-Dylanesque hero mystique of artistic talent, righteous indignation at social injustice, flirtations with the drug subculture and hard living, and the long-haired, slim good looks of the male ingenue Romeo. And he played in a band! I didn't want to be any boy's subordinate, competing with himself for his attention, but I was intrigued. I wanted to be with him, so that I could figure out how to *be* him—how to be what I thought he was: an independent-minded creative artist. (Interestingly, the Piccoli Theatre stood where the Jimi Hendrix "Experience Music Project" complex now stands, a monument to a true rock star and brilliant blues musician.)

Johnny Dee actually wrote what I later realized was appalling drivel, when I came upon a few pages of his lyrics in one of my file boxes years later. But the mannerisms and pretensions of this Beatle-suited youth stirred my imagination, and I wrote a few bad Bob Dylan imitation lyrics in his honor. Once the Piccoli Theatre production of *Kind Lady* ended, I landed a small role in another community theatre's production of *The Tempest*, so I was hearing, and reciting, some of the finest poetry in the English language in rehearsals every evening. The eminently speakable quality of Shakespeare's poetry for the theatre impressed me, even more than reading it on the page. I was entranced with the way that poetry is truly an oral / aural medium, a performance medium. After Johnny Dee unceremoniously dumped me later that summer, as the poem recounts, I turned to more dependable literary sources for solace: to Shakespeare, the Romantics and Modernists, and to contemporary American poetry as I could discover it then. That's when I first started to write poetry in a serious manner. I haven't yet written poetry for the stage—plays and other performance pieces—but I do try to perform my poems when I give readings, incorporating Slam Poetry energy and performative qualities with complex and nuanced literary language.

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The poem “*Bildungsgedicht*” started in the mid-1980s, when I was back in Seattle during the summer, between teaching and fellowship “gigs,” staying at my parents’ house. I was reading the latest Marilyn Hacker book: *Assumptions*, I think it was. With the brilliant melding of formal and narrative elements in her poetry, and a fast-paced, colloquial, and culturally allusive mixed diction, Hacker has been called the Lord Byron of our age. I found myself playing around with lines in a similar tone, and an early version of “*Bildungsgedicht*” emerged. But the poem felt awkward—I didn’t yet have the “chops” for poetic wit in form, and I was engrossed in writing two different series of poems in altogether different voices—so I put this poem away for years. In the winter of 2000-2001, leafing through a file of old drafts, I came upon that version, typed on my long-retired Smith Corona electronic word processor. Rereading it, I had one of those *ah-ha* moments: *Hey, this is pretty good, I should work on it*. It didn’t take long at that point to revise the poem to its current form. I began sending it to magazines and contests—it subsequently received an Honorable Mention in the Allen Ginsberg Poetry Awards competition sponsored by the Poetry Center at Passaic County Community College.

This poem became a “hit” of sorts at readings, and I have liked to conclude with it, because it ends the performance “where all poems start” (to paraphrase Yeats)—the beginning at the end—with the nascent poet writing her first poem. To read the poem aloud is like a brief return to the acting career that I put aside in favor of teaching (another profession calling for histrionic skills) and of writing / performing my own poetry. It has the comic parts I was too serious and too shy to play back in my teens. Now that I have lived long enough to take a humorous perspective on my own life, I can recreate with my grown-up voice the sixteen-year-old personae of Johnny Dee, his sidekick Don, and the poet-performer herself. I’ve discovered that listeners in their teens and early twenties enthusiastically identify with the adolescent younger self who speaks in the poem, and are gratified to hear this revelation of my own beginnings. They can glimpse, in the “successful, accomplished” poet’s early days, all the flaws and disappointments to which they themselves are susceptible. Grown-up listeners, especially fellow baby-boomer children of the Sixties, recall their own younger selves in the voices of adolescent aspiration, and pretension, in the poem. They recognize how the mature speaker both honors and pokes fun at her younger self in the process of retrospection: with affectionate exasperation at her youthful foolishness, and with nostalgia for the days when all her potential was wide open—not yet tested, not yet realized, and also not yet humbled by the awareness of its inevitable human limitation.

One presentation of this poem was a particular hit. I was more than halfway through an early evening reading at a Borders bookstore, among the literature and poetry shelves. Unbeknownst to my listeners, in the café across the store, I could see that a local rock ‘n’ roll group was setting up for a gig—clearly an overlapping performance that the store’s event organizers had not informed us about. I hastened to bring my reading to a close, and began reciting “*Bildungsgedicht*” just as the guitar and bass began tuning up and trading preliminary riffs. Talk about synchronicity! My listeners wondered for the first minute or so if I had not secretly arranged for this accompaniment, but then the group launched into their first number, and I had to declaim the last few stanzas at the top of my lungs as the cacophony of drums and guitars blasted through the building and ricocheted off the walls.

Another memorable reading of this poem was at the scene of the crime, as it were—at the Seattle Center for Bumbershoot. This was a Labor Day weekend, on the Starbucks Stage—only a few hundred yards from where Johnny Dee had eased into the Piccoli Theatre to check out the rehearsal, and where he and the chick who had been me had made the scene at the Food Circus, the fountain, and the boot-scuffed, cigarette butt-littered grassy knoll near the carnival rides with the infamous informal name, Hippy Hill. As I read the poem to the ideal audience, one who recognized every landmark and caught every allusion, I half-expected to see John Dee Roy (his real name) lurking at the edge of the crowd. Not as the mop-topped, Beatle-booted youth, but more likely—as I imagined him in late middle age—a balding, paunchy, laid-off fork-lift operator in cargo shorts and wife-beater tee shirt, with tattoos snaking up and down his arms and gaps in graying teeth, scowling in recognition of his younger self in the poem. If I had glimpsed him there, I might have waved and beckoned him to join me on the stage, to take a bow and share the applause.

continued overleaf...

BILDUNGSGEDICHT

At sixteen, I roamed Seattle Center with Johnny
Dee, the wicked-thin, mop-topped rock singer
who'd bopped into the Piccoli Theatre
while we rehearsed *Kind Lady*, and straightaway
asked me out. "Like, I dig your style,"

he drawled, lounging in a cracked plastic
chair under the Food Circus awning. Slipping
off his mirror shades, he talked of gigs
and record deals, his band "the hottest, you dig?,
in the whole South End." So, would I be his chick?

Hours later, he put me on the city bus
to View Ridge. "Ta, luv," he grinned. So cool.
So British. I waved to him through tinted windows
till he vanished in a swirling plume of diesel.
"*Where have you been?*" my mother fumed,

stabbing a toothpick into her midnight slice
of avocado. "Oh mother!" I rolled my eyes.
"Chill out! It was a long rehearsal." My senses
tuned to night, I waited for the phone to ring.
"Mom, do you like my hair like this?"

I poked at it in the mirror. "Hey Mom?
You think I can sing?" A week slid by. He showed
up at dress rehearsal, in a blue tailored
Beatles suit, with his sidekick Don, who played drum
and bass. "I dig your threads,"

he chuckled, tightening his arm around my gauzy
black frock, on the park bench by the fountain. Don
slouched, smoking, at the other end. "So foxy."
He kissed me, and took a cigarette from Don.
"Hey, you're gonna dig this song

I wrote for you." His tenor was smoky and nasal
like Dylan's in *A Hard Rain's Gonna Fall*.
"Well?" he looked me up and down. "Symbolical,"
I breathed, not yet knowing the word *cliché*
or bright moments of love's throwaways.

All summer Johnny was prince of the penny arcade,
arms around me on the tilt-a-whirl,
mug-shot grins in the quarter photo booth,
twanging his guitar for street kids on the hill
who scored baggies of hashish and Panama Red

until security cameras zeroed in.
Johnny's stoned effusions never let on
the double-mortgaged double-wide in Renton,
his father on the graveyard shift at Boeing,
his mother scolding my mother on the phone—

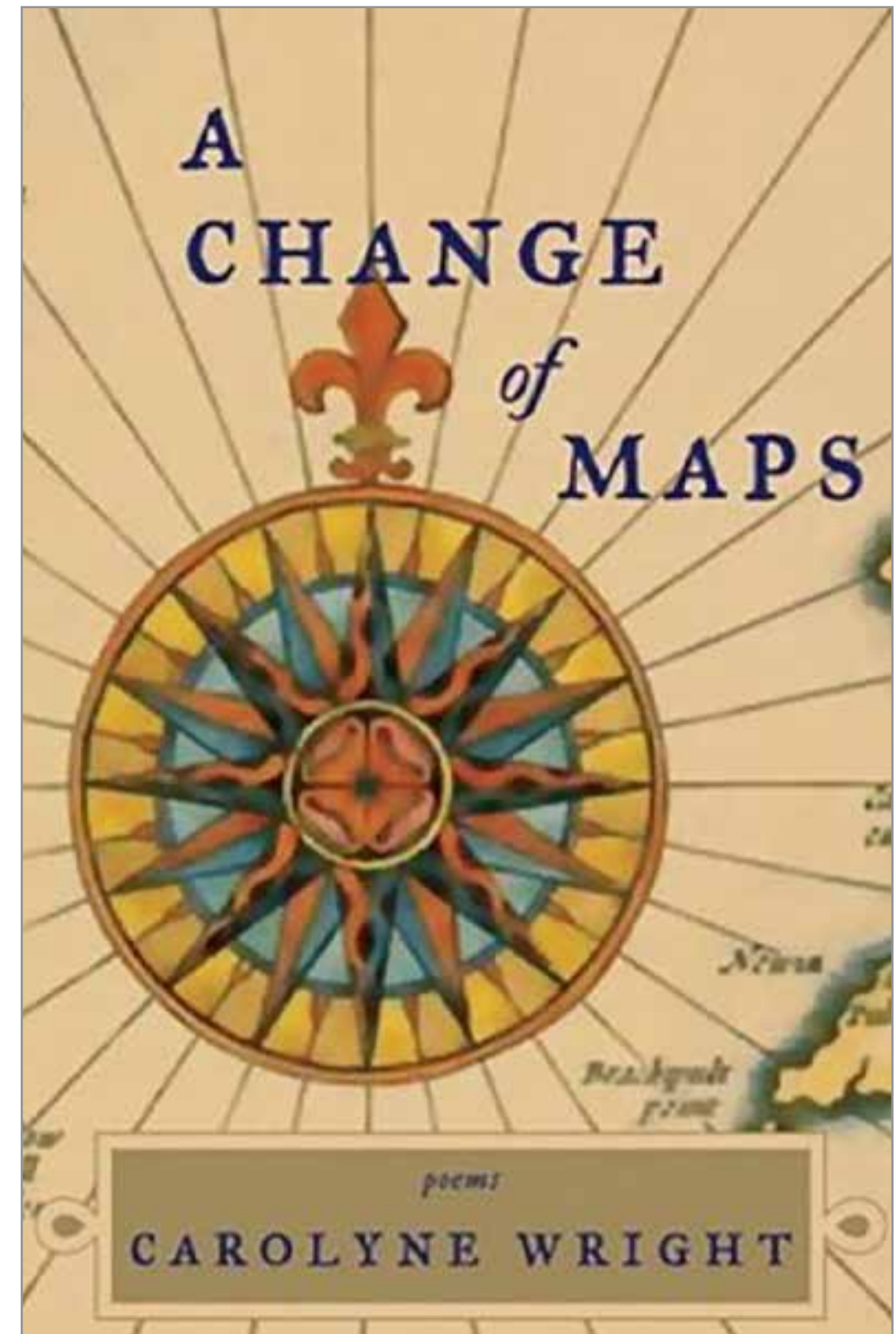
his needle tracks my fault, his Dexedrine
knocked back with coke, his hook-ups with "*hookers, maybe
faggots.*" The day he brought blonde Suzee
to the Food Court, I sobbed by the Orange Julius machine.
"Stop it," he snapped. "Your mascara's smeared."

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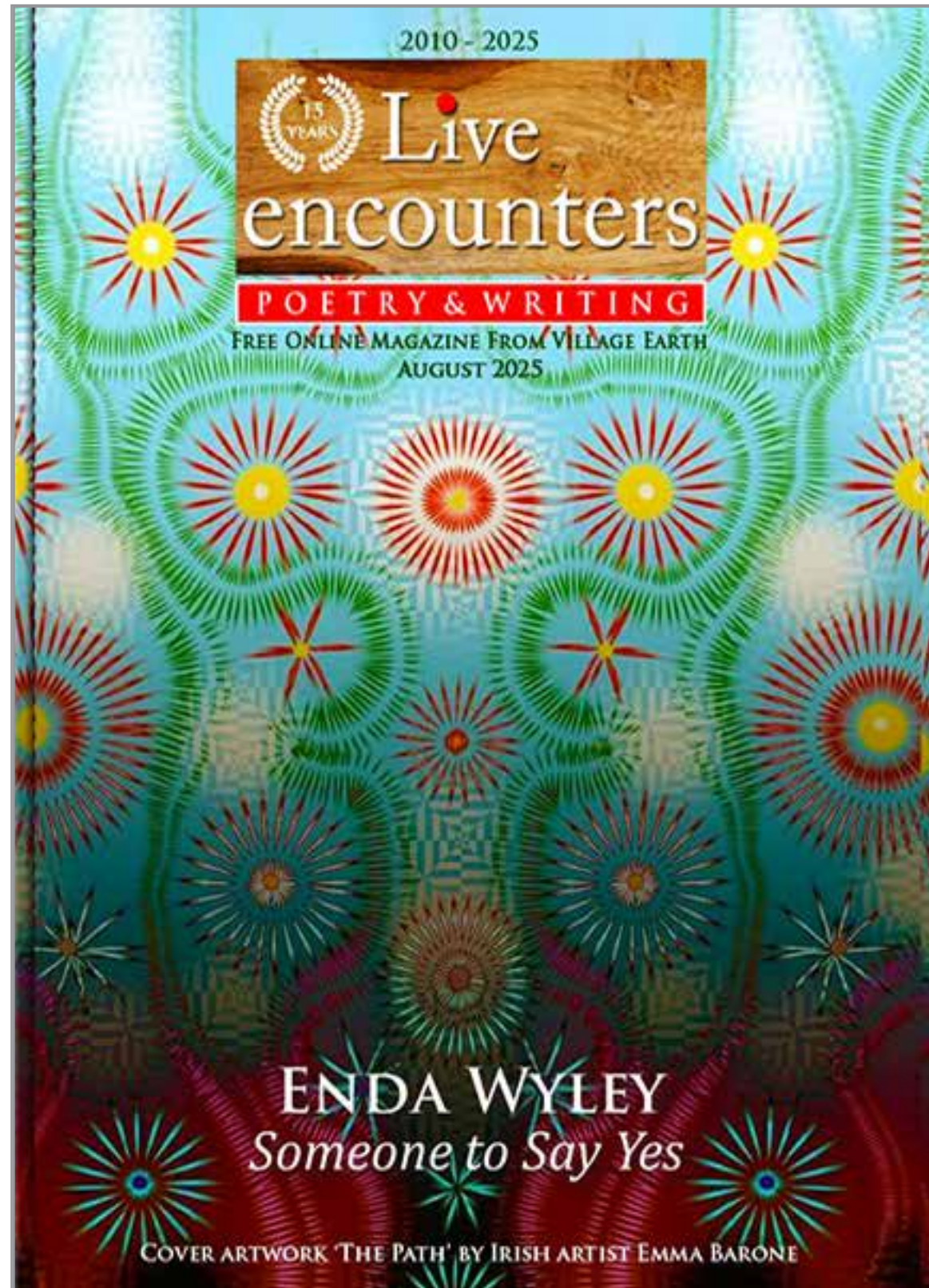
I rode north alone to the next rehearsal: *The Tempest*.
Iris, messenger of the gods, weaving the river
spell through tears because the show goes on.
“*Clear, concise, poetic,*” wrote the reviewer
of my part, before he panned the rest.

I went home, tore up Johnny’s song, wrote one
and tore it up. If I couldn’t be with him
I wouldn’t *be* him. I opened the Cambridge edition
of Shakespeare, and told my mother the truth.
I’m starting a poem.

Published in *This Dream the World: New & Selected Poems*
(Lost Horse Press, 2017). Copyright ©2017 by Carolyn Wright.



Carolyn Wright, *A Change of Maps* (Lost Horse Press, 2006).
<http://losthorsepress.org/catalog/a-change-of-maps/>



Enda Wyley's six poetry collections are *Sudden Light* (due October 2025), *The Painter on his Bike* (2019), *To Wake to This* (2009), *Poems for Breakfast* (2004), *Socrates in the Garden* (1998) and *Eating Baby Jesus* (1993). She has also published *Borrowed Space: New and Selected Poems* (2014), all from Dedalus Press. Awards include the Vincent Buckley Poetry Prize, Melbourne University and a Reading Association of Ireland Award. Enda has been widely translated and anthologised, including in *The Harvard Anthology of Modern Irish Poetry*, *Lines of Vision*, The National Gallery of Ireland and *If Ever You Go*, One City, One Book. Enda's work has also been broadcast on RTÉ Radio 1. She is an experienced teacher of poetry, co-hosts the popular podcast *Books for Breakfast* and is a member of Aosdána. 'Enda Wyley is a true poet,' The Irish Times.



ENDA WYLEY SOMEONE TO SAY YES

The child is delirious with fever, shouting about lions. The next day in the garden, in a state of weak recovery, he makes a sundial from stones. The woman observes the boy closely. She is his concerned and watchful mother – but also, although she doesn't realise it just yet, a poet in the making. As he creates the makeshift sundial, she reaches for a pen and begins her own work, vividly detailing the intimacy of her son's illness and his slow recovery. She sees him crouch, 'slightly / trembling with fever, calculating / the mathematics of sunshine.' She comes to understand how 'the wave of fever taught silence / and immobility for the first time.' The poem fills the page, builds with emotional intensity, and reaches an eight-line crescendo:

Here, in his enforced rest, he found
deliberation and the slow finger
of light, quieter than night lions,
more worthy of his concentration.
All day he told the time to me.
All day he felt and watched the sun
caged in its white diurnal heat,
pointing at us with his black stick.

She stops writing, crumples the page, and throws it in the bin. It isn't good enough. Who could possibly want to read about a sick boy building a sundial? But her husband at the time rescues the poem from the wastepaper basket. He flattens it out, carefully reads it, irons it, an idea coming to him. He will post it off to the magazine *Poetry Wales*. The poem is immediately accepted, and it becomes the title poem of her first collection, *The Sundial*, published by the Welsh publishing house Gwasg Gomer in 1978.

Gillian Clarke tells me all this as we sit on the edge of her bed in a Dublin hotel. It is autumn 1999, and I have come to interview the acclaimed Welsh poet for *Poetry Ireland Review*. The lobby had been too noisy, so she invited me to her room. It was an unorthodox interview setting, but an unforgettable one. There, with my pencil flying across my notebook and my small tape recorder pressed to play, I listened. ‘In those days,’ she tells me, ‘it was very difficult to get a book published and, until *The Sundial* came out, the TLS had never reviewed a book of poems by a Welsh poet.’ She was lucky, she says. Her journey as a published poet began because of the inspired action of someone who believed in her poem, sent it off to an editor who instantly recognised it as what it was, and still remains: a real poem. ‘We all need someone to say yes to us,’ she concludes.

Writing this editorial now, I think back to that afternoon in the late nineties and how her story resonated with me, the younger Irish poet, so intensely listening. Back then, I was starting off as a poet, having published two collections, *Eating Baby Jesus* (1993) and *Socrates in the Garden* (1998). But my real beginnings went back even further, to when I was ten years old and wrote my first attempt at a poem. Like Gillian Clarke, I threw it away, only for it to be found by my mother who, like Clarke’s husband, took an iron to it and posted it off from Dublin to a poetry competition in Cork, where she was from. To my surprise, I won. My prize? A volume of *Literary Life: Prose and Poems* by Canon Sheehan, presented to me by Professor John A. Murphy from U.C.C. at the North Cork Literature Festival in Doneraile. A peculiar award for a young child – but not even that dour, dark-covered book could dampen my enthusiasm for words. What mattered most to me wasn’t the prize. It was that someone had said yes to my fledgling poem. Because of this, I set off in my own way, filling notebooks, playing with words, and being rewarded with a feeling of intense joy and possibility that has never left me, most especially when, even now, I reach for a pen and feel the rush of a new poem claiming the page.

Other writers, too, have been buoyed by that vital early encouragement. Dennis O’Driscoll, for instance, was famous for sending handwritten postcards to fellow poets – simple affirmations that validated and inspired. His writing was distinctive – dark ink curls that poets in Ireland were always chuffed to receive. As though a new poem or collection wasn’t fully complete without the O’Driscoll stamp of approval. The flap of a card falling onto a hall floor. Words to goad you on to new poems, better ways of writing. Dennis, after all, was well skilled in writing postcards.

He had written to Enid Blyton when he was a child, and she had replied, praising his handwriting! He’d also written to W.H. Auden, Samuel Beckett, Stevie Smith, and Brian Patten – and received responses from them, too. No wonder, then, that he wrote to us Irish poets. *Yes, you can do it. Yes, you are doing it*, his messages seemed to say. *Keep going.*

David Marcus, too – Ireland’s most influential literary editor of the twentieth century – offered his ‘yes’ through his editorship of the *New Irish Writing* page in *The Irish Press*. Between 1968 and 1986, he showcased emerging voices like Claire Keegan, Colum McCann, and Kevin Barry. As a teenager still in school, I was thrilled to see my poems appear alongside Paul Durcan’s. Marcus sent me feedback that sharpened my craft, and his publication of my early work remains one of my most cherished memories.

These encouragements matter. Think of Elizabeth Bishop, whose fateful first meeting with Marianne Moore – on a bench outside the main reading room of the New York Public Library in March 1934 – sparked a decades-long friendship, with poetry as its central force. Bishop wrote in her essay on Moore, *Efforts of Affection*, “It seems to me that Marianne talked to me steadily for the next thirty-five years... her talk, like her poetry, was quite different from anyone else’s in the world.”

Moore became Bishop’s earliest advocate, championing her work, nurturing a talent that might otherwise have gone unnoticed. Nearly all of Bishop’s early poems were published in magazines thanks to Moore. She also wrote an introduction for Bishop’s poetry in an anthology of work by younger poets, where she praised her for her “methodically oblique, intent way of working,” while also recognising the inspiration Bishop drew from earlier poets: “One notices the deferences and vigilances in Miss Bishop’s writing, and the debt to Donne and to Gerard Hopkins.”

