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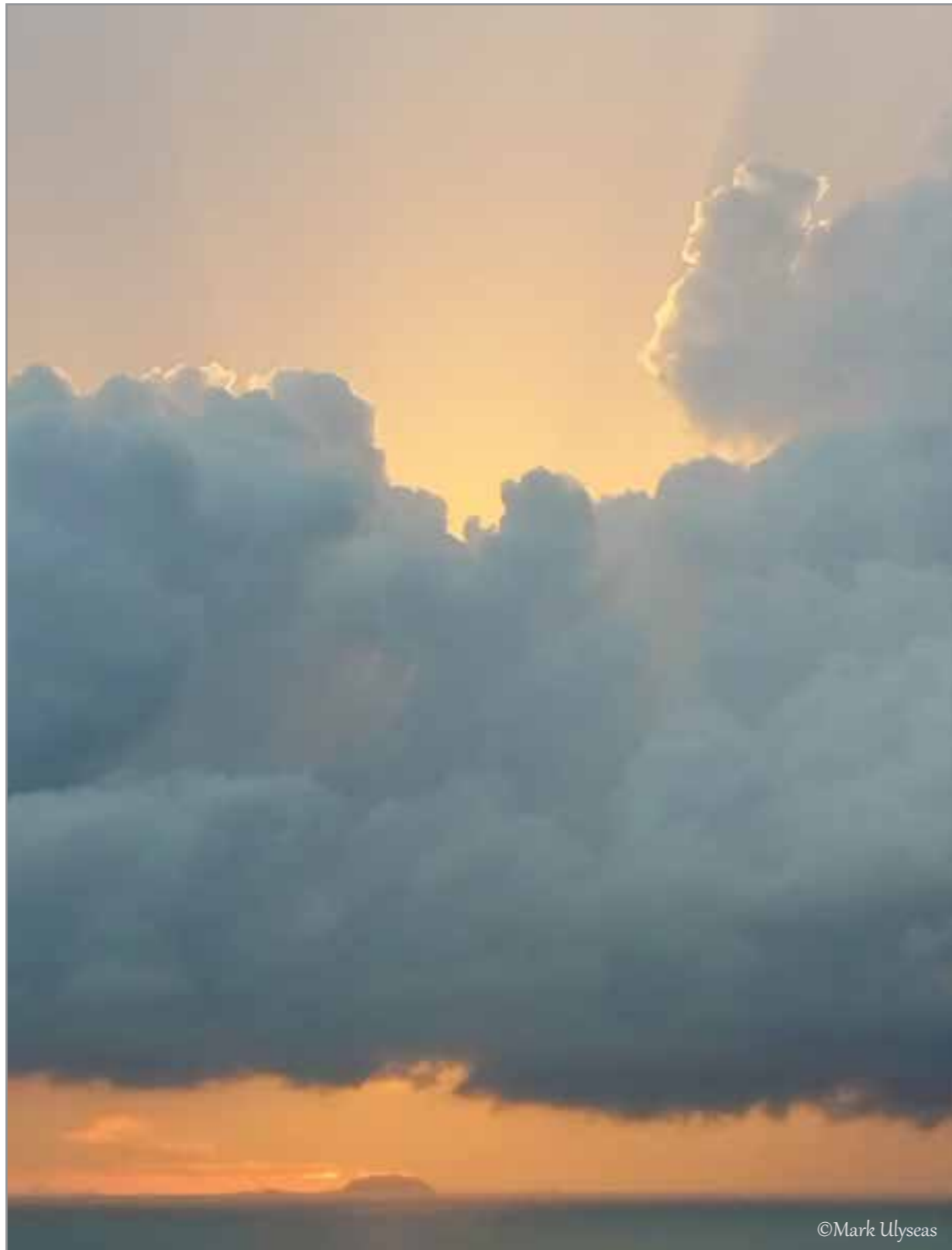
Live
encounters

POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH
APRIL 2026

BRIAN KIRK
Begin Again

COVER ARTWORK 'TERRAFORMING' BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