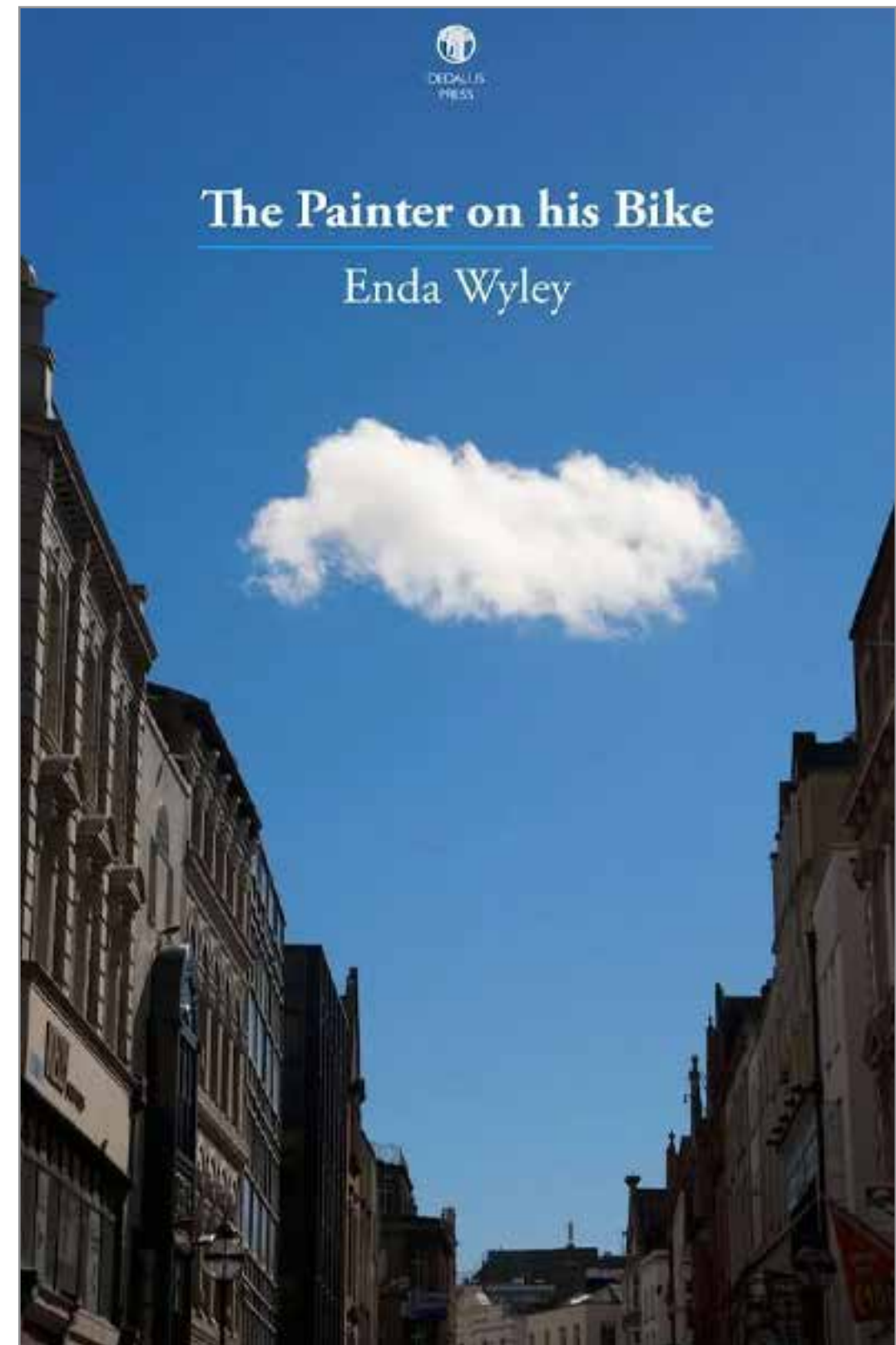
When they first met that day in the library, Bishop reportedly asked Moore if she’d like to go to the circus — not realising that Moore never missed a single one. Their second meeting was, in fact, at the circus, where Moore arrived with brown bread to feed the elephants, instructing Bishop to distract the enormous creatures with the bread while she tried to snip elephant hair from their heads. It was to be used for a bracelet she had, a special gift from her brother, made from elephant hair that needed mending. Shortly after this encounter, Bishop wrote to a friend, ‘I’ve seen her only twice and I think I have enough anecdotes to meditate on for years.’ Elephants and the circus aside, it was poetry that was to always remain central to their friendship.

Not every writer or poet, however, has had someone to say yes to them. Many remained relatively unknown in their lifetimes. Emily Dickinson wrote nearly 1,800 poems, yet just a handful were published while she was alive. Only after her death in 1886 were her complete works published, leading to her recognition as one of America's greatest poets. Similarly, John Keats, too, struggled for recognition in his short life, publishing only a few poems. Yet after his death in 1821, he became one of the most celebrated of the Romantic poets. But whether championed or ignored, poets and writers have always shared one trait: a fierce creative resilience. That resilience is the mark of the writer. And always, it is sustained by reading.

Elizabeth Bishop may have been lucky to meet Marianne Moore at the New York Public Library. But with or without that encounter, she would still have made her daily visits there in the years after she moved to the city, finding guidance and inspiration in the books she discovered on its shelves. There, she read Charles Darwin, George Herbert, John Donne, and Sigmund Freud. There, she read herself into becoming a poet.

Reading, in its own mysterious way, reminds us of what is possible. As the poet Mark Strand said: "When I read poetry, I want to feel myself suddenly larger ... in touch with—or at least close to—what I deem magical, astonishing. I want to experience a kind of wonderment. And when you report back to your own daily world after experiencing the strangeness of a world sort of recombined and reordered in the depths of a poet's soul, the world looks fresher somehow. Your daily world has been taken out of context. It has the voice of the poet written all over it, for one thing, but it also seems suddenly more alive ..." (*The Art of Poetry* No. 77, 1998).

I value the poems I have read and carried with me over the years. What would I have done without Philip Larkin's wise words? His poem, 'The Mower,' hangs over my desk, encourages me to keep going, says, 'we should be careful/ of each other, we should be kind/ while there is still time.' Then there's Miroslav Holub's poem, 'The Door,' that always puts a spring in my step; 'go and open the door./At least/ there'll be/a draught.' There's Thomas Hardy's woman calling, Edward Thomas on a train that stops at Adlestrop, Louis Mac Neice peeling an orange while snow outside falls, Sylvia Plath's morning song of motherhood, Maxine Kumin rummaging in the coat pocket of her dead friend Anne Sexton, Eavan Boland on a bridge over the Iowa river remembering the early intense years of her marriage, W.S. Graham laying a poem at the ear of his love before she wakes, Heaney's tinsmith's scoop of love in Mossbawn.



Enda Wyley, *The Painter on his Bike* (2019).

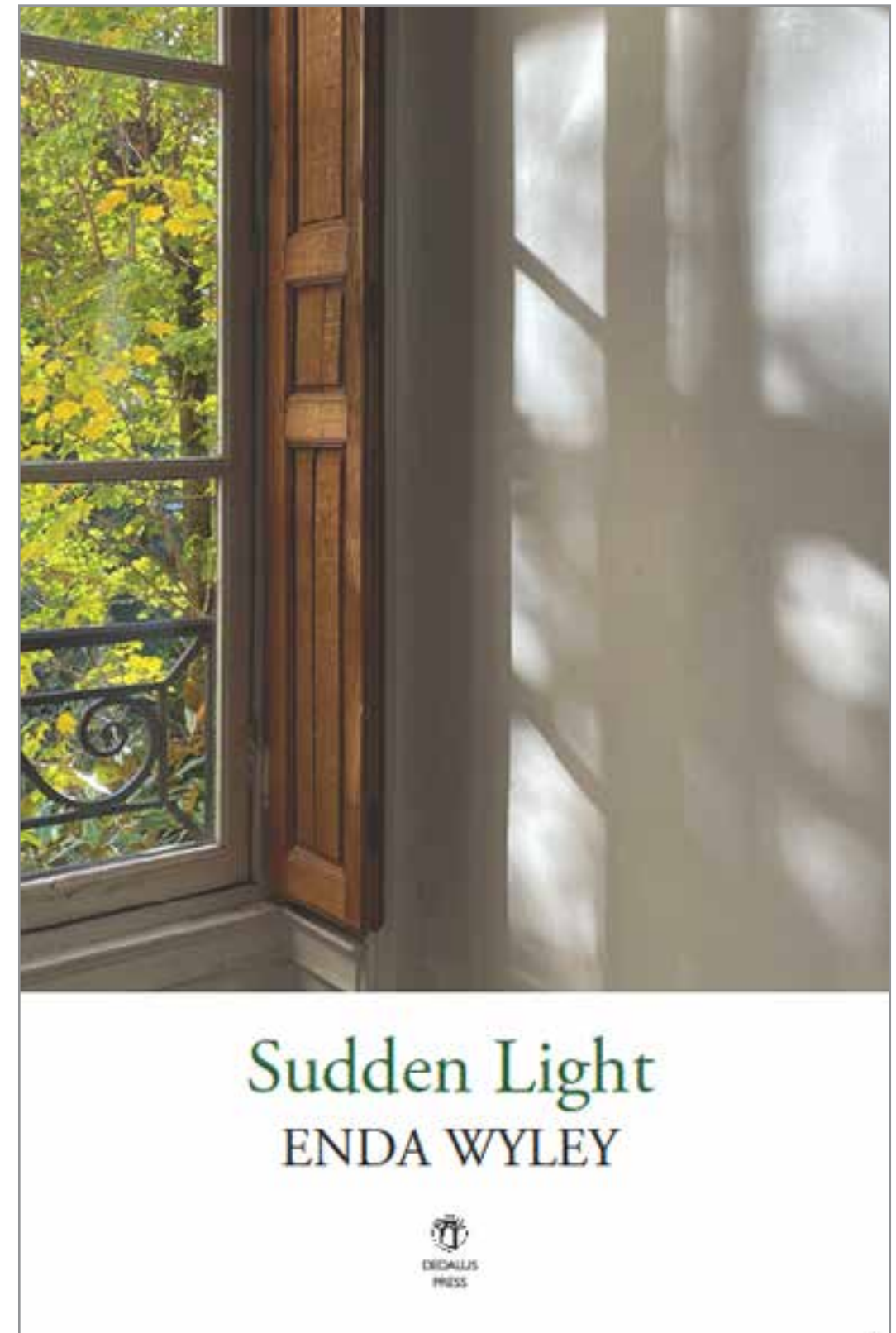
Order <https://www.amazon.com/Painter-his-Bike-Enda-Wyley/dp/1910251631>

These are just some of the powerful poems and vivid poetic scenes that I return to over and over, to be renewed by them.

Reading is a journey that knows no end, surprises and inspires. Just this morning, for instance, my day came suddenly alive when I read the opening poem 'Monet in Árann,' from Moya Cannon's new book, *Bunting's Honey*, Carcanet Press, 2025. How wonderful to be 'ambushed by the sway/ and scent of a July meadow.' This is the joy of reading – to be caught, 'in the blurry, summery sway of it.'

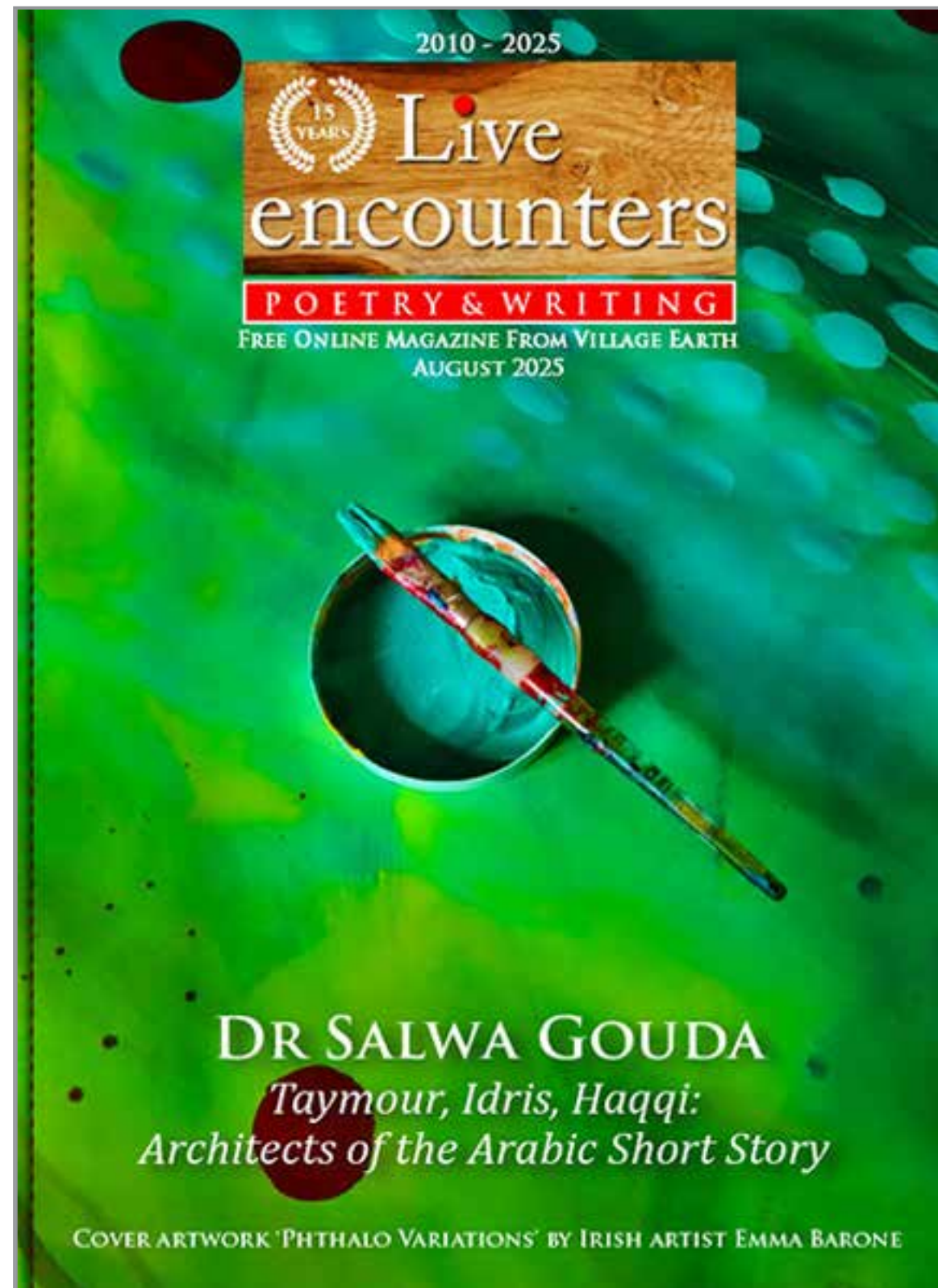
So, we all need someone to say yes to us – a mentor, a reader, a kindred spirit, a gifted editor who sees something worth saving in our writing. But even more, we need books and poems – read and reread – until the world gleams again, strange and new. And sometimes, if we're very lucky, someone who might even reach into that waste paper basket.

A poem is ironed, the sundial is complete.



Enda Wyley, *Sudden Light* (23 October, 2025).

Pre-order <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Sudden-Light-Enda-Wyley/dp/1915629454>



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DR SALWA GOUDA TAYMOUR, IDRIS, HAQQI: ARCHITECTS OF THE ARABIC SHORT STORY

While the Arabic novel commands global attention, the short story has pulsed with a quieter, yet equally vital, energy within modern Arabic literature. Its emergence and evolution are inextricably linked to Egypt, where three towering figures – Mahmoud Taymour, Youssef Idris, and Yehia Haqqi – stand as foundational pillars, each shaping the form in distinct and enduring ways, navigating the transition from romanticism to piercing realism and laying the groundwork for profound social and psychological explorations. Emerging during the twilight of the Nahda (Arab Renaissance), Mahmoud Taymour (1894-1973), often hailed as the father of the modern Arabic short story, witnessed profound societal shifts in early 20th-century Egypt – the waning Ottoman influence, British occupation, stirrings of nationalism, and jarring modernization.

Beginning under the influence of romanticism and European models like Maupassant, Taymour crucially turned his gaze inward, moving beyond exoticism to focus intently on Egyptian society. His stories delved into the lives of the Cairene middle and lower classes, peasants, and the marginalized, capturing tensions between tradition and modernity, rural roots and urban dislocation, bringing new psychological insight and commitment to authentic local reality.

His prose, while formal, sought Egyptian nuances, exemplified in a character's turmoil in "The Call of the Unknown": *"He felt his soul was a dark abyss, echoing with strange, frightening calls... calls that pulled him towards the unknown, towards a terrifying freedom he could neither comprehend nor resist."* This line captures the internal conflict between societal expectations and burgeoning individual desires, defining Taymour's move towards psychological realism within the Egyptian context. Elsewhere, in "Aunt Nafisa," he depicted tradition's suffocating grip: *"She lived as if wrapped in a cloak of ancient customs, each thread woven with the fear of God and the dread of people's tongues. To step outside its folds was to step into an abyss,"* illustrating the perilous cost of defying social norms.

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If Taymour laid the foundation, Youssef Idris (1927-1991) detonated a literary explosion. A physician by training, Idris brought an unflinching, clinical eye to the raw underbelly of Egyptian life, rejecting the genteel realism of predecessors to plunge into the visceral world of the urban and rural poor with unprecedented intensity. His revolutionary genius lay in mastering *colloquial Egyptian Arabic*, infusing it not just into dialogue but the narrative voice itself, capturing the rhythm, humor, anger, and despair of the streets and villages.

Idris depicted poverty, bureaucratic absurdity, sexual frustration, political disillusionment, and the sheer struggle for survival with brutal honesty, presenting flesh-and-blood characters often trapped and desperate yet pulsating with life and dark humor. Collections like *The Cheapest Nights* reshaped expectations, proving the short story could be a blunt instrument of social critique and profound humanism from below, crystallized in his iconic line: *“He felt that life was a cheap night, the cheapest of nights, where everything was sold: honour, conscience, manhood... and all for pennies.”* This stark indictment, devoid of sentimentality and delivered in the raw language of the street, gave shocking power to the voiceless and dehumanized under systemic neglect. His unsparing gaze captured the cyclical despair of the marginalized, as in “The Dregs of the City”: *“The child’s bare feet slapped the mud, not running from something, but running toward nothing. That’s how we lived: chasing emptiness,”* distilling the crushing futility of poverty. In stories like “The Chair Carrier,” he portrayed resilience amidst brutality: *“They broke his fingers one by one. With each snap, he laughed louder. Pain was the only thing they couldn’t steal from him,”* revealing defiance as a final refuge against oppression.

Yehia Haqqi (1905-1992) then brought a different, crucial dimension. A diplomat, intellectual, and master stylist deeply engaged with Arabic heritage and European modernism, Haqqi’s short stories leaned towards psychological depth, existential questioning, and consciously crafted, lyrical prose. While capable of sharp social observation (seen in his novel *The Lamp of Umm Hashim*), he explored alienation, identity, the burdens of the past, and the complexities of the human psyche with subtlety and nuance.

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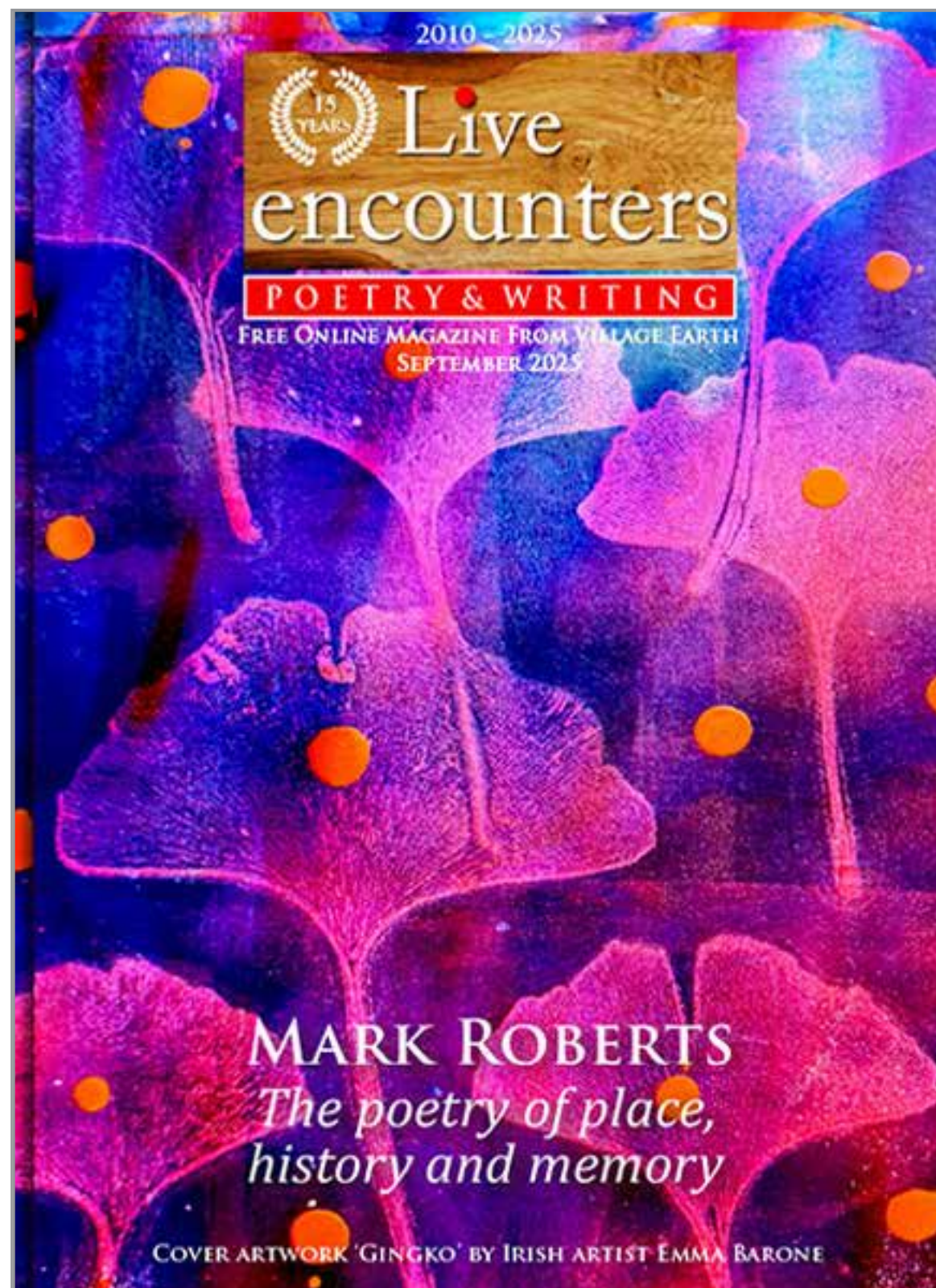
A meticulous craftsman concerned with structure, symbolism, and the musicality of Fus’ha (Modern Standard Arabic), his stories often featured introspective protagonists – intellectuals, artists, civil servants – grappling with internal conflicts and the meaning of existence within modern Egypt. He moved beyond pure social documentation to explore the inner landscapes shaped by those forces, as voiced by his protagonist in “The Postman”: *“Who am I? A name on an envelope? A number in a file? A shadow passing through corridors? ... I deliver letters, but who delivers me to myself?”* This quintessential Haqqi lament reflects his preoccupation with identity, alienation within the bureaucratic state, and the search for authentic selfhood, delivered with introspective layering and melancholic wisdom. In “The Saint’s Lamp,” he explored faith’s fragility in the modern world through potent metaphor: *“Faith, he realized, was not a beacon on a hill, but a flickering wick in a broken lamp – barely lit, easily drowned by the world’s wind, yet stubborn,”* capturing the delicate persistence of spirituality. His story “The Empty Bed” rendered profound loneliness tangible: *“The emptiness beside him wasn’t space; it was time solidified. Years of silence pressed into the mattress like a fossil,”* transforming absence into a palpable, haunting presence.

Together, these giants charted the modern Arabic short story’s course: Taymour transitioned it from romanticism towards authentic Egyptian social realism and psychological insight; Idris revolutionized it with raw, visceral power, colloquial language, and an unflinching focus on the marginalized, proving its potency for radical social critique; Haqqi elevated it with psychological depth, existential themes, modernist techniques, and mastery of literary Arabic, expanding its scope to explore the inner world shaped by outer realities.

They moved the genre from observing society to dissecting its soul. Taymour provided the map, Idris unleashed the torrent, and Haqqi reflected deeply on the floodwaters. Their innovations – the focus on the local and marginalized, embrace of colloquial rhythms, unflinching gaze at social ills, exploration of psychological complexity, and mastery of form – became the bedrock for generations of Arab writers. Their sparks ignited a flame that continues to illuminate the intricate, challenging realities of the Arab experience. The echoes of Taymour’s psychological abyss, Idris’s cheap nights, and Haqqi’s searching postman still resonate in the alleys and consciousness of Arabic fiction today.

For much of the last four decades, Mark Roberts has been involved in writing, criticism and publishing. In 1982, he established *P76* magazine in with Adam Aitken and has been involved in small press publishing ever since. In 2011 he set up the on-line journal *Rochford Street Review*, which is currently publishing Issue 42 <https://rochfordstreetreview.com/>

The Office of Literary Endeavours (5 Islands Press 2025) is Mark's third book, after *Stepping out of Line* (Rochford Street Press 1986) and *Concrete Flamingos*, Island Press 2016.



MARK ROBERTS

THE POETRY OF PLACE, HISTORY AND MEMORY

About a decade ago I started thinking about a project based on my memory of spending holidays and large blocks of my childhood on a farm run by my great aunts and uncle on the Cargo road between Orange and Cargo in the Central West of NSW, Australia. My memories covered the first 20 years or so of my life from the early 1960s through to the mid to late 1970s. At first this seemed to be a simple exercise. There were a number of memories that seemed to suit themselves well to poetry - travelling over the Blue Mountains as a child and looking down at clouds in the valley and imagining I was at the sea, looking down the main street of a town and seeing a paddock full of flowering canola like a sea of gold.... so I wrote some poems they were ok, but very one dimensional, much like a faded 1970s instamatic photograph.

Memory obviously wasn't enough for me to produce a good poem. There needed to be some depth beyond the simple description - context, history narrative perhaps? So I decided to return to the place of these memories. Travelling over the mountains again I looked out across the country as I drove down Victoria Pass towards Lithgow I felt a recognition I hadn't felt before. I had travelled through the area a number of times over the preceding decades but this time there was something different. I was looking at the country, trying to see into it, rather than just glancing at it.

A lot of things had changed since I was a child looking down at clouds or marveling at the gold of canola in flower. To start with I had learnt in school the accepted, colonial history of the place I was now looking down on. A history of settlement, explorers and empire (The British). There wasn't much room for First Nations People in this narrative of my youth - if they were mentioned at all it was implied that they simply 'melted' away in the face of the expanding white settlement. Now as I looked down onto the country in front of me I new that I was entering Wiradyuri land and far from melting away they had fought bravely for their land.

I had also been reading authors like William Least Heat-Moon (*Blue Highways*, *River Horse* and particularly *PrairieErth: A Deep Map*) and the Irish writer Tim Robinson (*Connemara: Listen to the Wind*). The poetic prose in these books drove a deep understanding of place and history, not just the accepted histories but the little histories, the lost histories and traditions that define a place. I was also reading poets like Laurie Duggan (*The Ash Range*) and Kate Middleton (*Ephemeral Waters*). Both of these books highlighted a method of capturing a region in poetry, its history, its environment and our impacts on it.

I headed out to where the old farm used to be just past Orange, in the foothills of what the settlers called Mount Canobolas but which the Wiradyuri knew as Gaaha Bula. I remember standing on the top of the peak as a child, shivering and looking at the radio and TV towers and trying to look back to the farm. Now, alone, I listened and eventually wrote a prose poem:

Gaanha-bula

I'm standing at the top of Mount Canobolas/Gaanha-bula. It is a spring morning, the sun is out, but there is a hint of ice in the breeze which occasionally flicks a piece of yellow tape against the metal framework of a telecommunications tower. This is a return to a place, a connection with country stretching through my family, the hints and suggestions of a buried history, a land that fills the imagination.

I listen to the tape against the metal, like morse code tapping out a message. I lis-ten for a pattern, but the wind swirls around the tower sending the sound in all di-rections. Above me I see microwave dishes, mobile cells and other pieces of elec-tronic gadgetry. This is how we communicate. I listen for a hum which would suggest high frequency radio signals are flashing above my head. But there is nothing but the flickering of the yellow tape.

Gradually I hear further into the silence - the wind moving through the trees be-low, the distant sound of a car heading up a dirt road, the faint rumble of a plane invisible in the sky.

Published in *The Office of Literary Endeavours* (5 Islands Press 2025)

In many ways this was a way in for me. Like Tim Robinson I listened to the wind and it hinted at hidden histories and memories which reached back further than I imagined.

Of course if you are going to try and write poetry you need to read poetry, really read it - read it and read it again. So I started looking for and reading contemporary poets writing about place. In particular I read the work of Wiradyuri poets and writers. Jeanine Leane's work was central to helping me connect with the hidden histories through poetry. Her poem 'After the Silence the Echo', which was part of the *Dhuluny: the war that never ended exhibition* at the Bathurst Regional gallery in 2024 to mark the 200-year anniversary of the declaration of Martial Law on 14 August 1824, became a powerful touchstone for me as I tried to place myself and my poetry in Wiradyuri country. The violence of the so-called Bathurst Wars, and its almost complete absence until recently from Australian history, has to inform how both First Australians and non-indigenous Australians, relate to the area around Bathurst and Orange. Leane's poem concludes:

After the silence there's an echo.
An echo is a sound bouncing back through time

repeating

an echo is a sound that curves around to
re-sound again...
and again...
and again...

An echo is the sound of the past
as it screams

down

through

time
through the barrel of a gun

at the end of a knife
from the thud of a stirrup iron.
An echo is resounding.
Silence is not peace.
The echo comes back
to break the silence...
again...
and again...
and again...
now...
as then...
as now...
As always.^[1]

Once you accept the violence of the colonial past it necessarily impacts the way you view your past, your memories and how you represent them in poetry. Once of the memories I have tried to write about is the old car racing track at what was called Catalina Park in Katoomba. As a child I recall being in the car as my family drove through Katoomba on the way over the mountains to the farm. Down in a gully, off the old highway was a car racing track and, if a race meeting was on, you could hear the roar of the cars from the highway. I had tried to work this into a poem a number of times without success. The history of the racetrack, and the land it sat on, was, however, much more complicated. As settlement spread out from Sydney and across the mountains, many of the displaced Darug and Gundungurra people settled in a gully just west of the settlement of Katoomba.

Over time it became a community and a central point of culture. Then, in the late 1940s the local council decided to build a car racing track on the site and the community was dispersed and de-molished. Recently I read a poem by another Wiradyuri poet Jazz Money called ‘Gully Song’. While this poem is probably not about the Katoomba gully, it does provide another layer of histo-ry to the place I was trying to write about

a mist seeps
through this gully
and I can hear song
feel smoke cling to
hair to lashes
hear the way
the old voices are
held here

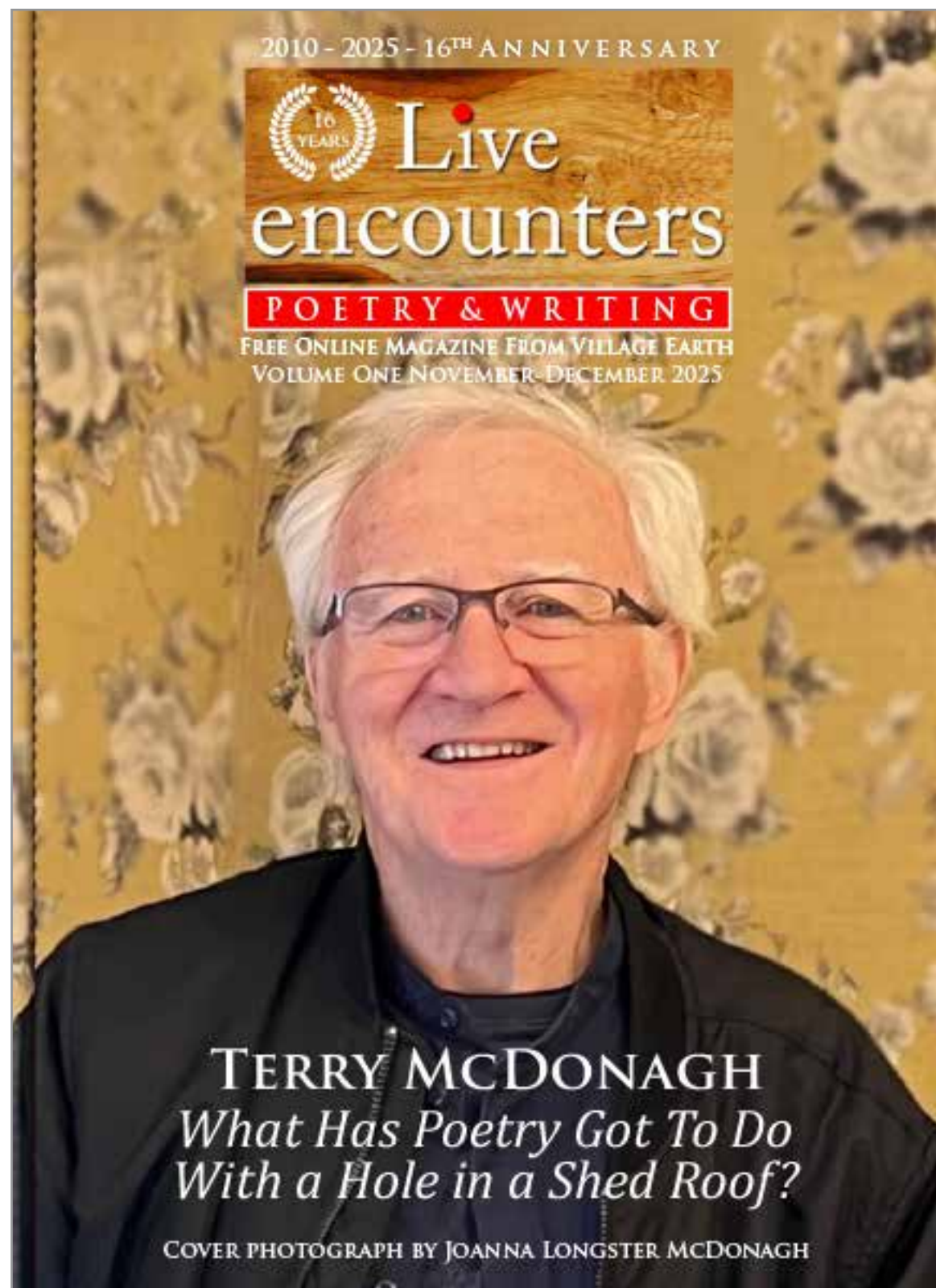
- From *how to make a basket* UQP 2021

Auden once famously said that “poetry makes nothing happen”, what many fail to consider is that that section of ‘In Memory Of W.B. Yeats’ concludes with the lines “it survives,/ A way of happen-ing, a mouth”. For me, creating poetry out of place, memory and history is a “way of happening”, an attempt at truth telling in verse. The understanding, the unearthing and recording in art of our understanding of what it means to be living on a country that has a history that has been deliber-ately hidden from us is what is driving much of my current poetic practice.

While my main work at present may be firmly centred on a particular area of Australia, the old saying ‘think locally act globally’ holds true here. Australia is not the only country trying to come to terms with its colonial past (particularly a British colonial past) and the value of international platforms such as *Live Encounters* is critical in reaching out to a global “village” of poets and readers. It is a privilege to be part of that village. The poetry of place can be, indeed, global.

[1] The complete poem can be read at <https://rochfordstreetreview.com/2024/08/25/jeanine-leane-after-the-silence-the-echo/>

Terry McDonagh, Irish poet and dramatist has worked in Europe, Asia and Australia. He's taught creative writing at Hamburg University and was Drama Director at Hamburg International School. Published eleven poetry collections, letters, drama, prose and poetry for young people. In March 2022, he was poet in residence and Grand Marshal as part of the Saint Patrick's Day celebrations in Brussels. His work has been translated into German and Indonesian. His poem, 'UGG by Degrees' is included in the Galway Poetry Trail on Galway University campus. In 2020, *Two Notes for Home* – a two-part radio documentary, compiled and presented by Werner Lewon, on *The Life and Work of Terry McDonagh, The Modern Bard of Cill Aodáin*. His latest poetry collection, 'Two Notes for Home' – published by Arlen House – September 2022. He returned to live in County Mayo in 2019. www.terry-mcdonagh.com



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

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

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

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

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

Raymond of the Rooftops

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

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

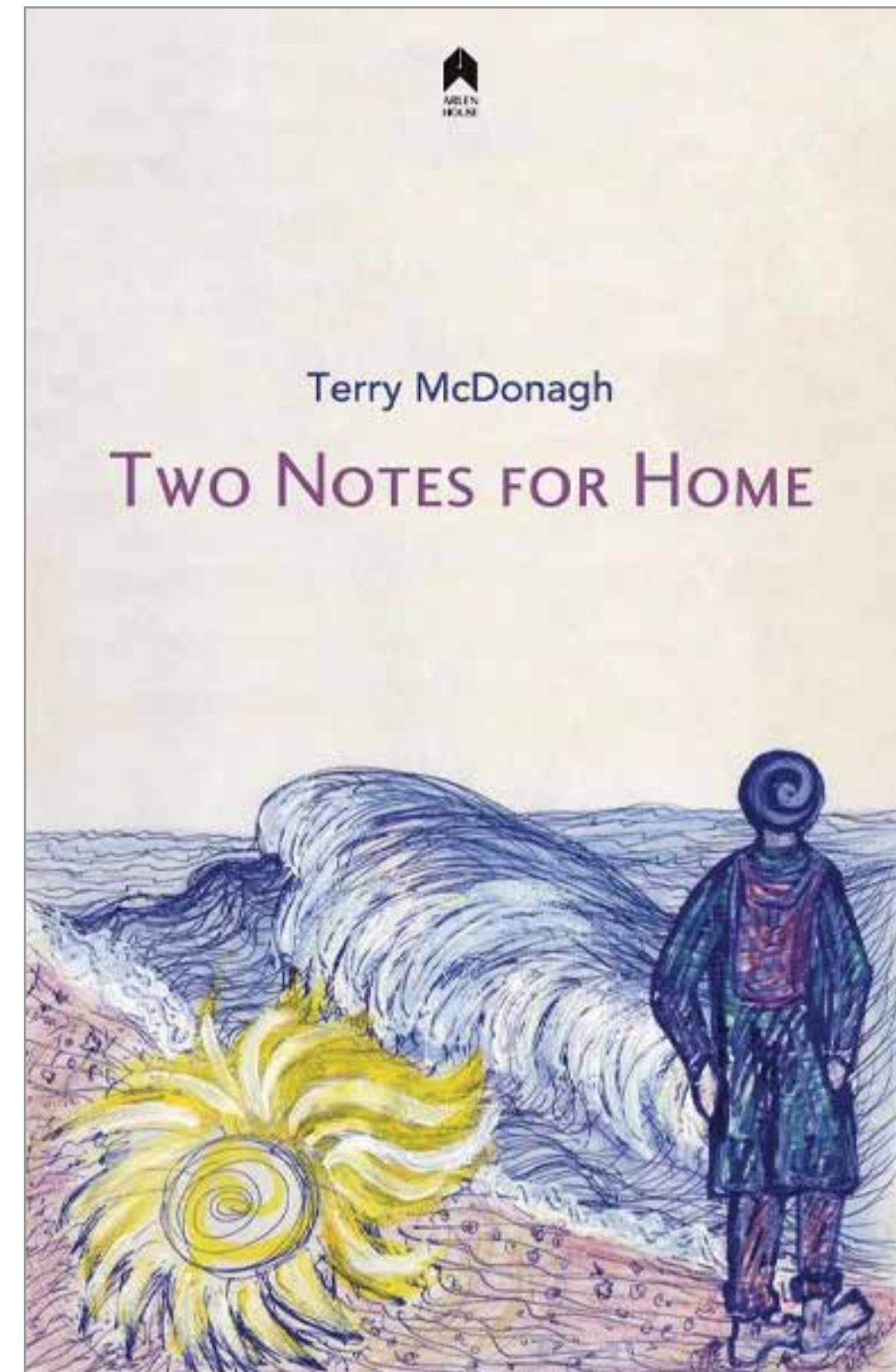
A Dark Hole in Our Shed Roof

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

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

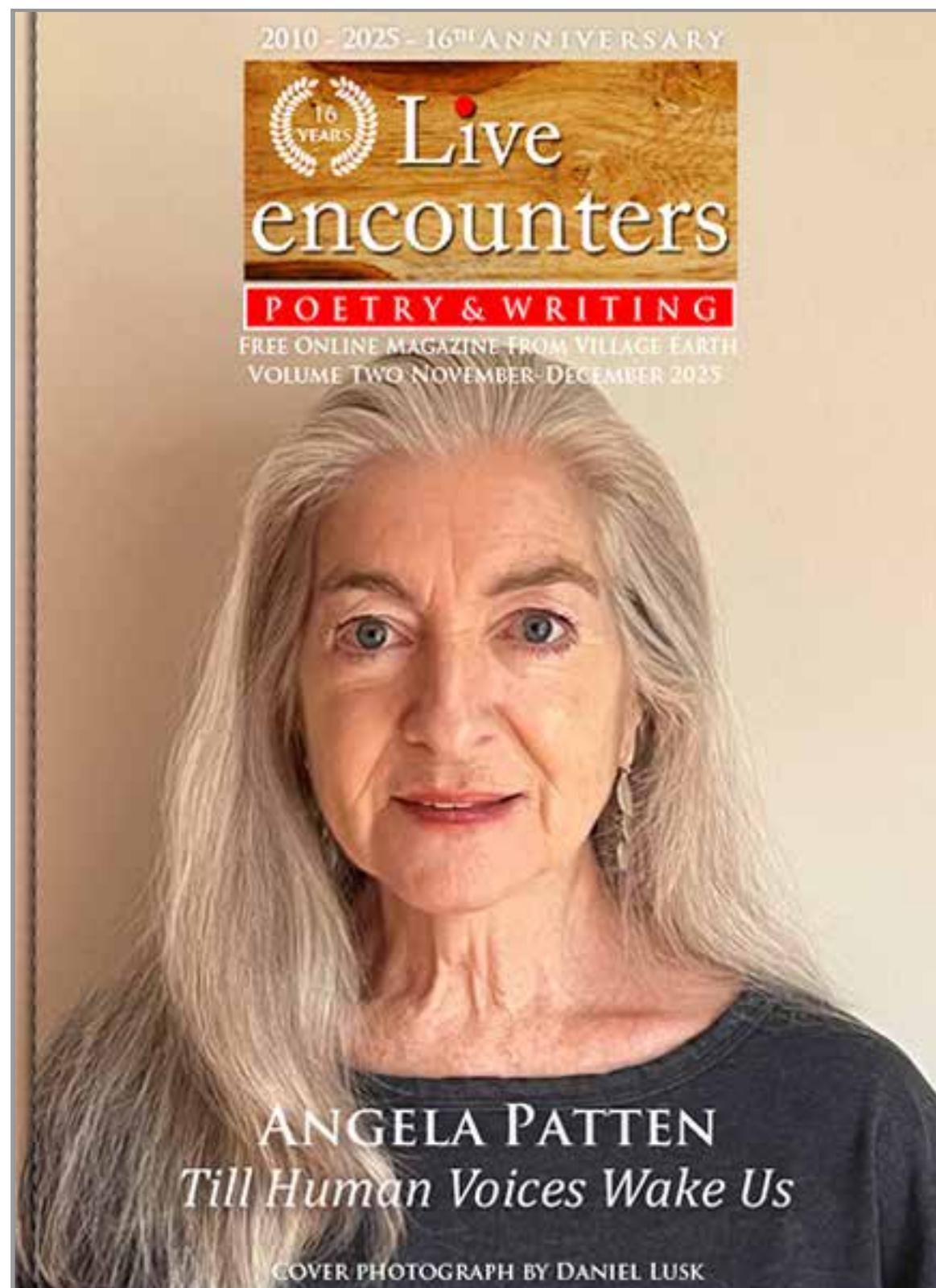
Jimmy arrived with measuring tapes and a practiced eye. He knew what he was on about and to add to the occasion, he had a big smile. *See you on Monday*, came at me like the opening line of an epic poem. He arrived with kit and tools and went to work with the grace and elegance of a man used to smiling.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

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



Available at: www.amazon.com

Angela Patten's publications include five poetry collections, most recently *Feeding the Wild Rabbit* (Kelsay Books), and a prose memoir, *High Tea at a Low Table: Stories From An Irish Childhood* (Wind Ridge Books). Winner of the 2022 Anthony Cronin International Short Poem Award and other awards, Patten has received grants from the University of Vermont, the Vermont Arts Council, and the Vermont Community Foundation. Her work has appeared in many literary journals and in anthologies, including *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* and *The White Page/An Bhileog Bhan: Twentieth-Century Irish Women Poets*. Born and raised in Dublin, she maintains dual citizenship in Ireland and the U.S. She lives in Burlington, Vermont, where she is a Senior Lecturer Emerita in the English Department at the University of Vermont. www.carraigbinn.com



ANGELA PATTEN TILL HUMAN VOICES WAKE US

It is widely accepted that the oral tradition is still alive and well in Ireland and that the country is positively stuffed with friendly, garrulous and eloquent people who can't wait to share the gift of the gab with all and sundry. While it is true that Celtic customs, beliefs and historical events were not written down but were passed on through poems, songs and stories for thousands of years, one wonders how the oral tradition is holding up under the weight of the internet, television, and the mobile phone.

When I was growing up in Dublin during the 1960s, the oral tradition was kept vividly alive by my mother and her relatives, all of whom could have talked for Ireland. Throughout my childhood, I listened to them recite poems, sing songs and spin endless stories about their childhood adventures. Both my parents, like others of their generation, turned to poetry for the pleasure of sound and rhythm but also for the message or moral it was sure to contain. There was no distinction between a line from Shakespeare, a religious platitude, or an old proverb when it came to finding the appropriate word for the occasion.

Even within her own loquacious family, my mother was famous for her incessant talking. My father, the quieter of the two, was also attentive to words and especially to accents. He was proud of his ability to tell which county in Ireland a person was from within minutes of conversation. After decades in Dublin, he still spoke with a rich County Meath accent that was distinctly different from ours, and he used a lot of strange words that turned out to be Irish. He called a jumper a *gansey* and a corner-boy a *bowsey*. I was his *Alanna* and our John was his *amhic* or *gossún*. Instead of a simple "no," he said "divil a bit," and he told our mother to "whisht" when he wanted to get a word in edgeways. Our whole family loved words and accents and we particularly enjoyed listening to exaggerated Dublin accents on *Radio Eireann* comedy programs, never thinking that we had a curious accent of our own.

When our mother was alive, she did most of the talking. She also did all the letter-writing to her children in foreign countries. I moved to the U.S. in 1977, one of my sisters went to Germany in 1980, and my other sister went to Switzerland in 1986. Our brother was the only one of us who stayed in Ireland. After our mother died in 1988, it was a challenge for Dad to stay in touch by letter. He had a hereditary shake in his hand that made it almost impossible for him to write. As if in answer to his dilemma, *An Post* (the Irish Post Office) created "Talk Back Cassette Post," talk-a-letters that provided seven-and-a-half minutes of tape on either side so Irish people could send voice messages to their families abroad. I have a collection of around two dozen of those white plastic tapes, printed in green in both Irish and English, most of them recorded by my father in the 1980s and 90s during the fifteen years that he lived alone after my mother died.

I could picture the post office where Dad purchased the tapes. It was across the street from our house in the newsagents' shop where we bought sweets, ice cream, broken biscuits, newspapers, our beloved weekly British comics, and much more. The post office was located in a corner of the shop, designated by a window with a little grille through which the post-mistress sold postage stamps and savings stamps, doled out the monthly children's allowances, and gossiped with customers. I could imagine my father talking about his eldest daughter who had "gone out to America" as he posted the tapes.

These days, *Facetime* and *WhatsApp* have made communication cheap and easy. I think of my terrible homesickness when I first came to the U.S. and how it might have been relieved by a *Facetime* chat. Instead there were weeks between letters and only occasional phone calls that served as reminders of the width of the ocean that lay between us. The talk-a-letter tapes were a great advance in technology in the days before mobile phones.



Photograph by Angela Patten.

The tapes usually began with the words, “Hello, Angela. Daddy here,” followed by the date. Dad’s messages were not always cheerful. He was terribly lonely in the years after our mother died. But he had visits with his sisters-in-law, kind neighbors who passed the time of day, and his music sessions at the weekends. He was an accomplished fiddle player and he regularly attended the sessions at *Comhaltas Ceolteori Eireann*, the local Irish music venue. Loneliness drove him to join a retirement group and he exerted his considerable charm, reciting poems he had memorized as my mother had done in the past, and taking bus tours with the other retirees to various parts of the country. He reported on all these adventures on the cassette tapes - my aunt drinking her tea and smoking a cigarette by the fireplace, the flowers and vegetables he grew in the garden, a great night at the music session - and I responded with news of my studies, my son’s progress at school, and other entertaining tidbits, carefully omitting any mention of the heartache and heartbreak that were also part of the picture.