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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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APRIL 2026

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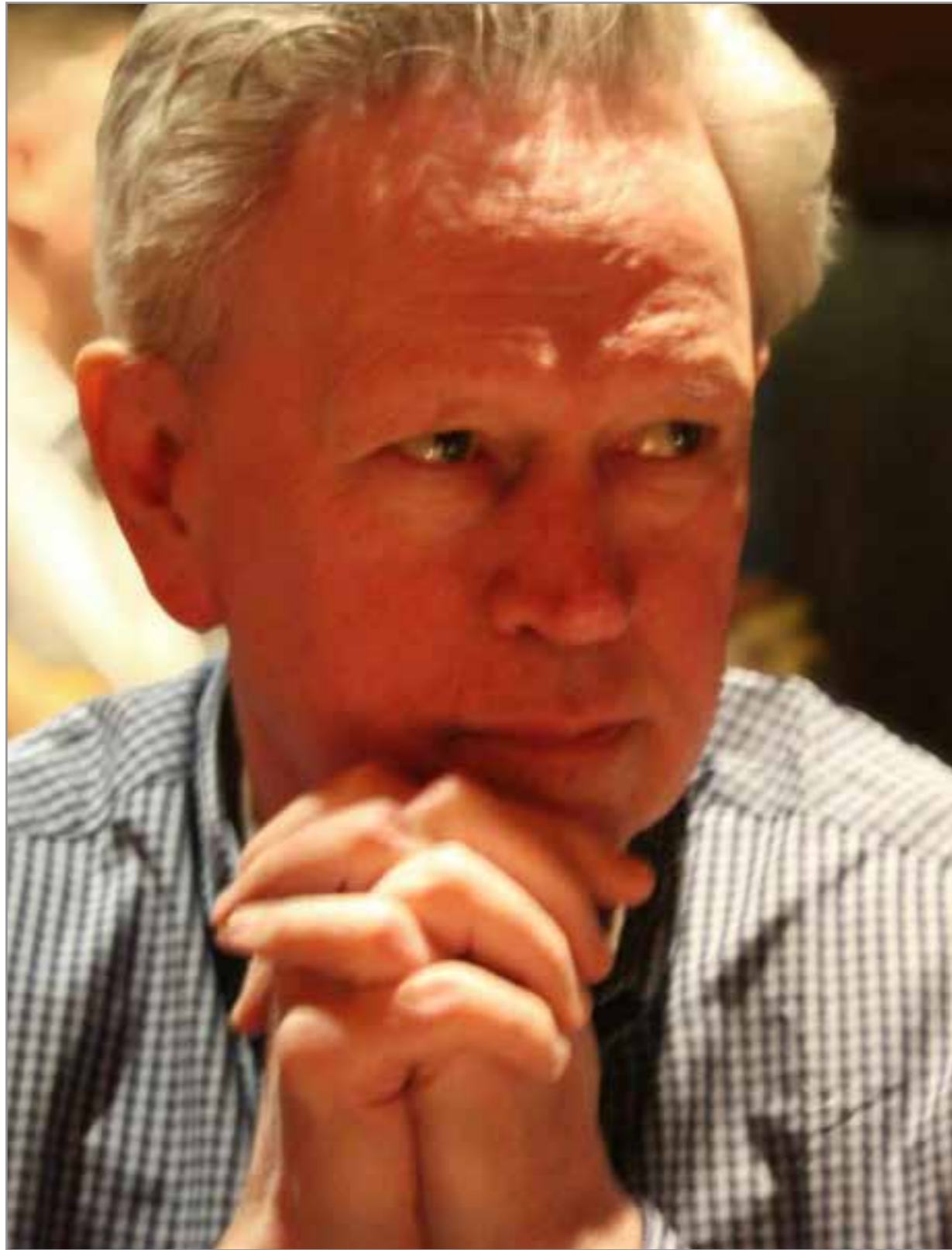
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Brian Kirk is a poet, short story writer and novelist from Dublin. He has published two collections of poetry with Salmon Poetry, *After The Fall* (2017) and *Hare's Breath* (2023). His poem "Birthday" won the Listowel Writers' Week Irish Poem of the Year at the Irish Book Awards 2018. His short fiction chapbook *It's Not Me, It's You* won the Southword Fiction Chapbook Competition and was published by Southword Editions in 2019. He is a recipient of Professional Development and Agility Awards from the Arts Council of Ireland. His novel *Riverrun* was chosen as a winner of the Irish Writers Centre Novel Fair 2022 and was shortlisted for the Spotlight First Novel Award 2023. His poetry has been published in the Irish Times, Poetry Ireland Review, Cyphers, Abridged, Skylight 47, Crannóg, Live Encounters and many others, and has been featured on The Poetry Programme, RTÉ Radio One and the Words Lightly Spoken podcast. Brian has been a guest author and hosted events at literary festivals around the country including Dublin Book Festival, Listowel Writers' Week, Red Line Book Festival, Cork Short Story Festival, Ó Bhéal Winter Warmer Poetry Festival, Belfast Book Festival and Bray Literary Festival.