My first collection of poetry was titled “Still Listening.” And no wonder. It was only after I left Ireland that I began to appreciate the way people talked there. My first poems were an attempt to conjure those voices and the peculiarly Irish expressions I had gleaned during my childhood. My most recent collection of poems also focuses on words and their multiple meanings. Whenever I go back to Ireland, I am gobsmacked by all the words and phrases I had forgotten and I often pick up new expressions that become fodder for poetry. During my last visit I was driving with my brother when he called his daughter to say, “We’ll be there within the bones of an hour.” I gleefully stole the phrase and made it the title of my new poetry manuscript.

The human voice is both intimate and ephemeral. Children’s voices change and deepen and ultimately disappear as they grow older. Before we had the tools to capture them on audio, each voice died with the individual. After Dad died, it took some time before I could bear to listen to his voice on the tapes. But now that he is long gone, I realize how important the cassettes were in preserving his unique voice and accent, and his way of talking.



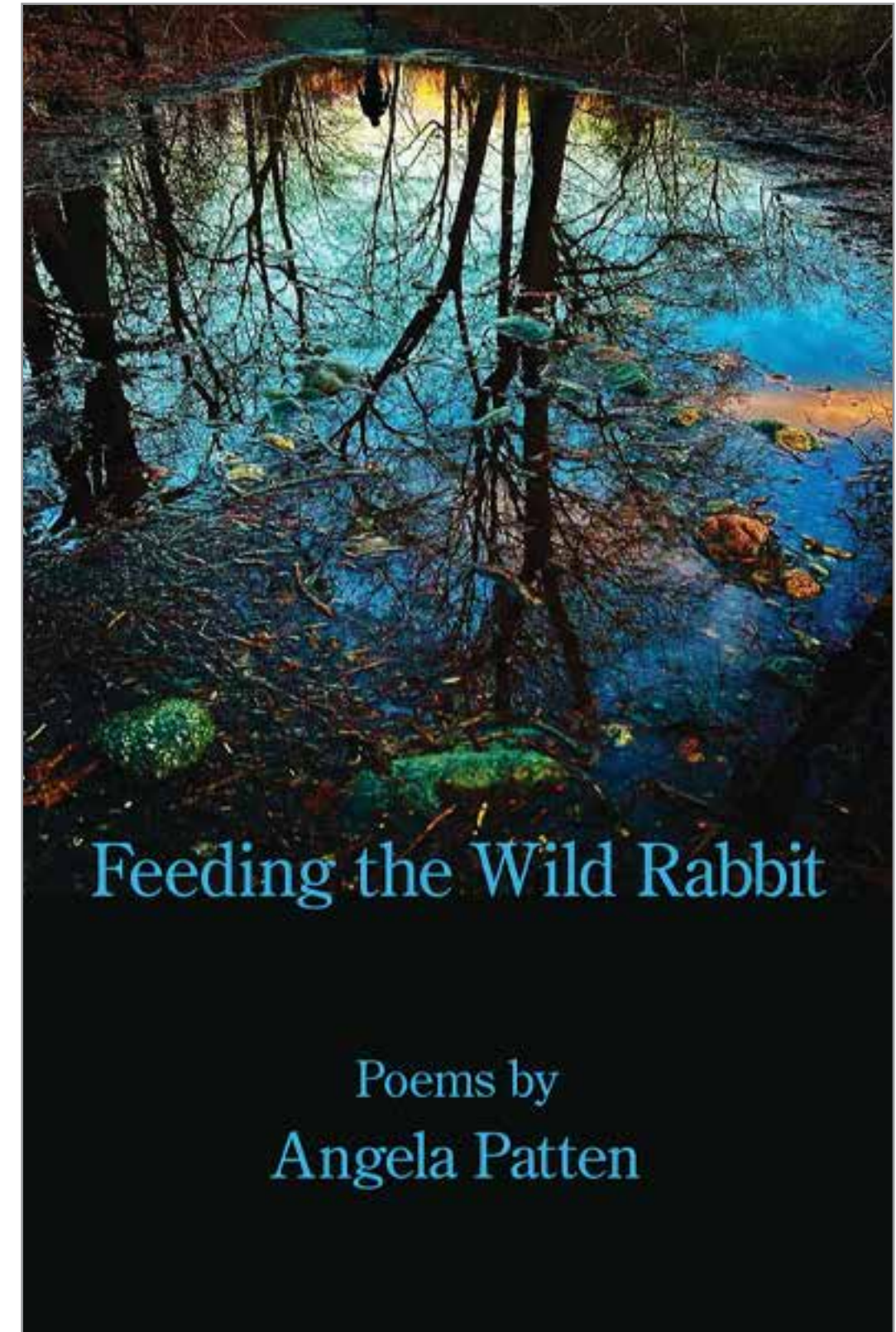
Photograph courtesy Angela Patten.



My parents. Photograph courtesy Angela Patten.

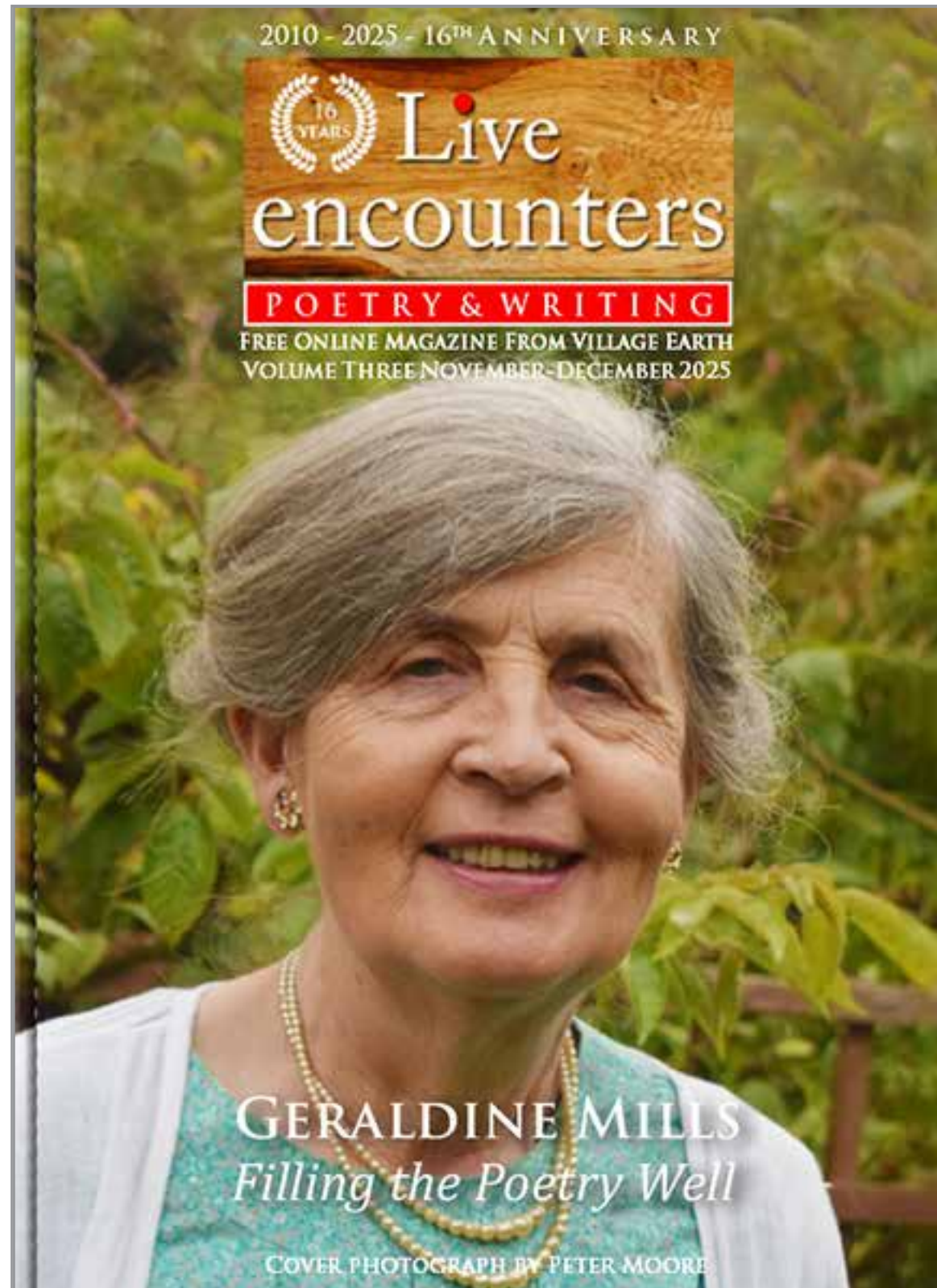
During a recent flood at our house when friends and neighbors were running around with mops and towels, putting random objects under the feet of the furniture, I discovered that one friend had rescued the cardboard box that held my father's cassette tapes from under the bed and was wiping each one down and setting it out to dry. I was touched that he had gone to the trouble of rescuing them but he must have realized that such old and outdated items had sentimental value.

Although I had most of them converted to a digital format years ago, those white plastic miniatures are nevertheless precious artifacts. In these days of Chatbots and AI, they are a reminder of the power of the human voice to convey the essence of a person, the sense of a previous era, and the pleasures of the spoken word.



"Feeding the Wild Rabbit." Cover photo credit: Zak Patten.
Link to purchase the book: [Feeding the Wild Rabbit](#)

Geraldine Mills is an award-winning poet and short story writer who lives in the west of Ireland. She is the author of six collections of poetry, three of short stories and two children's novels. She is the recipient of many awards including the Hennessy New Irish Writer Award, three Arts Council Bursaries and a Patrick and Katherine Kavanagh Fellowship. Her fiction and poetry have been on curricula of contemporary literature courses in a number of US universities and the USA summer programme at the Burren College of Art. Her fourth short story collection, titled *Survival Games* is forthcoming from Arlen House in the autumn.



GERALDINE MILLS FILLING THE POETRY WELL

There was a field. There was a woman. She had a dream to build a garden to celebrate Brigit, goddess/saint of Celtic Ireland. Land was bought, plans drawn up, trees planted, a garden shaped to honour the seasons of the Celtic calendar. Saplings soon rooted, thrushes came, a robin. Tortoiseshell butterflies, orchids. The vision came into being.

Brigit is the goddess/saint of healers, smiths, poets and child-birth. There is the story of Brigit, the saint, who requested a piece of land from the king of Leinster to build her convent. When he refused, she asked if he would give her as much space as her cloak would cover. He agreed. She spread it on the ground in front of her and it started to stretch across the land until it had covered many acres.

Like the cloak, this field in County Galway, Ireland grew too. From its small beginnings it now claims 11 acres of native woodland, meadows, pond, and the four gardens of Samhain, Imbolg, Bealtaine and Lunasa, the seasons that celebrate the Celtic year. The reason I mention this is that the founder, the woman with the dream, Jenny Beale, asked me to be part of a new poetry trail around the garden this autumn with seven other Galway poets. Our task was to write new poems in response to the garden and a selection of them would be chosen and displayed for visitors.

For months I had been searching for a road that would lead me back into writing. I knocked on many doors, the words didn't answer. I lowered the bucket into the well and only pulled up silt and dead insects. I gave the page roses; it gave me back snakes. I offered the white space apples; it spat back scorpions.

Carl Jung said that 'the creative mind plays with the objects it loves', and so before I could start any work on the garden poems, I knew I needed to come to it from a sense of richness, instead of poverty. The way that has worked for me in the past is to play with the things that bring me joy: words and their meaning.

Since my early college days, when I studied science, I have never failed to be amazed by the beauty of the word 'photosynthesis', which means: to make with light, and it does just that. It was the Dutch scientist, Dr Jan Ingen Housz who discovered that light is necessary for plants to give out oxygen. That carbon dioxide and water in the presence of sunlight striking chlorophyll are miraculously converted to glucose and give out oxygen as a byproduct. It is what keeps us alive. Creates food for the living chain. Allows us to breathe. Studying the glucose molecule fills me with awe. How does this happen? How did this come about? Mere accident or a brilliant designer? I will never know but it is the jewel in the crown of biochemistry that makes up life as we know it.

It reawakens my curiosity.

Boustrophedon is a word I can barely pronounce but I am entranced by the way it gets its name from the Greek word for 'ox' and 'turn'. It was a style of writing used by ancient Greek inscribers, especially on stone, before the standard left to right style came into use, as we know it today in this part of the world. Boustrophedon is where alternate lines of writing are reversed, with letters also written in reverse. Thus, the pattern builds, turning alternate lines in the same way the working animal alternates its ploughing along the field.

I take out one of my old poems and try it. Every alternate line and letter I write backwards. It is strangely satisfying. There is complete focus needed to write each letter in reverse. My mind becomes accustomed to it, everything else blocked out as I shape letters as if a child who has just begun to write. I come to the end of the line. Turn it and the letter just like the ox ploughing. It releases something in me. The beginning of richness.

I learn new words for yellow – Realgar, Orpiment, Gamboge.

My imagination continues to be sparked by the vivid travels of Albrecht Dürer. When his patron, Maximilian died, this painter left the impoverished streets of Nuremburg in 1520, took to travelling with his wife and maid. A year long trip by horse, by boat to the coast to search out a new patron. He traded along the way his priceless art for two parrots in a cage, a piece of red chalk, a buckler of fish-skin. He bought himself a pair of socks for one stiver and stopped to sketch the bones of a giant. The sun burning his neck as he drew. Birds clamouring to be heard. I wonder what he would have made of the huge scapula, that enormous thigh bone?

I discover Enheduanna, who is celebrated as the earliest known poet in history. Born in 2286 BC, around the time of the invention of writing, her father, Sargon, ruled over ancient Mesopotamia (encompassing modern-day Iraq, Kuwait) where Enheduanna became the high priestess of the moon god, Nama, at the temple at Ur. She died 35 years later.

In 1927, British archaeologist, Leonard Woolley excavated the ancient city of Ur where he discovered the ruins of a temple. There he found stone discs, depicting Enheduanna standing in worship beside a libation bearer. Two seals with her name on it show the 'Exaltation of Inanna', one of the poems of 154 lines written to the goddess, Inanna, in which Enheduanna beseeches her to intervene in the conflict that has driven her into exile. She attributes the success of her return home to the power of the goddess, and she writes in the exaltation, 'Be it known that you devastate the rebellious land'. So important was she that her work was one of the ten texts used in schools for scribes and is the main reason why her work has survived to this day.

While there has been much debate as to whether a woman could possibly be the first author, the Morgan Library and Museum in New York consider the evidence strong enough to have hosted an exhibition in her honour in 2023.

I like to think of this woman who lived fifteen hundred years before Homer, 1700 years before Sappho and even longer before Aristotle, sitting with her clay tablet on her knee, and with her reed stylus inscribing words that depicted her every day: issues such as her insecurities, abuse, her usurper, even the difficulty of writing a poem. At this point, I can relate to her creative struggles.

I have, however, given myself enough riches to begin my poetry project. It is a soft day as I arrive at the garden and step through the interlinking sections, each representing one of the Celtic festivals, through the cycle of the year, from birth to death. The earth in the shape of a sleeping woman curves around a womb-like pool. Birch woman bends to the dark, listens. There is tree man with his arms outstretched; the robin that knows the best places to catch a crumb falling.

There are the hazels with their little husk hats, the brushes sweeping time across the sundial.

I stand before the spindle tree. It is laden with prayer fruit. The tree where people write their wishes, on coloured squares of paper. It holds all their hopes and worries. One asks for a magical wedding day, another hoping that fairies are real, another again that their hair will grow, that they will get a new home. The one wish that is asked for, over and over again, is the longing for peace. So many longings for peace. I take up my pen and start.



Survival Games by Geraldine Mills will be launched on 21st Oct at 6 p.m. in the *Teachers Club* in Dublin and at Charlie Byrne's Bookshop on 26th Oct at 6 p.m. Thereafter, it will be available at :

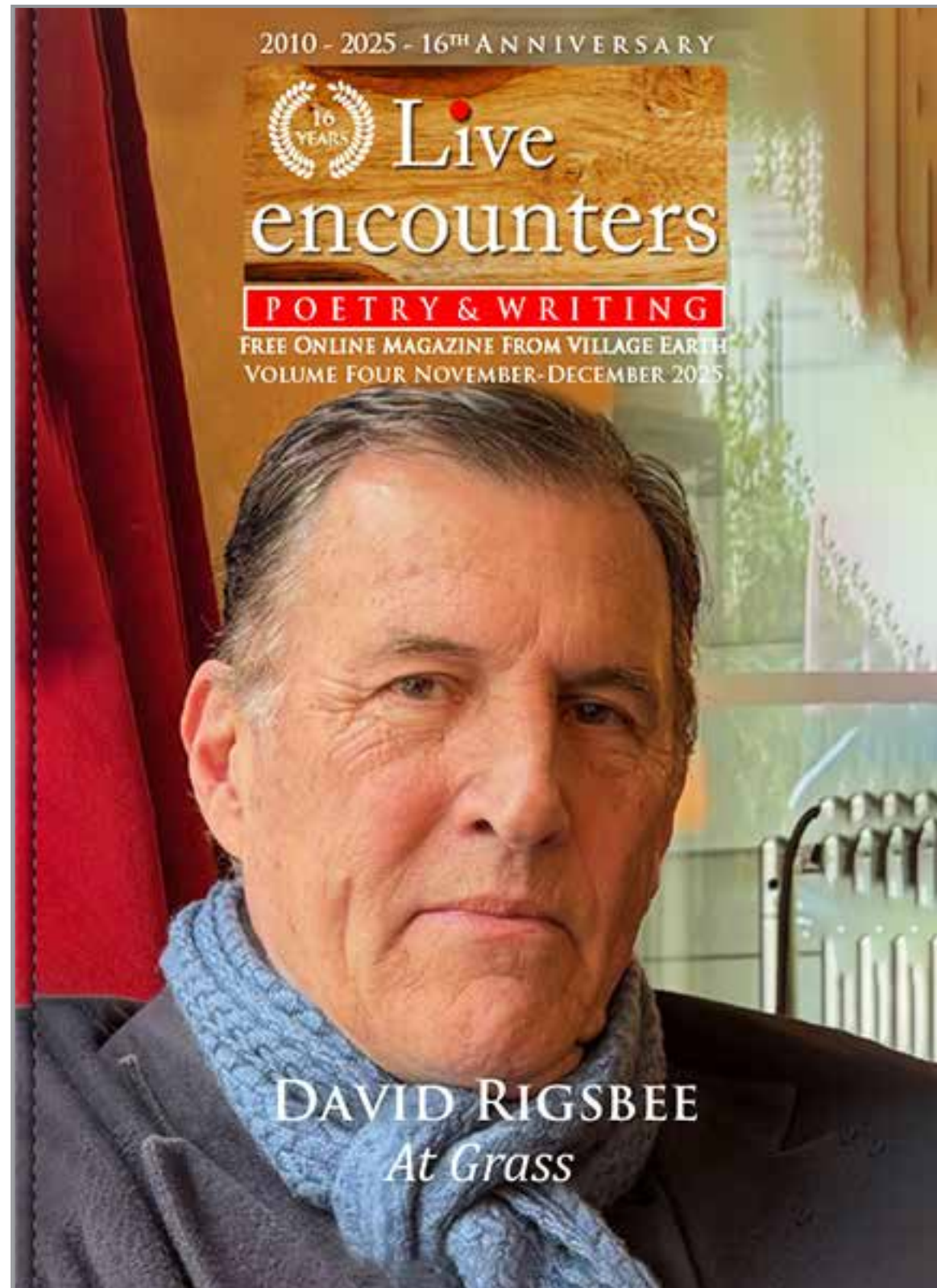
<https://www.kennys.ie/>
<https://charliebyrne.ie/>
<https://booksupstairs.ie/>

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.





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/>

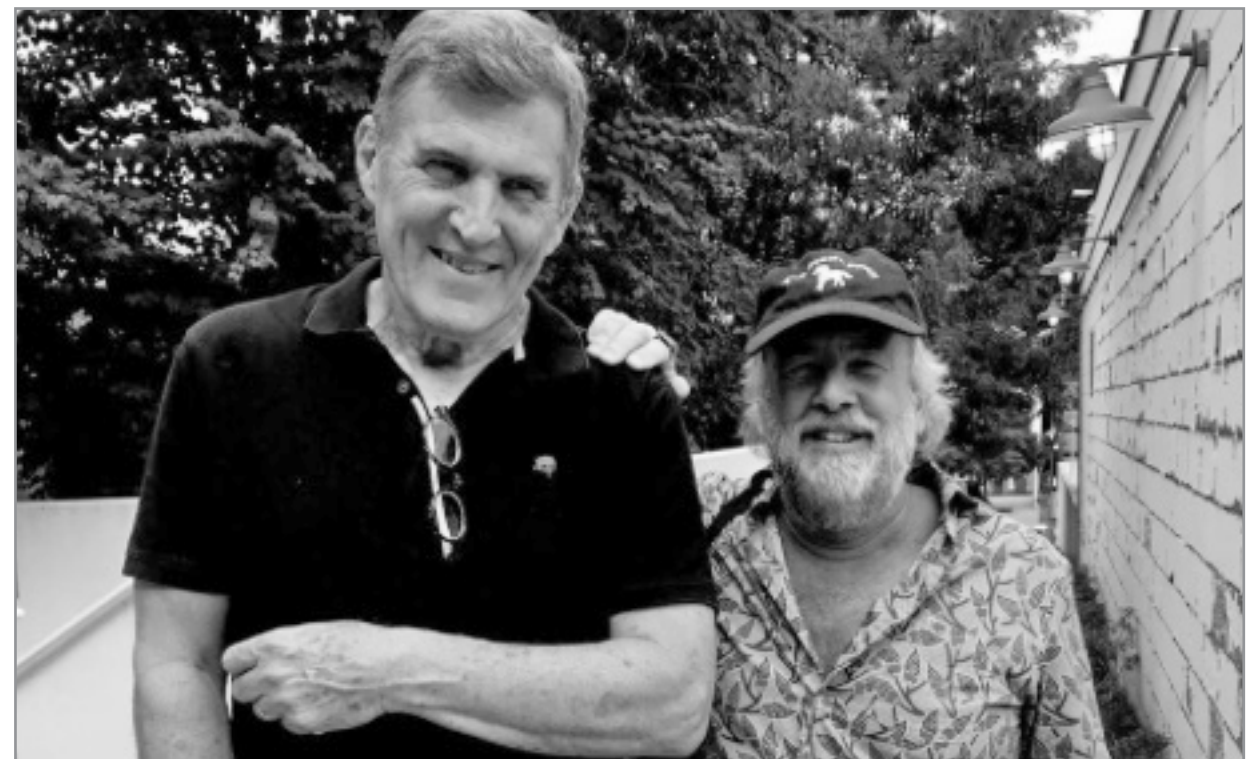
Their status now might offer a complicated consolation: the races mattered in their moment, aroused enthusiasm, fan loyalty, and the spectacle of energy and mastery at work, just as (it is implied) a poem promised aesthetic pleasure, shaped sensibilities, and invited imaginative participation, etc. Whether 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.

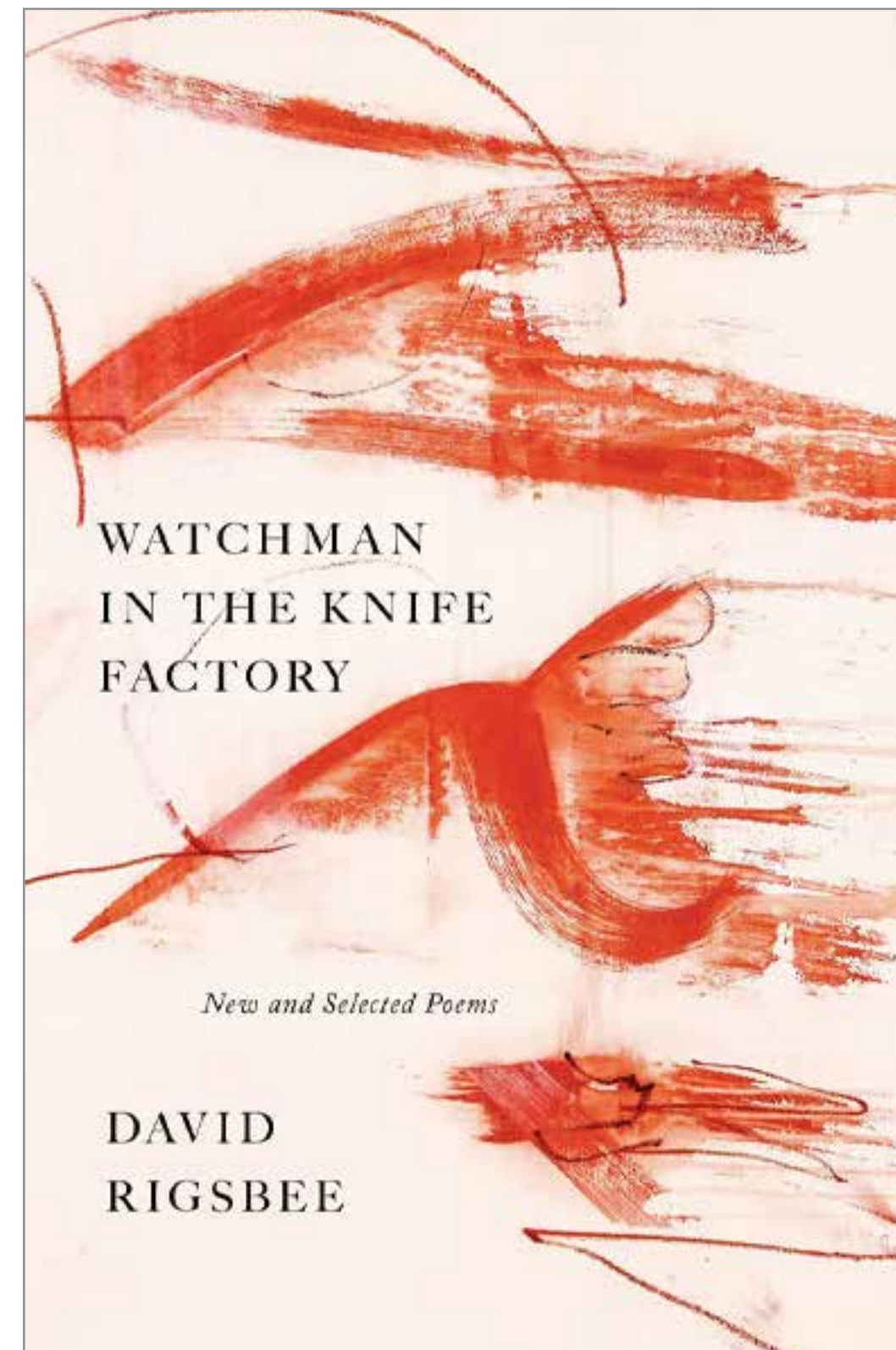


David Rigsbee and Michael Waters, ca. 2016. Photo courtesy David Rigsbee.

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.

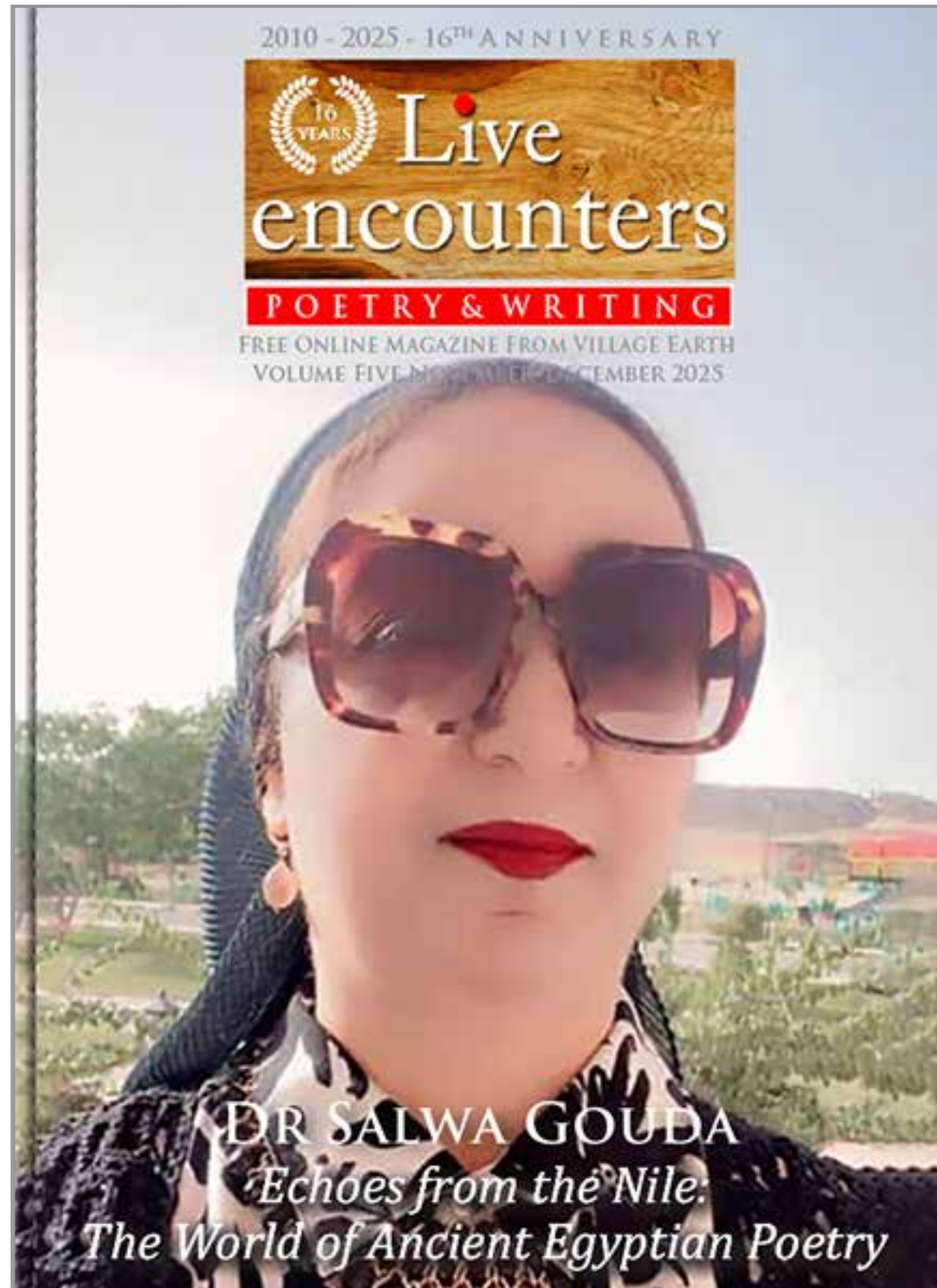


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Dr Salwa Gouda is an accomplished Egyptian literary translator, critic, and academic affiliated with the English Language and Literature Department at Ain Shams University. Holding a PhD in English literature and criticism, Dr. Gouda pursued her education at both Ain Shams University and California State University, San Bernardino. She has authored several academic works, including *Lectures in English Poetry and Introduction to Modern Literary Criticism*, among others. Dr. Gouda also played a significant role in translating *The Arab Encyclopedia for Pioneers*, a comprehensive project featuring poets, philosophers, historians, and literary figures, conducted under the auspices of UNESCO. Recently, her poetry translations have been featured in a poetry anthology published by Alien Buddha Press in Arizona, USA. Her work has also appeared in numerous international literary magazines, further solidifying her contributions to the field of literary translation and criticism.

DR SALWA GOUDA ECHOES FROM THE NILE: THE WORLD OF ANCIENT EGYPTIAN POETRY

The prevailing image of ancient Egypt is one of monumental silence: the stark geometry of the pyramids, the stoic sphinx, the towering temples of Karnak standing against the relentless sun. These structures of eternal stone speak a language of power, divinity, and the immutable cosmic order of Maat. For centuries, our understanding of this civilization was filtered almost exclusively through these official channels—the funerary spells of the Pyramid Texts, the elaborate guides of the Book of the Dead, and the hymns carved for gods and pharaohs. These texts are profound in their scope and purpose, but they inherently represent the voice of the state and the priesthood, literature concerned with eternity, the afterlife, and the metaphysical maintenance of the universe. However, if we attune our ears to a different frequency, a quieter, more delicate and profound human sound echoes from the papyrus scrolls and inscribed limestone flakes that have survived the millennia. This is the vibrant, often overlooked voice of ancient Egyptian poetry, a rich literary tradition that serves as the essential counterpoint to the civilization's monolithic grandeur. It reveals a people not solely preoccupied with death and divinity, but one deeply in love with life, nature, and the intricate, often tumultuous landscape of human emotion. This poetry proves that the architects of eternity were also passionate, witty, vulnerable, and introspective human beings, whose inner lives were as complex and vibrant as their architectural achievements.



This significant shift from purely sacred and functional texts to a more personal, lyrical literature marks a fascinating evolution in Egyptian culture. The Middle Kingdom (c. 2050-1650 BCE), often hailed as Egypt's classical age, saw the stabilization of the state and a flourishing of arts and letters that began to accommodate more reflective themes. However, it was during the prosperous and confident New Kingdom (c. 1550-1070 BCE)—an era of imperial expansion, international trade, and a growing, literate class of scribes, officials, and skilled artisans—that this personal voice found its full confidence and widespread expression. A society with more leisure and a broader base of literacy created an audience and a patronage system for a new kind of expression. This was a literature composed not for the tomb, but for the garden; not for the god in his sanctuary, but for the beloved in one's arms; not for eternity, but for the fleeting, exquisite present. The most captivating and accessible of these works are, without doubt, love poems. Discovered on precious papyri like the Chester Beatty I and on informal ostraca—the pottery shards and limestone flakes used as the notepads of the ancient world—these verses feel startlingly modern in their immediacy and emotional honesty. They are not the formal declarations of state or the structured rituals of later European courtly love traditions. Instead, they are the raw, playful, agonizing, and intimately relatable whispers of lovers, their voices bridging a chasm of three thousand years with effortless grace. [\[Chester Beatty Library; British Museum Collection\]](#)

The poets of the Nile Valley employed their lush, life-sustaining environment as their primary artistic palette. They perfected a technique like what would later be known in Arabic poetry as the *wasf*, or descriptive blazon, to paint meticulous portraits of their beloveds using imagery drawn directly from their world. A lover is never simply beautiful in an abstract sense; she is intimately woven into the very ecosystem of desire and admiration. In one famous example, the poet says: "My beloved is like a gazelle, / Whose limbs are sleek, / whose neck is long, / whose hair is dark. / I hold her fast, I will not let her go, / that I may place her in the house of her mother, / with the door shut behind us." The choice of the gazelle—a creature synonymous with grace, alertness, speed, and wild, untamable beauty perfectly captures the essence of a desired one who is both captivating and elusive.

The concluding lines are equally significant, expressing a yearning not for illicit passion, but for private, sanctioned intimacy within the "house of her mother." This reveals a sophisticated understanding that for all its overwhelming power, this passionate love was experienced within a real, structured world of family, social codes, and domestic expectations. The goal was to bring the wild gazelle into the social fold, to legitimize the passion within the framework of community.

In this sophisticated tradition, love is never portrayed as a mild affection but as an all-consuming, physical and psychological force that recalibrates the very being of the lover. The natural world is rarely a passive backdrop in these dramas; it is an active, sympathetic participant, a chorus commenting on and amplifying the human emotions played out at its center. This is most powerfully expressed in the pervasive theme of "lovesickness," a condition so severe it is presented as a physical ailment that defies the finest medical care of a civilization renowned for its physicians. A lover laments with palpable despair: "Seven days since I saw my beloved, / And illness has invaded me. / My body has become heavy, / I am forgetful of my own self. / If the chief physicians come to me, / My heart has no comfort of their remedies... / What will revive me is to say to me: 'Here she is!'" This explicit and poignant dismissal of Egypt's renowned medical science is a powerful rhetorical declaration. It strategically positions love as a condition of the spirit and the emotions, an existential malady whose only true antidote is the tangible, physical presence of the beloved. This theme of lovesickness is also rendered with charming cunning and a touch of humor in other poems, where a young man feigns illness to lure his beloved to his bedside, knowing full well that she alone holds the cure to his fabricated, yet emotionally real, distress.

The profound pain of separation is often expressed through a direct, plaintive dialogue with nature itself. In one particularly moving poem, a lover addresses the dove, the herald of the dawn that cruelly ends a precious night of union: "The voice of the dove is calling, / it says: 'It's day! Where are you?' / O bird, stop scolding me! / I found my love in his bed, / and my heart was overjoyed... / My hand is in his hand, / I walk in dance with him..." Poems from a female perspective, such as this one, are often rich with social and emotional nuance.

The dove is transformed from a neutral symbol of peace into a chiding, unwelcome intruder on intimacy. The private, authentic joy of the night is starkly contrasted with the public performance of the day, where the lovers must walk in a social “dance,” their relationship now subject to the gaze and judgment of the community. The speaker finds her ultimate validation not just in the secret consummation of love, but in the prospect of being publicly acknowledged, a status that formally protects her from the vulnerability and potential heartbreak of being a mere secret. These poems were thus not only pure expressions of emotion but also sophisticated navigations of a complex social world where public honor and private desire were in constant negotiation.

Running parallel to this intimate, secular tradition was the continued flourishing of the religious hymn. These works, while more formal in structure and purpose, are nonetheless masterpieces of poetic metaphor and awe-inspired observation, seeking to give shape to the formless and a voice to the ineffable. The sun god Amun-Ra could be envisioned as a falcon soaring across the vault of the sky or a mighty ram whose breath gave life to the entire world. The great Hymn to the Nile personifies the annual, life-giving flood as the god Hapi, a force of benevolent chaos and creation whose arrival meant “the poor and the rich are laughing, / the trees and the vegetation are verdant.” The pinnacle of this sacred poetry is undoubtedly the Great Hymn to the Aten, attributed to the pharaoh Akhenaten during his revolutionary monotheistic reign. This hymn is a masterpiece of world literature, notable not just for its radical theology but for its intensely intimate and joyful portrait of divinity. The sun-disk Aten is not a fearsome overlord but a benevolent, nurturing presence; its rays are repeatedly described as “hands” that “soothe,” “caress,” and embrace all they touch. The hymn is a breathtaking, almost scientific catalogue of the world awakened by the sun, and it reveals a remarkably global and inclusive consciousness: “How manifold are your works!... The countries of Syria and Nubia, and the land of Egypt; You set every man in his place... Their tongues are diverse in speech, and their natures as well; Their skins are different, For you have differentiated the peoples.”

This focus on the tangible, visible world—from the chicks in their nests to the diverse cultures of humanity—creates a powerful bridge between the divine and the everyday, mirroring the same keen, loving observation of nature that animates the secular love songs. . [\[Hymn to the Nile, Translations of Ancient Egyptian Poetry\]](#)

The figure who most perfectly embodies this seamless connection between the divine and the human, the cosmic and the personal, in Egyptian poetry is the goddess, Isis. In grand temple hymns from the Late Period, particularly at her great cult center at Philae, she is celebrated as the universal mother, “the Great Magician, the Queen of the Gods” whose power and scope transcend Egypt itself. Yet, her most resonant and poignant poetic role is rooted in the foundational mythology of Osiris. Here, she is not a distant, omnipotent deity but a vulnerable, intelligent, and fiercely determined individual using her wits, her courage, and her formidable magical prowess to restore her murdered husband and shattered family. Her laments for Osiris are among the most powerful love poems in the entire Egyptian canon. In these texts, she is the archetype of the grieving widow and devoted wife, a figure of profound pathos. This narrative of unwavering loyalty, desperate search, and magical restoration made her an immensely sympathetic and accessible archetype for universal human experiences of loss, devotion, and resilient hope. [\[Chester Beatty Library; British Museum Collection\]](#)

It is no surprise, therefore, that her influence directly infused the secular love songs, creating a fascinating synchronicity between religion and daily life. In the Chester Beatty Papyrus I, a young lover swears: “I love you; I choose you before all others... Let me not be forced to swear, ‘By the beautiful Isis!’ lest I take my oath in your name. Come to me, that I may see your beauty!” Here, the poet brilliantly uses the immense cultural and religious weight of the Isis myth—her legendary, unwavering fidelity—to underscore the depth and absolute seriousness of his own human passion. To swear an oath by Isis is to invoke the ultimate standard of devotion; to do so frivolously would be a sacrilege. The lover’s fear is that his feelings are so profound that any oath would be true, binding him eternally.

Through this divine figure, the sacred hymn and the secular love poem are revealed as two complementary expressions of the same fundamental, world-shaping power: the force of love and fidelity, whether directed toward a god or a mortal beloved. [*Chester Beatty Library; British Museum Collection*]

To fully appreciate this poetic tradition, one must mentally reconstruct its original context as a primarily oral and social art form. It was meant to be performed, not just read. Poems were sung or recited to the melodic accompaniment of harps, lyres, and the rhythm of tambourines and sistra during festive gatherings in the lush gardens of wealthy estates or in more modest communal settings. The very structure of many poems, featuring call-and-response patterns or dialogues between groups of young men and women (the chorus of youths and maidens), points directly to their performance at banquets, harvest festivals, or other social celebrations. The archaeological discovery of these texts at Deir El-Medina, the village of the royal tomb-builders, is particularly telling. It provides incontrovertible evidence that this lyrical expression was not the sole province of the elite scribal class or the royal court. The highly skilled artisans who carved the pharaohs' eternal resting places in the Valley of the Kings scrawled these very love songs on the limestone flakes and pottery shards they used for practice sketches and memos. This is a profoundly poignant symbol of the enduring human need to express love, joy, and beauty—a need that persisted and flourished even in the direct shadow of the death-obsessed monuments they were commissioned to build.

Furthermore, the Egyptian language itself was a key tool in the poet's arsenal. Its root-based system and remarkably flexible syntax were perfectly suited for the layered meanings, puns, and evocative metaphors that characterize great poetry. A word for "heart" (ib) could simultaneously imply "mind," "will," and "understanding." The simple act of "entering a garden" could carry unmistakable and powerful erotic connotations. This inherent linguistic richness allowed for a density of expression, a resonance of sound and sense, that is often largely lost in translation, reminding us that what we read today is only a faint, ghostly echo of the original's full musicality and semantic complexity.

Ultimately, the poetry of ancient Egypt compellingly shatters the long-held, simplistic image of a morbid, death-obsessed culture. In its place, we find a people who were keenly, lovingly observant of their environment, who celebrated the body and its senses without shame, and who understood love in all its forms—erotic, familial, divine—as a powerful, disorienting, and ultimately life-affirming force. They gazed at the same vast night sky that inspired their grand cosmologies and saw in it a metaphor for a lover's flowing hair. They felt the same blazing sun that empowered their king as a god and felt its warmth as a personal, nurturing embrace. The names of these individual poets are almost entirely lost to history, subsumed into the collective, anonymous voice of their culture. Yet, in the delicate, graceful lines of a love poem scrawled on a shard of pottery destined for the midden heap, or in the majestic, soaring verses of a hymn carved into a sunbaked temple wall intended to last for eternity, they achieved a different, perhaps more profound kind of immortality. They proved that the most lasting monuments are not always made of stone. The most enduring are woven from the simple, yet eternal, materials of words that capture the timeless rhythms of the human heart—its passions, its wonders, its sorrows, and its eternal, joyful conversation with the world. In their poetry, we do not meet a dead civilization, but living, breathing, feeling voices. In listening to them, we recognize a part of ourselves, connected across the immense gulf of millennia by the universal and shared experiences of love, longing, and the sheer, unquenchable awe of existence. This literary legacy is their true and greatest pyramid: an invisible, indestructible structure built not from quarried limestone, but from the enduring material of human emotion.

Note: This article is authored by Dr. Salwa Gouda and was originally published as "Echoes from the Nile: The World of Ancient Egyptian Poetry" in *Live Encounters*. Reproduced/adapted here with attribution. For scholarly context, see: *Live Encounters* (<https://liveencounters.net/>), Chester Beatty Library (<https://chesterbeatty.ie/>), and translations of 'Hymn to the Nile' and 'Great Hymn to the Aten' from primary Egyptian sources. [*Chester Beatty Library; British Museum Collection*]

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.

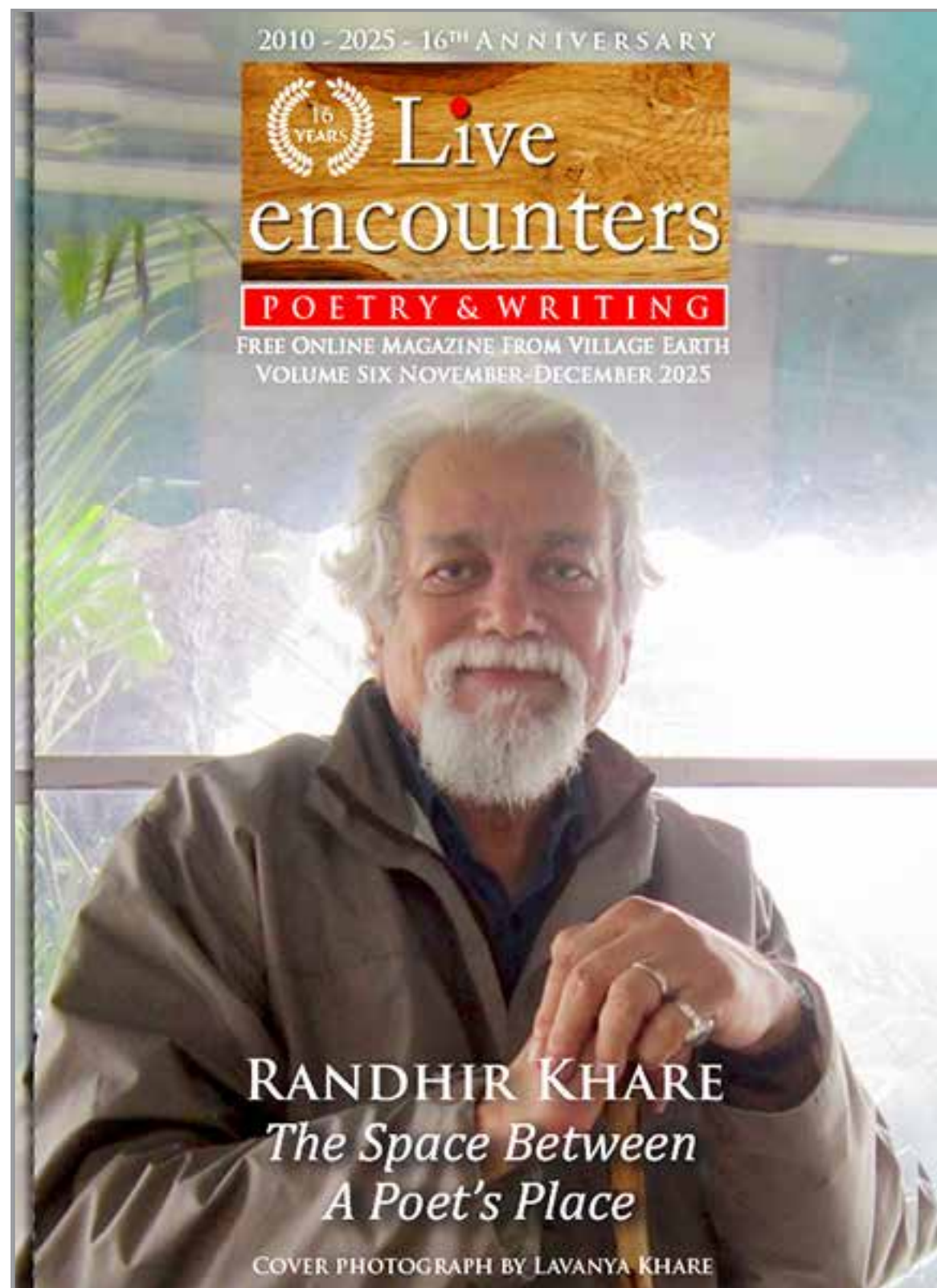
<https://www.randhirkhare.in/>

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.