BRIAN KIRK BEGIN AGAIN

It's natural at the beginning of the year to feel low. The hoopla surrounding the celebration of new year encourages us to look to the future with renewed optimism, but it isn't always easy. We have weathered the privations of winter, sated our appetites during the holiday festivities, and now it's time to gaze outward again at a world that we hope will be brighter and offer some sort of renewal. From the beginning of time, in all cultures, our lives have been tied to the passage of time, to the changing of the seasons. Even now, in the post-digital age, with the uncertainty that AI threatens for artists and creatives, in a time of dramatic climate change, a time of war and hostility, we still align our lives with the rotation of the earth around our sun. Regardless of race or faith we have an innate need to feel a part of the natural order of things, to experience up close these cycles of birth, death and regeneration.

Some winters are longer and harder than others. This year in Ireland, the weather has been depressing, raining almost every day during January and February. That, coupled with the shorter hours of daylight, narrows the small window of opportunity to be out in the world interacting with others and nature. The absence of this tangible engagement with other people and the natural world works to erode us as humans. We become silent, distant, unsure of ourselves in a world that appears alien to us. We retreat into worlds that are not authentic, not reflective of life as it has been and should be lived. We have our private cares also. Maybe a loved one is sick, or a friend has passed on, or a job is in jeopardy. All this adds to our withdrawal from the world. And this year the world has become less enticing. War is waged for no reason, and the lives of the innocent are counted as nothing, truth and lies are two sides of the same coin for many who hold power. Where does that leave us? What can we do? What is the point of it all?



Brian Kirk

continued overleaf...

Every new year is a new beginning, but it is not always easy to begin again. For many years now reading and writing has been a hugely positive part of my life. And this year two groups have helped regenerate my creative journey. The first is the *Hibernian Poetry Workshop* which I've been a member of for a number of years now. We meet in person in the Teacher's Club on Parnell Street in Dublin on the second Friday of every month to read and discuss our new poems. Last year, for a number of reasons, I missed most of our workshops, so this year I was determined to attend regularly. The group is made up of experienced and talented poets, so I always feel an urgent responsibility to bring good work to the table. Part of the success of the group is the social element of meeting up and chatting, but the poetry is ultimately the most important part. The poets are honest, fair, critical in the best possible way, and the comments received are taken in good faith in the manner in which they are offered.

The second writerly group I meet up with is more concerned with the role of the reader. At *Story Club* six prose writers (some of us poets also) meet once a month via Zoom to discuss and dissect a short story chosen and circulated by one of the group on rotation. We are all writers engaged in our own projects, and as a result we tend to read like writers. There is time for chat and personal and professional catching up as well as close reading and argument. It's remarkable how opinions can vary in such a small group in relation to the perceived success or otherwise of a story. Each time we meet I come away with a better understanding of the form and what excites me as a reader and a writer.