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.*

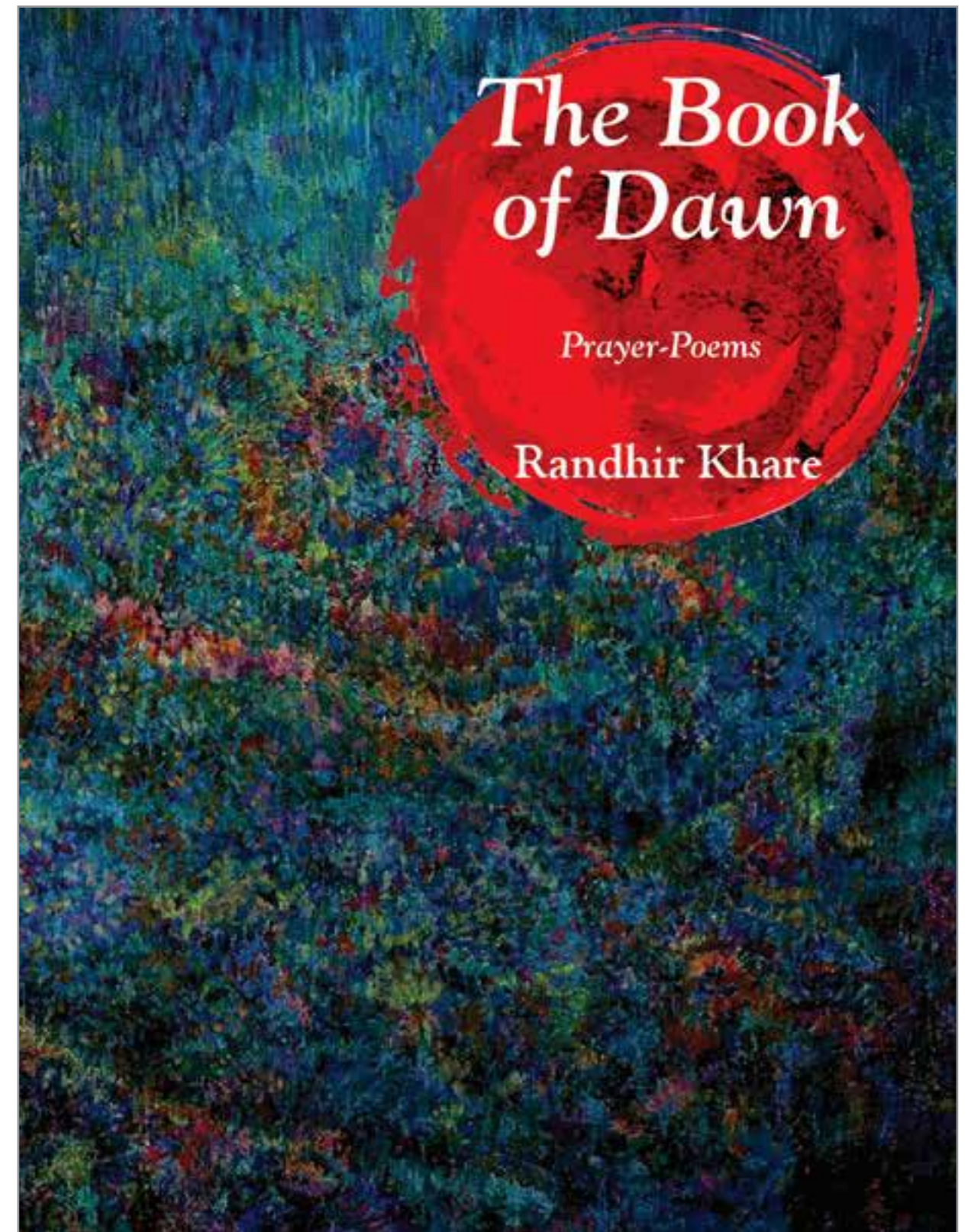
If anyone had guts and money, I'd recommend investing in Miro. He was a winner. A one-man enterprise.

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.

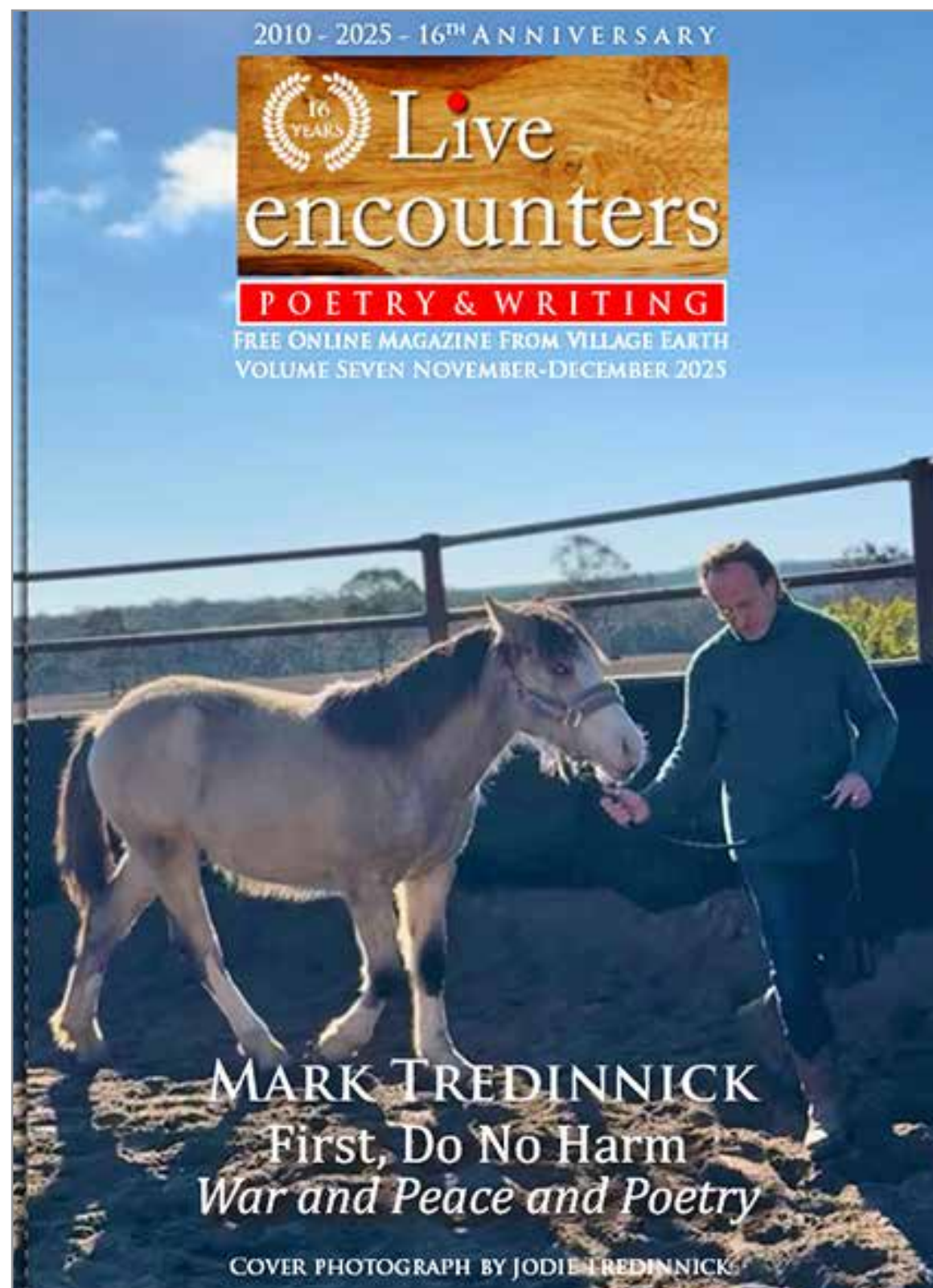
Then how do we get to the real creations? If you are interested, through your senses, just being present wherever you are. Wholly present. Compassionate listening, looking, reading. My new role as an empathetic guide helps me understand each time a young adult talks to me about what they are creating. 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/>



Mark Tredinnick OAM is a much-awarded poet and essayist and the managing director of 5 Islands Press. He is the author of five collections of poetry, including, most recently, *A Beginner's Guide*; *Chain of Ponds: New & Selected Poems* appears in July 2026. Next year also sees the reissue of his classic guides to the craft: *The Little Red Writing Book* and *The Little Green Grammar Book* (New South). Mark lives with his wife Jodie in Bowral, on Gundungurra Lands, southwest of Sydney. He runs the poetry master-class *What the Light Tells* online through his website <https://www.marktredinnick.com/> and he teaches literature and creative writing at the University of Sydney. He is at work on *The Divide*, which tracks the Great Dividing Range in prose and poetry, the way Basho's *Narrow Road* tracked the deep north/ outback/ deep interior of his times. 5 Islands Press has recently published a collection of poems from Gaza, *Each Night I Count my Children*, edited by Denise Howell. All revenue goes to support MSF in Gaza. Please support the book, which you can purchase at <https://www.5islandspress.com/>

MARK TREDINNICK FIRST, DO NO HARM WAR AND PEACE AND POETRY

*In a time of destruction, create something.
A poem. A parade. A school.
A vow. A moral principle. One peaceful moment.*
—Maxine Hong Kingston

The Clangorous Mechanics of What's Real

Up in the northwest provinces of the great sandstone plateau we call the Blue Mountains, in southeastern Australia, a valley is cut by a small river that rises in the outlying ridges of the plateau, at Bogee, near Rylstone, and it flows, unaccountably (to me) eastward, into the bulwark of the plateau, to join the Wolgan and with that river make the Colo, which joins the Hawkesbury-Nepean, and, at last, they all find the sea. Just a bit to the north, and still in the stone country, the Cudgegong, another small river, which goes on to water Mudgee and to fill a couple of dams, rises to the east of the small river I'm sitting near, in its handsome valley, and yet the Cudgegong, though it starts further east, flows *west*—away from the plateau and the coast, and on into the hungry belly of the continent.

continued overleaf...

Few things in a human life or the life of the world or of a place run as simply as you'd imagine. The divide that runs a great crescent down the east coast of Australia, from Cape York to Gariwerd (the Grampians) and sorts the waters east and west of it, is made up of a thousand small and fractious ranges that find themselves tending somewhat unwillingly to cohere, and the notional divide from which the rivers flow either inland or down to the Pacific is as sketchy and erratic as all hell. As witnessed here at Glen Alice in the Capertee, where I am this late October among a profundity of birds and blowflies, wide pale pastures, and all these encompassing scarps, these handsome purple, ochre, grey assemblages. We're here for a wedding anniversary (our first), and as I put it yesterday in a poem, a gift to my beloved:

*The house sits at the head
of the valley, where the river slips into the plateau (under the gate of the garden of stone),
and the winds are chronic here, petulant as parrots, crazed as blowflies.*

*And all the long blue day the wrens run over-
due repairs on the clangorous mechanics
of what's real. The river gets on with composing the present from the past,
and the sheoaks walk all sorrow back the hard way to the east.*

The work of making poetry is hard: a poem of four stanzas took me most of a day to discover and lay out and tend yesterday. But the work it performs is like that of the lean Capertee river, whose (present) course I can make out from the house, marked by the sheoaks, carrying the sadness and loss and desire and death and birdsong and grief articulated and recollected in the valley, into the apparently impenetrable walls that confront it.

The work of poetry is soft and indefatigable. It insists on itself and on eternity and on what is real, all that it witnesses in human lives and hearts and in the greater world those lives of all beings participate in; it insists on itself and on us against an imponderable weight of indifference; it prevails, poetry, like this small river, against impossible odds. Poetry is the water that, improbably, wears away the stone.

And so, I think, it must be. The world knows enough vainglorious, strident, and violent ways of making a point. The power of poetry is to eschew those paths, and so to say and do what otherwise cannot be said and done.

And the River Goes On

As I write that last paragraph, the wrens in their workshops inside the roses out the back give over to the *chita chitas*, notorious prophets of endings and beginnings, and then, as if to laugh me out of my quiet pieties, two little friarbirds (google them) overly the house brawling their hysterical plaints. Poetry should be hilarious and outspoken and even a little histrionic, sometimes, too. But its real work begins when the outcry subsides. And the river goes on.

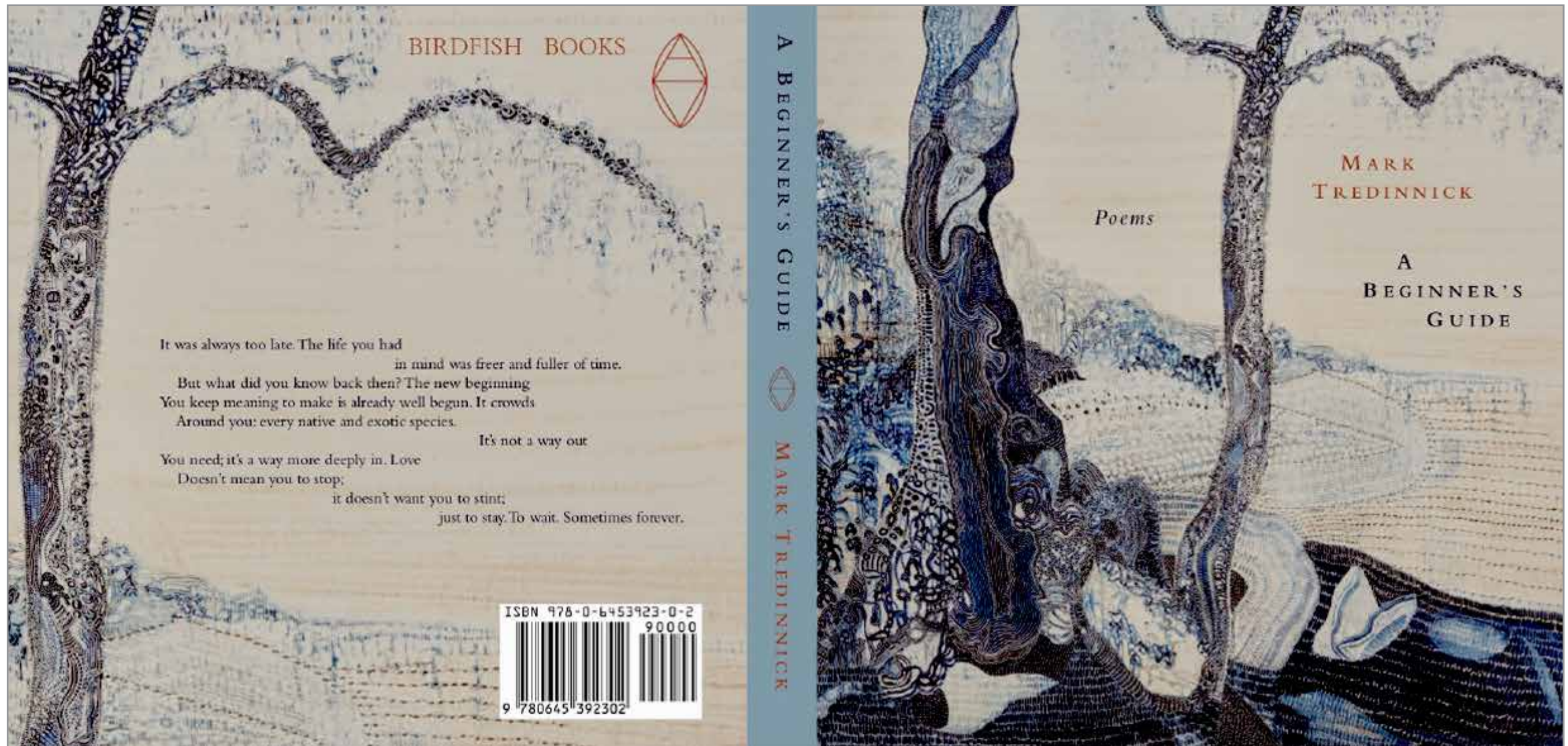
The Drunkenness of Things Being Various

Here with me to read in the valley I have a selection of the poetry of Louis MacNeice, a selection for Faber made by Auden. "I didn't think anyone was still reading MacNeice," one of my students said to me recently, as if it were a reading list—somehow compulsory and drafted by whom and on whose authority?!—from which poets are periodically eliminated. There is only poetry. When it is well made it is, again, like the river, here, going on doing its work regardless of who cares to pay it any attention or attribute to it any value. MacNeice was not, perhaps, one of the great poets T S Eliot has in mind in some remarks I'll get to in a moment. But then, who is? And who decides? But because, I think, MacNeice's work was (and is) steeped so deep in craft and care for the human condition, less persuaded by some by the arguments of fashion, some of his work endures and is capable, movingly, of speaking truths about one's own life and times, not just his.

Plus, as it happens, MacNeice's time, which might have seemed to have passed, is here again. His star is rising. It sometimes happens. It happened to Bach, after seventy years lost to us all. Never trust fashion, I'd say.

Auden apologises in his short introduction for leaving so many poems out and for his lack of all authority except his likes and dislikes for making the choices he has. He also explains that MacNeice went through a long dull patch for a decade or so.

continued overleaf...



A Beginner's Guide - book available at <https://www.marktredinnick.com/books>

And don't we all. But the selection is still large and some fine poems made the cut: wonderful and wise "Sunlight in the Garden" and parts of the long poem sequence, "Autumn Journal," in which the poet innovated free-verse and prose-poetic forms to establish a looser kind of structure for the sustained and grounded contemplations of love and ageing and place that he writes there. It's clear what the poet stands against (cant) and for (beauty and honest and dignity and love and place. There was a lot to be anxious and angry about during MacNeice's writing years: the threat of fascism, the threat of communism, the unbreathable air of London, the threat of nuclear extinction, the moral tightness of the times. But MacNeice knows that poetry's part in the great work of resistance is the small work—the noticing how the big ideas that dominate a time play in everyday lives like of his own and in everyday moments. Like the sunlight on the garden in the poem that observes it: a poem of hope and despair, at both public and private loss, a quiet observation of the persistent beauty of things, notwithstanding ill winds.

It is only with the great poets, perhaps, that the language of the poet escapes the privacy of her idiolect and interiority and transcends the habits of mind and speech that characterised her times. More on this proposition (Eliot's) in a bit, but just to say there are, for me, a few too many occasions where I trip up in MacNeice's utterance and wish he had found the courage to be plainer or worked out how to shake a personal or temporal habit unlikely to help the poem survive its moment. (In such moments one hears but barely comprehends the speaker, and one is shut out a little from the moment of Being that had seemed, till then, one's own, all of ours.) Even in the poem "Snow," which I love, I meet a little unhelpful opacity. But then there are these lines—lines as radically clear and hilarious and serious and important now as then, as vital for us to understand as readers and voters and writers now as these lines always were: for it is true, I think, that prevailing discourse (political, intellectual, artistic and private) tends to bifurcate and enmify and oversimplify or overcomplicate and to strip lived experience of its layers and contradictions and eros and dynamism.

*World is suddener than we fancy it.
World is crazier and more of it than we think,
Incorrigibly plural. I peel and portion
A tangerine and spit the pips and feel
The drunkenness of things being various.*

Poetry's Innate Activism: Bearing Implacable and Memorable Witness

Please let us—in our languaging (as in his) and in our understandings of how humans are and how relationships play and what things mean—recall and practise the incorrigible plurality of things, the drunkenness of their and our own being various. Let's leave the platitudes and stereotypes and categories to AI. Let's leave the mantras and slogans and tribalism to commerce and politics. Poetry's activism is performed by its bearing implacable and memorable witness to the real, in language that does deep justice to what it witnesses—place, moment, person, cause. Good poetry keeps doing that justice long after the news cycle has moved on; its justice lasts, transcending as it does the particulars of the times it witnesses., Poems work in time, but also in eternity. Writing poems is for finding, through care with language, one's own unique range of variousness and for divining one's own plurality (for coming back plural, as Rumi put it once), and for making common cause—through language as awake as this head of the valley is with layers of being, past and present—with the issues and moments and instantiations of the moving world, as the world manifests in given faces and places and beings and schemes. Poetry is for joining the wide world of Being It is for perpetuating the uncanny and beautiful, and sometimes unbearable, variousness of things, catching them in the act of getting after their living, each of them refusing, notwithstanding all that is hard and wrong, not to Be.

Toward a Poetry of Peace

All is not right with the world.

It never is, but things right now, in many arenas, are unhappy and dangerous, terrifying and ugly. Mobsters broker what they like to call peace; the idea of the public good, the common good, has flown from minds both left and right; kindness and forgiveness and generosity are vanishing from heart and mind and mouth; the oceans warm and the plastics swill and the forests fail and the cities burn; loneliness is pandemic; civil disagreement, on which democracy depends, has largely descended into shrillness and name-calling, a mutually assured destruction by competing outrage; all our thoughts are thought for us and all our phrases fashioned by bots using stolen IP; ignorance informed only by internet rage gets despots elected, most of whose work, as ever with despots, is vengeance and rank ideology and the further enrichment of the rich.

continued overleaf...

It is easy to despair, but one must not, or all that isn't right prevails.

What might be the role of poetry in times of such trouble and injustice? Not, I'm certain, to engage in the devices and postures of prevailing politics: the anger, the name-calling, the categories of blame and cancellation, the tribalism. In order to save us from the politics that prevail—and not only among politicians—poetry, I believe, must practise, in its rhetoric, its diction, its devices, and what it chooses to speak of, the values of dignity and compassion, tolerance and mercy and peace and courage and grace and civility that are so missing from the hegemonic discourses that rule our institutions of government and law-enforcement, of public policy and education. Remember Heaney, who had to fight hard for what it took to know the truth of what he said in accepting the Nobel Prize: poetry, uniquely, caters for two contradictory needs of the human spirit in times of trauma—not only a retributive, profoundly honest truth-telling, but also, a softness of seeing and saying, without which the traumatised soul, though their suffering be names, is still lost and without love.

Let us not forget to love: the world, in its woundedness; each other, and yes, even our enemy. Poetry is the way love speaks: tough love, soft love, the slim and persistent stream that defeats, in the end all resistance.

Poetry's work is to keep us from despair, to call us to turn our pain and anger into something more useful. Poetry refuses to accept or to allow us to accept what the politics of greed and envy and revenge ask us to accept as real. Poetry's politics is its refusal of the idiom of politics—its vow not to act and think and speak the way that tribal politics, sects, and ideologues do. Its work is to make us always more human than we are told we are. To love us in our frailty and magnificence and to ask us to be kinder and to be more useful to each other.

Softer Bombs

How a poet might respond to what Israel, for instance, with Western weapons, has done to Gaza: here is one of the great moral challenges of our moment. And in one sense, the response is easy. Anyone inclined to read and write poetry will condemn the murderousness, the depravity, the vengefulness, the asymmetry, the barbarism of the occupation and destruction (just as the bloodthirsty violence of Hamas, which, rising though it did from years of occupation of Palestine by Israel, triggered the monstrous and disastrous Israeli response).

But how to make one's words useful to anyone, especially anyone under the bombardment, or to anyone making decisions that might bring an end to the killing. That is the real question. Poems of shrillness and (understandable) anger have prevailed, but it's not clear how much they help anyone except as a catharsis for the speaker. It is too easy to write a poetry violent and intolerant in its attitudes and language. But no one needs more violence. Entrenched tribalism is the problem here; enmification on the page perpetuates war; it heals nothing and no one.

A fine young Gazan poet, Fatena Abu Mostafa, puts it this way in one of the poems gathered into an anthology by Denise Howell, *Each Night I Count My Children: Poems from Gaza*, a book we're proud to have just published at 5 Islands Press:

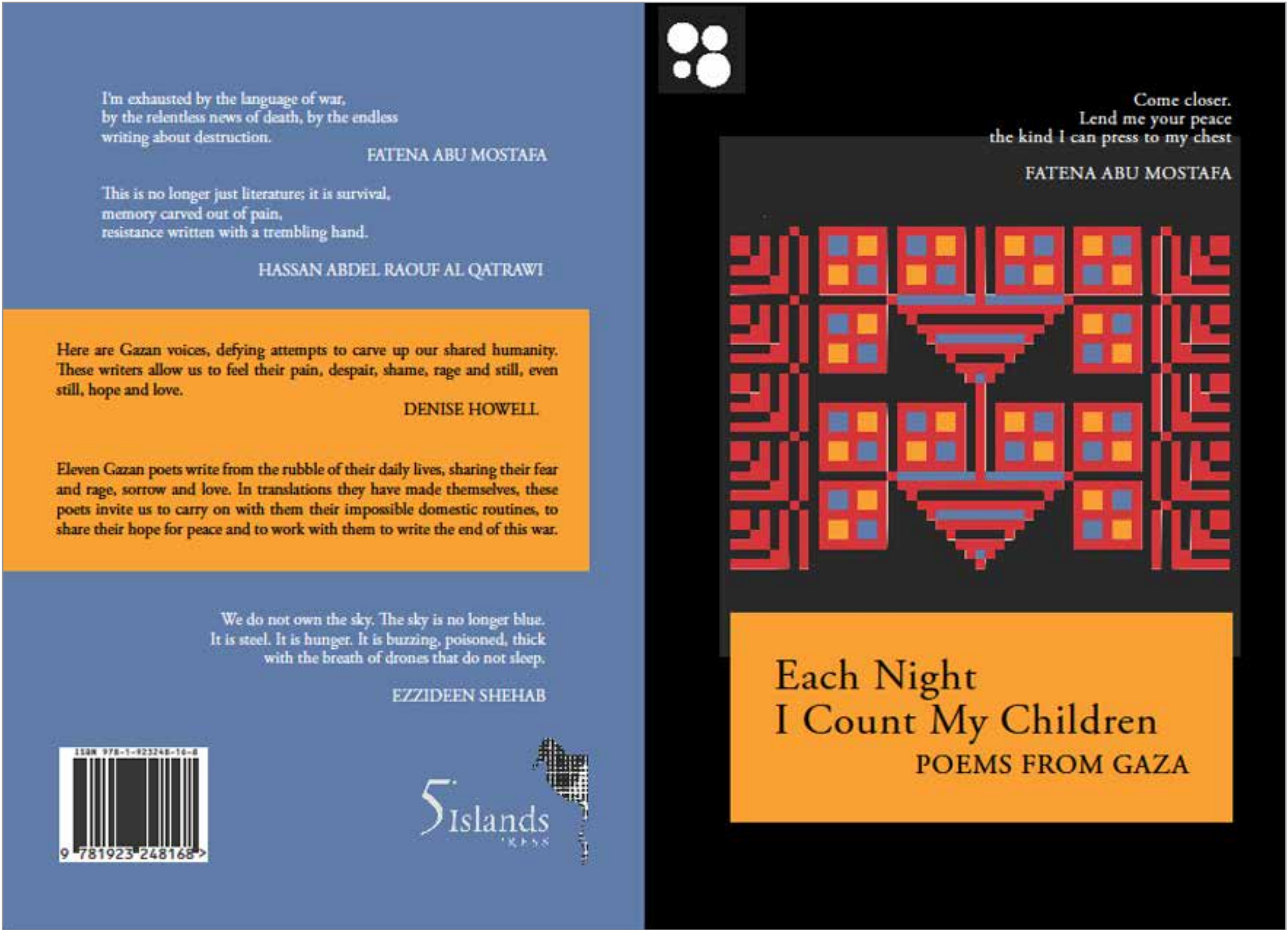
*I'm exhausted by the language of war,
By the relentless news of death, by the endless
Writing about destruction ...
Come closer.
Lend me your peace—
The kind I can press to my chest.*

There is poetry's work, spoken of by one under the bombs, one whose poems speak the language of peace even though there's a lot of war in them. There is our work, I think. There is the politics of the poem. To let us feel, in our selves, what the war is and what the dying and the suffering are and to insist on more from ourselves and our friends and leaders. The work of peace is poetry's work.

All That War is Not: How to Write Poems of Use in Times of Violence

For poetry refuses and softly refutes the violence of dehumanising discourses: war, fundamentalist ideology, absolutist politics, the words with which one tribe, in any context, steals humanity and variousness from the other. That is its politics, and it happens to our hearts. Poetry does not enmify; it takes life's side; it knows no idiom of revenge.

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Book available at <https://www.marktredinnick.com/books>

Poetry over the centuries has borne witness to what being feels like and what it may mean to live a finite life in an infinite universe, especially when the living is hard: as it is for the poets in this book, women and men and children carrying on under unrelenting siege in Gaza. Poetry restores dignity to death and sorrow and bitterness and abjection, to hope and survival and daily bread and to carrying on notwithstanding. It divines what is human, and therefore sacred, in moments particular to those who suffer (or are blessed by) them, and it invites us (readers) to know those moments as our own.

Good poems implicate their readers; in a sense, they turn the reader into their subject. This is the work of metaphor and speech music and form. The deeper speaking of poetry.

From often unbearable, chaotic, ecstatic or unimaginably awful eventualities, from suffering and privation, poetry fashions—in the voices of those who survive those moments—habitable forms, beautiful coherences, in which hope is possible again and violence falls well short of its aim. A poem is a soft bomb. A small incendiary device, a poem goes off and doesn't stop; but its work, unlike the bombs raining on Gaza, is to give life, not to take it, to dismantle ignorance and unsettle apathy, to transfigure rage into something more useful, to practise and engender compassion, to implicate the reader in both the cause of the trouble (or delight) and in its consequence and in the possible futures the poem helps us imagine.

A good poem, like all the remarkable pieces we included in the book *Each Night I Count my Children*, recruits the reader to help “write the ending” of this and every war.

Wars pursue and depend upon ideological abstractions (ideas about victory and homeland and enemy and patriotism and vengeance and so forth); they cheapen life in order to take it and to make that okay. Poetry should be all that war is not—innately human, relational, particular, contradictory, various and generative. A poem is not just a bullet; it is a mother and a father and a hearth and something unendurable to endure. It is despair seen off and tyranny stared down. It is a voice that loves life, even when it condemns those who take it.

The poems we were proud to publish in *Each Night* are partisan for peace and for life and for mothers and fathers and children. For hope and home. Even if you forget the circumstances under which they're written, they are remarkable instances of poetry's peace-making work, its soul-making, heart-breaking, mind-altering work: the way it has kept humanity (each of us and all of us) sane, made sense of senselessness, taught readers to find their own selves in the faces of the enemy (and the enemy's victim), to love better for being implicated in both the violence and the resilience.

These poems count their children, name their dead, remember the sky and the ramshackle city by the sea; they feed the cats, laugh at calamity, despair and keep going; they give in and cry out and find a way to wake again and refuse to fall silent. They throw soft bombs. They restart the revolution in the heart, which does, in the end, write the end of war.

A poem cannot stop a war; a book of poems won't bring about a peace. But still a book of peaceable poems can save lives by telling them and honouring them and those like them (many of them already lost), and it can help a beleaguered community by moving readers in a position to help, to help. Apart from reaching the readers Denise's book has already and reached, the book, through her generosity and that of my colleagues at the press, who gave their time for nothing and donate all takings to the work of MSB in Gaza, will be of some practical use. As all poems should, I reckon, try to be.

First, Do No Harm

Doctors, before they practise, take the Hippocratic Oath. First, do no harm: this is that oath, or the heart of it. Hippocrates (c.460–370 BC), to whom the oath is attributed, was a physician and philosopher from Kos, and although it is from his writings and that of the school of Epidemics he founded that the oath came, his words do not anywhere quite say “first, do no harm.” They say “I will abstain from all intentional wrong-doing and harm.” And they say “Practise two things in your dealings with disease: either help or do not harm the patient.” But the idea is the same: the primacy of refraining from harm in offering help—in meeting the medical needs of those you serve.

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And so over time, in the Latin phrase “primum non nocere,” and in the English “first, do no harm” settled into popular usage, though not in so many words, among medical practitioners (The world rarely runs exactly or as simply as it seems.) It is a form of words that all of us, even poets, know, but few of us, especially poets, pay enough attention to in our work.

Clearly the oath is not a promise that no patient should ever feel pain; the central idea, vital to the humanity of the practise of medical care, is that nothing the doctor does should be done for any reason other than to heal, to help the patient with their need. Something a doctor does, a surgery for instance, may hurt, but it must always aim to heal.

Interestingly, other versions of the oath doctors take remind the doctor that they treat a whole human (and indeed their family) and that the soft skills of the physician, like kindness and honesty and attention and the gentleness of the doctor’s speech and action, matter as much as scientific considerations in the practise of care. Not to play God, and not always to presume to have the answers.

Now, poetry has been important to all the human cultures we know of, and poetry has been associated in most, if not all, of them with healing work: it is for soul-making, said Keats; it is for survival, wrote Orr. There is no question readers have through the ages turned to poetry to find themselves accompanied in their pain or ecstasy and to help them make sense of the incomprehensible, to find a way through difficulties of the hearth and the mind and spirit.

So, if there were still, as I hope there is, a shared understanding that poetry ought to be spiritually or psychologically useful, even healing in some way—to make (and for the reader to find) in words a habitable coherence where before there was just trauma or a chaos of emotion—then the poet might want to take seriously the work she or her makes, the medicine they offer to the world. In which case it is worth asking what an oath like “first, do no harm” might look like for a poet, and whether it might help us find our readers, and help them, again.

If a poet were asked to take an equivalent of the Hippocratic oath before making a poem, it might, I reckon, have these dimensions.

- First, to help. Not just to voice, but to meet human needs for language that heals and elevates our understanding of being alive in a troubled world; that makes readers kinder and braver and less afraid and less full of ourselves.
- Also to cause no harm to language or person, while throwing light or bearing witness or consoling grief, or giving delight, or recasting the spell (as Emily Dickinson put it), or however it is one thinks one’s words might help (the language, the world, the imagined reader, the general stock of wisdom, the moral clarity of one’s times).
- To treat, as it were, the wholeness of the person (the reader), not just her intellect or his politics or their sociological or anthropological or cultural category, but their being, their incorrigible variousness, their drunkenness of variousness.
- To arise from one’s whole self, at one’s best and fullest, not merely in one’s professional life or social category. To write, as Montaigne once put it, as “all that I am.” Out of one’s flawed and mysterious and various humanity.
- Not to play god: never to be too certain of one’s observations or categories or mantras or prescriptions, one’s understanding of who is victim and who is perpetrator, of who is right and who is wrong. To be aware of the terrible complexity of things, and yet to be clear in one’s values, partisan always for justice. Poetry, after all, forgives us for being human, and finds us all both culpable and innocent and in need of some care.
- To honour the obligations a poet owes, not just to their own people and readers, but to the future and the past, and in particular to the great long tradition of the making and sharing and private reading of poetry, the deep importance of that tradition to the wellbeing of human societies and to individuals in those societies. This is not just diverting hobby, in other words; nor is it a microphone and a mobile phone and a chance to hurl curses and opprobrium at the bad and the ugly; poetry is a gift given to you to put to work for others, to rekindle the revolution in their heart).

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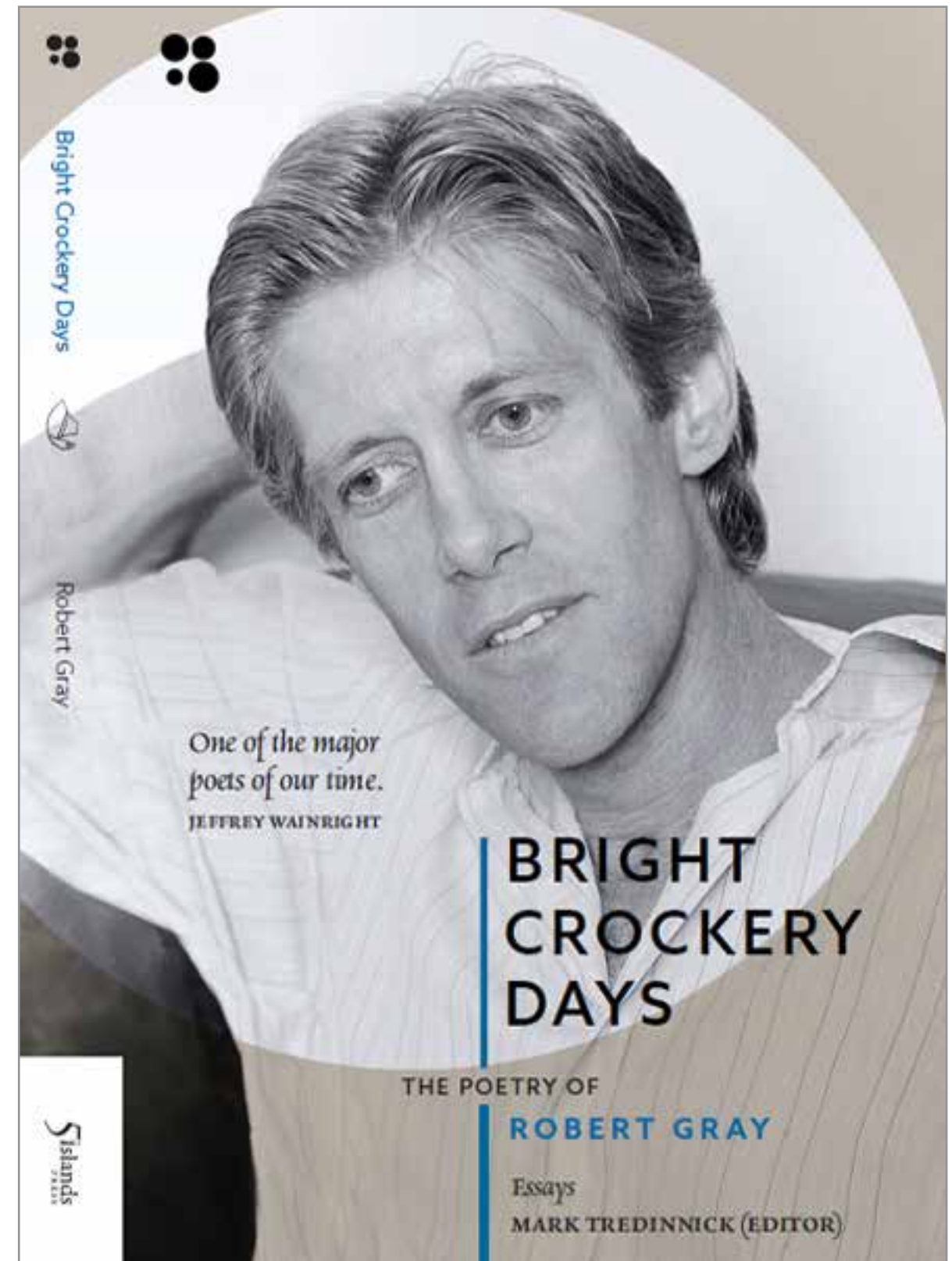
T S Eliot, Dante, and the Poet as a Servant of Language (and its Readers)

Asked to make a lecture on Dante, Eliot wrote an essay, instead, that walks around the ways *The Divine Comedy* and its poet had touched and influenced him—in life and in letters. Such is my affection for the great Italian poet, we named a dog for him: Dante, the golden cocker spaniel, for whom the straight way was always lost. Jodie and I read our way through Dante during COVID, sharing the Italian in our best imitation of how it might have sounded, and moving between Sinclair's prose and Sayers's metrical poetic translation, and checking also, when her meter got in the way, more recent translations that attempt to catch the poetry but not to imitate all the poetics, and that time in our lives, though the going is not always easy and the divinity not always all that comedic, will remain one of the times of our lives.

Because this short trip to the Capertee is a celebration of our first wedding anniversary, Jodie brought with her the book in which Eliot's essay "What Dante Means to Me" appears, and two days ago she read it aloud over breakfast. In her voice was Eliot's voice and inside his, Dante's old Italian, and here and there some Shelley. Or not their voices, but the music of their intelligence and craft and the humanity they witnessed.

I can't claim to be either as steeped in Dante as Eliot was or as deeply influenced by him, though it stays with you, that musical intelligence, that imagery, the humour and the rhythm of the wisdom. I'm with Eliot when he writes that there are some poets, he calls the masters, "to whom one slowly grows up." I'd tried Dante a few times in my thirties and forties, but I think I was only ready for him, in my reading and craft and in my living, in my fifties. Eliot was largely wasted on me at school, too; I'd grown into him by thirty-three, and largely out of him by fifty, but his ideas—the objective correlative, the power or rhythm, individual talent and the poetic tradition—stick with me.

And so it is that Eliot's three conclusions about Dante feel like better ways of saying things I have been teaching and preaching and trying to practise for over fifty years. I have no doubt that, like Sappho and Dickinson and Shakespeare and Auden and Rumi and others it is perhaps to early to be sure about, Dante was as masterly a thinker and world-builder and, above all, an artist of the line as anyone ever.



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It may be, as Eliot says, that though many poets are wonderful, and we need every one of them, but only a few are great. And to the great artists (Hannah Arendt says the same of Auden, by the way) Eliot attributes three particular qualities. I'm not sure it helps much these days to speak of masters and others. Certainly, though, the qualities Eliot touches on in Dante would be useful for all of us who write to work at.

And it seems to me we'd win our readership back and show the world how useful and necessary poetry can be, if we valued and attempt to practise these values and skills.

1. "The great master of language," writes Eliot of Dante, "should be the great servant of it." Through sustained attention to one's craft and to one's language, the great poets do, writes Eliot, and the rest of us should, use the language, whichever is ours, in its fullness, to serve it by stretching and renewing it—but not mostly by innovation or personal eccentricity, by ignoring its ways or subverting or abusing it. The language we write in comes to us as a great gift, I've often thought, and we ought to earn that gift, that privilege, by the love and care with which we employ it, by adapting ourselves to it as much as it to us, by fitting it thoughtfully to our times and the needs of our readers in our times. Let's aim, in other words, not to fuck language up in the service of our ambitions, but to leave it at least as rich and wide and fine as we found it. *First, in other words, let's do no harm*, and beyond that, to do some good to the language and somehow ennoble it and enable it to reach out in its native wealth to more readers than would have been the case without us, so that the language, as it finds our readers through our poems, to do some radical good.

"To pass to posterity one's own language," Eliot says, "more highly developed, more refined, and more precise than it was before one wrote it, that is the highest possible achievement of the poet as poet."

2. The poet, Eliot would say the great poet, has the gift, or develops the art through practices of inward and outward attention of wider and deeper and more discerning apprehension of the phenomena in which the world plays out and one's own life and the lives of others play out in it, experience existence in its many forms and colours.

The poet notices more shades and "vibrations," as Eliot puts it, of lived experience. And the poet will be good or great to the extent that they have the natural gift—or train themselves by apprenticeship, reading and practice—of finding within the language to which they have access ways of saying that do justice to that wider range of perception and deep and more subtle range of thought that is the core practice of the poet.

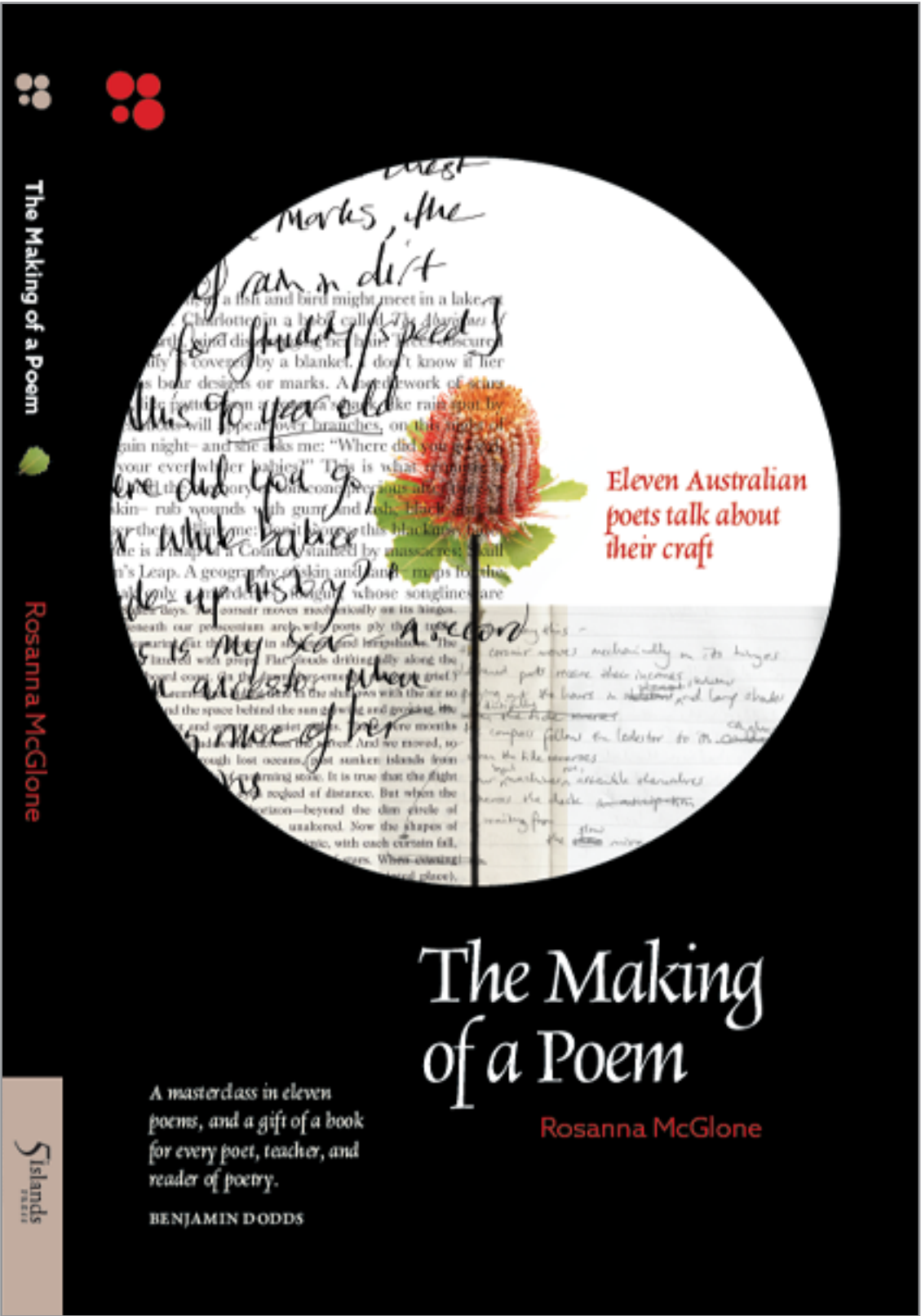
And so, as Eliot notes, the first gift or genius (linguistic accomplishment, craft, the practised mastery of the language in its semantic and lyric, figurative and musical realms) serves the second (seeing and feeling and thinking more fully). So the poet who would write some poems of use will see deeper into how life plays out, into the heart of the "incomprehensible" or mysterious or mystifying or terrifying or ecstatic, and they will offer a response to the plurality of what they apprehend, that in its sheer adequacy, in its mastery of language and poetics, serves its material more faithfully and invites a reader more fully into a comprehension of the incomprehensible, into an experience deeper than they had known they could have, or into an understanding of a phenomenon of living that a reader had known but hardly understood—and now does.

One of the ways good poetry serves us all is to expand the emotional, phenomenological range and literacy of those who read it, and of the cultures, at large, in which that poetry finds its place. This, it seems to me, has been the work—help with allowing us more fully and usefully and safely to feel and know and survive sanely the kinds of trouble and delight every life bumps into—that poetry has performed through the ages. And it is the work readers expect it to do. So, when much of the poetry readers encounter fails either to notice profoundly or speak of what it meets with well (remarkably, but clearly), to speak of it, even half to sing of it, not merely to think or rage about it—they lose their faith in poetry.