These regular outlets, of course, feed directly into my own creative projects, sometimes sending me off to research writers that are new to me or to read more work by a given author who has touched a chord for me. As writers and as humans, we are learning all the time. Reading and writing, immersing oneself in another life or imagining how another life could be lived, is the root of all learned empathy outside of family and role models. And for me, empathy is the key trait we need to learn if we are to continue to live together in a world that seems to have lost its way. It is also the key component of great writing.

Writing can be a lonely undertaking at times. That's why it is vital to spend time with fellow writers and artists, to get that sense of solidarity in the face of all that the world might throw at you. That's why I love to attend readings, author events, book launches. They are milestones on the writer's journey, celebrations of the work and the word. And the word is what we seek, the next word, the right word, until the line is finished, or the stanza, or the poem.

When I need fuel for the journey I go back to the books that rekindle the flame, the desire to create. At this time of year I go back to the poems and the poets that started me on the road that I'm still on as a writer and a human being. I'm thinking first of all of the Irish poet, Patrick Kavanagh, whose poetry was a staple on every secondary school syllabus for years. I particularly think of lines from *Canal Bank Walk*, written after he was diagnosed with lung cancer and had a lung removed in Baggot Street Hospital in the 1950s.

*O unworn world enrapture me, encapture me in a web
Of fabulous grass and eternal voices by a beech,
Feed the gaping need of my senses, give me ad lib
To pray unselfconsciously with overflowing speech
For this soul needs to be honoured with a new dress woven
From green and blue things and arguments that cannot be proven.*

Another poem I return to is *Begin* by Kerry poet, the late Brendan Kennelly. It starts:

*Begin again to the summoning birds
to the sight of the light at the window,
begin to the roar of morning traffic
all along Pembroke Road.*

The poem is grounded in images of the everyday: rain, flowers, couples, girls, swans and seagulls on the canal. And it ends beautifully, with a message that is as apposite today as it was when it was written:

*Though we live in a world that dreams of ending
that always seems about to give in
something that will not acknowledge conclusion
insists that we forever begin.*

And that is what we must do every year and every day. Begin again. More than ever at the moment the world seems intent on ending itself, but we must persevere somehow, and the words and work of writers and artists give us the strength to do so.

DESPATCHES *

i.m. Edward Sheridan, Petty Officer Telegraphist, Royal Navy (1917 – 1945)

Struck amidships,
the gaping hole invited water
and the final memories

of a short life lived
in search of *Boys' Own* exploits.
You watched the ranks

of swallows on the wires,
when shadows lengthened
on a midlands farm,

and dreamt of Java,
Alexandria, Ceylon. First
time you ran away,

they sent you back:
too young. But two years later
they took you as a Boy

at fifteen years, six months.
You learned your trade in peacetime,
long before the Munich Crisis

sparked orders to weigh
anchor and embark for Freetown
and a protracted war;

tapping the code
that sent the words
to safety beyond the boom

of wave and ocean
spume to harbours
that were havens

where all futures met.
But yours was not assured.
Although you dodged the fate

of *Perseus*, it took a winter
visitor to sink the *Lapwing*
in the Barents Sea.

Homing torpedo from a U-boat
broke the boat in two.
A wife and daughter

waited, hoped a message
would not come. The worst
arrived in Royal livery,

O.H.M.S. and postage paid.
By order of the King
and the First Lord

of the Admiralty:
*he gave his life to save
mankind from tyranny.*

* HMS Lapwing was sunk by torpedo on 20 March 1945. Of the 229 officers and men aboard there were 61 survivors. Unfortunately, Edward Sheridan was not among them. He was posthumously awarded a Mention in Despatches, published in the London Gazette of the 7 August 1945.