3. Dante, Eliot observes, writes from where and who he is—his times, his place, his language, his culture, his nature—but somehow, at the same time, he speaks about and speaks to all times and all places and all languages and creeds and genders and ways of being. Dante is, Eliot intones, the least provincial of poets, but "he did not become the least provincial by ceasing to be local." The Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh wrote that the parish was the proper province of the poem. "To know fully even one field or land is a lifetime's experience," he wrote. He understood the parish not as place or worldview that shut out or denied the world, but as an "aperture" through which, alone, the world might be seen and known and named. Depth, he wrote, not width, is the work of the poem.

Eliot does not spend much time on this point in his published talk; perhaps he ran out of time. But I would say that the trick here is to know your moment as an instance of all such moments, this war and suffering as instances of all such traumas, your place as one incarnation of the world, not as if it were the world, let alone the best or worst place in it.

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History, the poet understands, is made of moments such as these, and she writes in that knowledge, offering up the world near at hand, the bird, the love affair, the loss, as an instance of all such phenomena everywhere and any time. Dante, for Eliot, and it felt like that to me reading the *Commedia*, has that knack. All that Dante’s poet encounters in hell and purgatory and paradise, though peculiar to times and ways now lost on us, seems spoken in one’s own voice and seems to happen to oneself— now, in whatever analogous circumstances one finds oneself in. There will always be lessons in a good poem for the times and troubles the reader lives in, far away though she is in time and place, from the time and place the poem witnesses. The good poet knows that it is not herself she writes, but all such selves, ever, and anywhere.

How the Poets Have Run Themselves Out of Town and How They Might Run Themselves Back in Again

We find ourselves in times that need poetry more than they know. And just when it is needed most, poetry, for most of the people who need it, is hard to find and harder yet to fathom or put to much use. For one thing, poetry plays much less central a role in most people’s lives than it used to—than it should. This is true especially across those parts of the world where English is the dominant language and where late-stage capitalism is in the ascendancy. By contrast, it struck me, reading the poems Denise Howell sent me to consider for the anthology—poems written by teachers and doctors and nurses and students and psychologists, by mothers and fathers, and in some cases “professional” poets—how much accomplishment in craft and perception and articulation were on display, suggestive of people more steeped in a long tradition of poetry than is true of most of us who speak our lives in contemporary English, most of the people, including book-lovers and teachers and students, that I encounter in my native land.

I don’t want, here, to rehearse the many reasons for poetry’s flight from the centre of our values and days. Some of the reasons are what the economists call exogenous, beyond readers’ and poets’ control (the radio, popular music, the internet, aesthetic theories that forgot to take readers along with them, television, the ascendancy of film ...). But we poets who mourn our falling sales, the absence or the slenderness of poetry sections in most bookshops, the lack of media attention to poetry, the lack of poetry literacy, would do well to look at ourselves and the practice of our art.

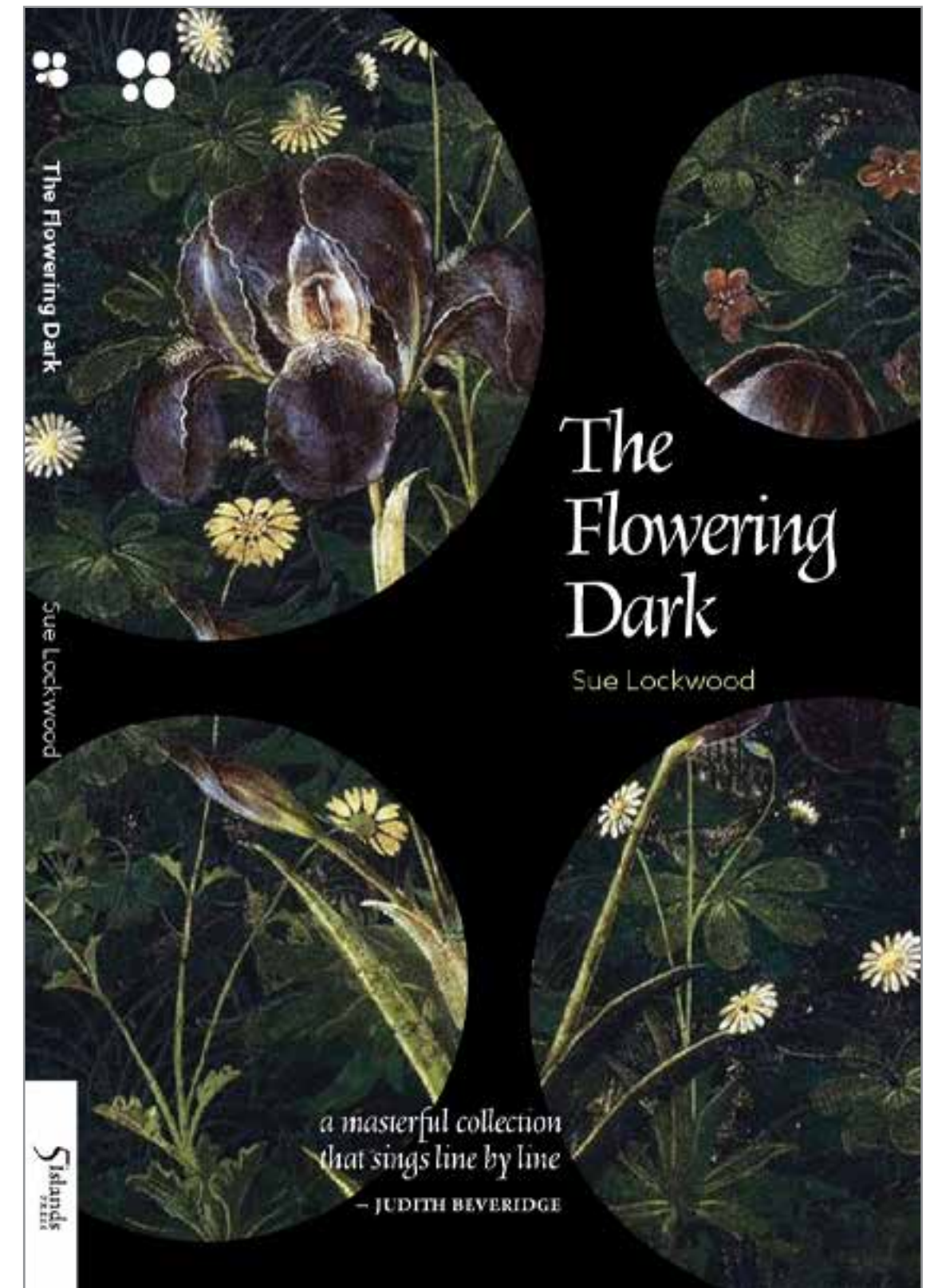
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This, too, is a big story, but since the dawn of modernism, the coming of free verse, the rejection of form (of meter and speech music and rhythm structures and often, too, the rejection of punctuation and syntax, the refusal to make sense), the story of poetry is its turning from its readers; it is the story of its refusal of the role it has played and plays still in many cultures—the making of memorable sense of mystery and tragedy and delight, of being of some use. The story of twentieth and twenty-first century poetry in the west is two divorces: from its readers and their needs (for clarity and delight, the work of lyric sense-making poems from the dawn of human languages have fulfilled), and from language and its service, at its best, of our deepest human needs, as I’ve explored them here.

Poetry has largely in our times uncoupled itself, with the support of wave after wave of theory, from the tradition of (oracular, arresting, strange, memorable) sense-making by means of form and speech music and of patterns of syntax recognisable to most readers.

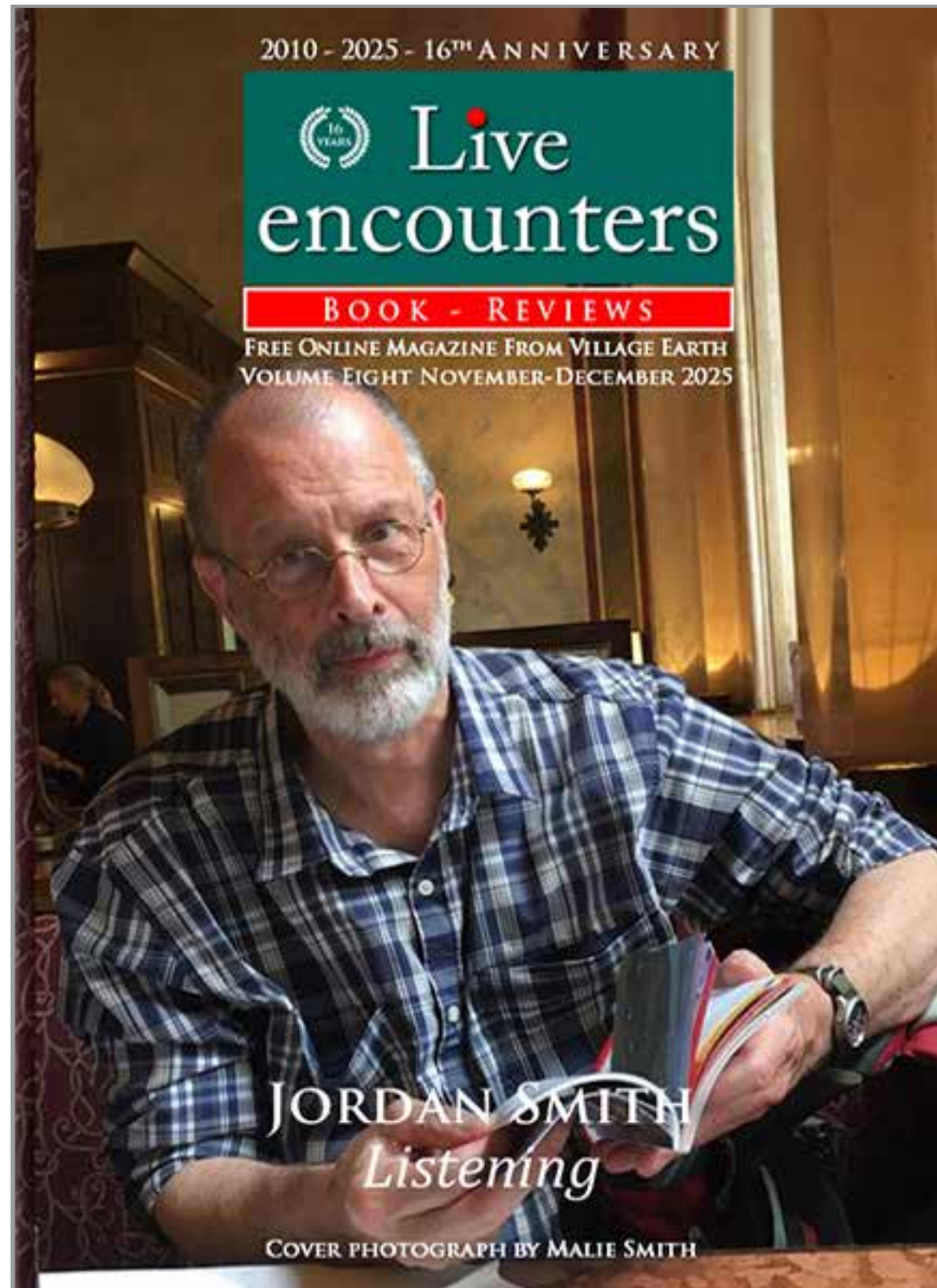
There are many exceptions, of course, many poets even in recent times, like Seamus Heaney, Mary Oliver, W H Auden, Judy Beveridge, Joy Harjo, David Brooks, who have kept the poet’s oath to language and readers and the healing of spiritual harm, through devices of language used at its most economical and stirring. But poetry has lost its readership, has lost the greater part of its market; its brand awareness, as the commercial people say, is fading, readers are out of touch and out of love with poetry, suspicious of it, and that is a tragedy. A tragedy very largely of poetry’s own making. This is not really something that has happened to poetry. Forgetting whom and what they serve, persuaded by one theory after another that has elevated thought over language, the idea over the utterance, the poet over the reader, *the poets have run themselves out of town*.

Time to find a way back in. Manifestly, no one can live long in a world from which the lyric has taken flight, where daily discourse is violent and stupid and brutal in ways that any good poem would sing right out of town.



Available at: <https://www.5islandspress.com/product-page/the-flowering-dark-by-sue-lockwood>

Jordan Smith is the author of eight full-length books of poems, most recently *Little Black Train*, winner of the Three Mile Harbor Press Prize and *Clare's Empire*, a fantasia on the life and work of John Clare from The Hydroelectric Press, as well as several chapbooks, including *Cold Night*, *Long Dog* from Ambidextrous Bloodhound Press. The recipient of fellowships from the John Simon Guggenheim and Ingram Merrill foundations, he is the Edward Everett Hale Jr. Professor of English at Union College.



JORDAN SMITH

LISTENING

I'm on my usual walk in the woods near my house, and as usual I have earbuds in place and I'm listening to music. Today it's an album by a group of Ornette Coleman alumni, *Old and New Dreams*, a long-time favorite. But today I am also depressed, anxious, angry—why doesn't matter; you have your own list, I bet—so much so that the music hardly registers. I'm thinking about stopping it and putting my earbuds in my pocket, and that is not how it usually goes.

About a quarter mile into the stand of mixed hardwoods, I've gone past the wall of bugs that shimmers at the trailhead, down the steep hill with the little side trail to the ledge where the high school kids hang out, across the creek on the new bridge the Boy Scouts built, half-way up the equally steep other side, turned to follow the trail that climbs the edge of the ridge more gradually, before I actually begin to hear the music. The first cut is Ornette's "Lonely Woman," bluesy and melancholy. If I were looking for music to fit my state of mind, this might do it, but that's neither how nor why I want to hear it. What catches me a minute or so in is Charlie Haden's bass.

Low pulses repeated, it might be the abstraction to near-zero of Coleman's subtle, complex melody, beautifully articulated by Don Cherry's trumpet, but I can't imagine one apart from the other, not in this moment, any more than I can imagine silence without sound, consciousness without the binary oppositions that seem to make it possible. Ornette's melody is a cry, a woman's cry, as he tells us in the title. Cherry's trumpet gives it voice, but a trumpet is not a woman, and we've no way of knowing if her loneliness is something he shares, but he inhabits it as she inhabits his horn. And if Haden's bass is neither, neither is it separable. It is the Tao that cannot be told, it is Thomas' "the force that through the green fuse drives the flower," it is Dickinson's "formal feeling" that witnesses loss but cannot stop for it. A few more minutes into the track, Haden takes a solo, playing the melody with great insistence and delicacy, after a passage in which Ed Blackwell's low drum meshed so closely with the bass you could hardly anticipate which you'd hear next, a moment of unity, which is presence defined by the absence which it defines. It is beautiful and entirely without sentiment.

I've been listening to Charlie Haden since I discovered jazz in my mid-teens. I may have read about Ornette Coleman's music in *Downbeat* or in a book by Nat Hentoff, but I first heard one of his records in the listening room of the Rundell Library in Rochester, the massive and elegant building along the Genessee River (on opposite bank was the National Casket Company, whose sign, clearly visible from the listening room, was the subject of a memorable piece of light verse in the local paper, a comedic version of the Buddhist evening gatha about the decreasing number of our days) where I came to check out books I couldn't understand. If it was avant garde or difficult, I wanted to know about it, if not necessarily to know it. *Finnegan's Wake* defeated me. James Merrill's poems resembled nothing in my life, and the *Cantos*... When difficulty outweighed pleasure, I hadn't the chops for it. But that album—*Ornette!*, with Blackwell, Cherry, and Scott LaFaro on bass instead of Haden—I got right away. *Dancing in Your Head* Ornette would title another album decades later, and that's what this early album was doing, especially, I thought, an aspiring trumpet player myself, when Cherry took the lead. The idiosyncratic solos, like good monologues amidst the conversational interplay, the propulsions and provocations and asides. The band wasn't playing who they were. They were playing an idea of freedom, of who we all might be.

The next cut, "Togo," begins as a Cherry solo, and then a voice articulates the rhythm. Blackwell joins in on percussion and then it's his solo, *his* articulation of the pulse Cherry set up and, as at moments in "Lonely Woman," the lowest drum fills in for what a bass might do, and it is hard to tell if I hear the bass as there or as absent.

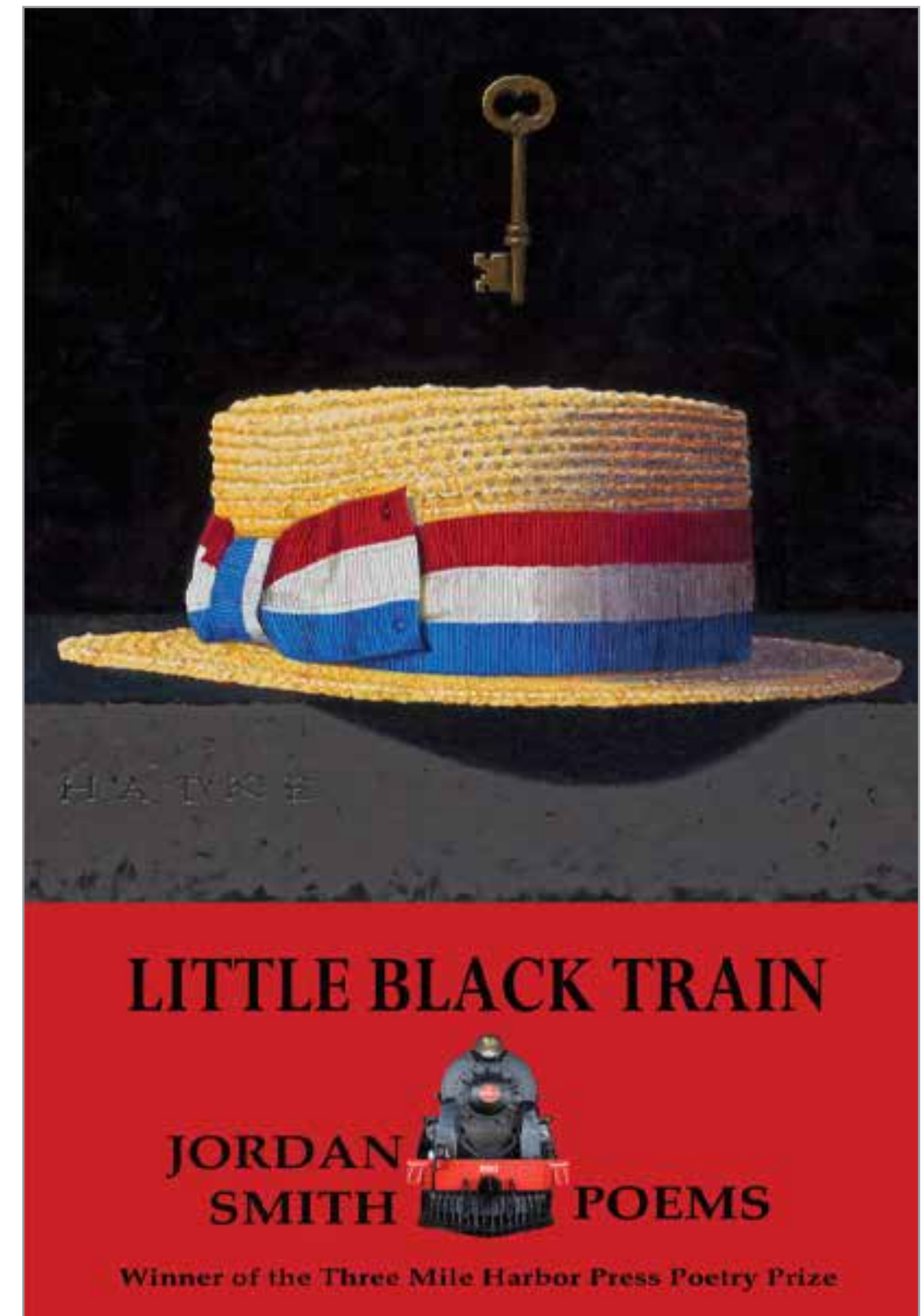
I was so locked into Haden on "Lonely Woman" that missing him here is almost as intense as hearing him. I don't think I would have noticed any of this if I hadn't been reading *Where the Heart Beats*, Kay Larson's study of the influence of Zen Buddhism on John Cage. Larson retells a story that Cage loved to repeat, of his visit to the anechoic chamber at Harvard in search of total silence. It wasn't there. He heard what the technician said was the low sound of his blood circulating and the high pitch of his nerves firing. This might have been disappointing—where was the silence? Instead, Larson explains, it was liberating, an insight into the way in which all our oppositions are co-dependent, each arising in the midst of our desire for the other. Haden lays out on "Togo," but if you come to that song after "Lonely Woman," you can still hear his presence in what he might have played. The next cut on the cd, "Guinea," opens with another Cherry solo. Cherry's tone on this album, recorded with the ECM label's typical clarity and precision, is gorgeous, in need of no electronic enhancement. But the engineer has added a shimmer of reverb at the end of each phrase. He's there, then he isn't, but he still is. Then the shimmer becomes Blackwell's cymbals.

One use of art, Larson quotes Cage as suggesting, is not self-expression, but self-alteration. Listening now as I reach the crest of the ridge where the hardwoods begin to shift towards the pine plantation that makes up the lower part of the park, I'm not so lost in myself; there's less self to be lost in. Shimmer into something like that glint of cymbals. That possibility: like the music, it's here and then it's gone. And then the next song comes on, unexpectedly, T' Monde's Cajun version of Huddy Ledbetter's "In the Pines." I must have jiggled my phone in my pocket. Happens all the time. The music: here and then it's gone, just like Mick Jagger sings.

And then it's not. There are desolation and desperation in "In the Pines," whether the version is T'Monde's or Leadbelly's or Fantastic Negrito's or Bill Monroe's or Kurt Cobain's, that will not leave you when the music stops. If ever a song felt like a curse to be borne, this one is it. And an invitation too. How many versions are there, with each singer taking on the tangling and scraping of a scramble through those dense branches, as if there was another side to come out on. While the order of the verses floats depending on who is singing them, and so does the emphasis—infidelity, deadly labor, desperate love in a desolate landscape—two things persist: the deception that's staring us in the face and the shiver when the cold winds blow through those woods. Presence and negation dancing. This world we recognize and barely know.

Which is another way of describing poetry, not just poems, but the nature of poetic composition, a subject treated beautifully in Christopher Nicholson's *The Making of Poetry*, a study of the early works of Coleridge and Wordsworth that the author carried out by living in the countryside where they'd retreated, visiting their houses, walking their walks, and speculating on just what state of mind they might have fallen into, a way of reading that does honor to the lives and the writing. One step, and then another. One step follows and alters the one that implied its possibilities; one word strikes the empty ground of the page and anticipates the emptiness just coming. I do a lot of writing in my head in these woods, in the hardwoods where the oaks frame the sharp blue sky of an upstate summer, in the pines that cross that same blue in winter, like strike-throughs on a page, elisions that finally make the light clearer, more intense: a shimmer, a shiver where the cold wind blows.

The shimmer is the fear that we can't hold what moves us most in the splendor of its presence. The shiver is the fear of the nothing that, as Stevens said, we cannot know until we became it. Now that I've let the music stop, it's the poems that accompany me: "The Snowman," and Dylan Thomas, and Emily Dickinson, the lines of Merrill and Pound that flummoxed me years ago in the library and that I live with now, complicated but companionable. (You've got your own list, I bet, and your own playlist of songs.) Marvin Bell's "I'd have to ask the grass to let me sleep." Marvin had a habit of interrupting a thought by saying, "You remember that poem by," and he'd mention a poet, "the one that starts..." He knew I'd come to love Merrill's work, so on our last visit, out of nowhere, he reminded me of the opening of JM's "Mad Scene," "Again last night I dreamed the dream of laundry." It was his way of acknowledging that we were friends now, who were once teacher and student, and it was no more an interruption than the sudden revelation that comes just before the formulaic conclusion of a tale of Zen transmission, "and then he was greatly enlightened." And then he was gone, but not, because see what I have remembered here between the hardwoods and the pines.



Book available at:

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Little-Black-Train-Jordan-Smith/dp/0998340642>

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