Despatches was first published in Hare's Breath, Salmon Poetry (2023)

Denise O'Hagan is a Sydney-based editor and poet, born in Rome. She has a background in academic publishing in London and Sydney, and is poetry editor with *The Marrow*. Her third poetry collection, *What the Mirror Tells*, is forthcoming with 5 Islands Press (2026). Her awards include the Dalkey Poetry Prize, the Monica Taylor Poetry Prize and the NSW Poetry Prize.
<https://denise-ohagan.com>



RELIQUARY

The elderly couple enter
 quietly. Her arm is tucked into his, and they cross
 the floor steady as snails after the rain, pausing neither
 at the lone woman crooning
 before traces of the torment of the damned,
 scratching at herself gently with her painted nails, nor
 before a flushed Virgin in prayer
 buoyed by a choir of androgynous angels
 halfway to heaven,
 or even at the child working the zip
 in a tourist's handbag by the melancholy light
 of a hundred candles,
 until they reach the side chapel
 where the chipped tooth of the Saint is hanging
 by a golden chain from the top of a cage
 where, fingers raised to the glass, they stand
 as one, immobile, polishing its ivory with
 their passionate gaze—

Denise O'Hagan.

DEATH OF A GOLDFISH

She stood silent in the shadow of the doorway,
 school bag plummeting to the floor.
 At eight, the shape of shock was globular, airy and inert.
 Emptied of its golden occupant, the bowl had lost all meaning.

Later there would be a burial,
 a small mound at the road's edge, a pinecone for a headstone,
 a lily if she could find one—otherwise, wildflowers.
 Two gelato sticks, wiped clean of sticky residue,

rubber-banded together to make a cross.
 How easily it would slide into crumbled rain-soft loam,
 make its home in the sunken city of roots,
 below a congregation of clouds.

SNOWFALL

The woman in the fur-trimmed coat and boots
 climbs the steps of the apartment. Her gloved hand
 is resting on the doorknob as he trudges past.
 He never really knew who she was anyway.

There he goes, the dark smudge of his overcoat
 traversing the yolk of lamplight. She pushes the bedroom
 window shut again: the edges of him fade, vanish.
 The street feels different now.

The snow falls more heavily, covering the footpath,
 filling in the curved dips left by the man's footprints.
 The creak of the old wooden window sash
 flies away in the wind

the same wind that further on, later on, brushes
 the man's cheek as he pushes himself on to where
 he believes he is going.

Robyn Rowland is an Irish-Australian citizen. Living between Ireland and Victoria for 40 years, working in Turkey since 2009, in December 2019 she moved back to Australia as companion then carer for her father, who died at 102. Now living in Victoria, her most recent book is *Steep Curve* (Five Islands Press, 2024). She has 12 books of poetry, including 2 bilingual Turkish/English: *Under This Saffron Sun – Safran Güneşin Altında*, (Knocknaron Press, Ireland 2019) and *This Intimate War Gallipoli/Çanakkale 1915 – İçli Dışlı Bir Savaş: Gelibolu/Çanakkale 1915* (FIP, 2015; repub. Spinifex Press, Australia, 2018). She has won or been listed for various prizes e.g. Myslexia, ACU Poetry Prize, the Peter Porter Poetry Prize, Antipodes: Journal of Australian and New Zealand Literature International Poetry prize. Her poetry appears in national/international journals in 9 countries, fifty anthologies, 8 editions of 'Best Australian Poems' (Black Inc). She has read in India, Portugal, Ireland, UK, USA, Greece, Austria, Bosnia, Serbia, Turkey and Italy, and is published in translation. She is filmed reading in National Irish Poetry Reading Archive, James Joyce Library, UCD



COLD, COLD FEET

February 6, 2023, an earthquake magnitude 7.6, followed by another, 6.7 after 11 minutes hit central/southern Türkiye / Northern Syria, area the size of Germany. 14 million Turks were affected. Confirmed death toll in Turkey was 53,537; in Syria around 7,000. In Malatya city 1,393 died 6,444 were injured. 3 million in Türkiye, 2.9 million on Syria were left homeless. Her name is Sevgi (love)

Stumbling, then tumbling out, in mimicry of river-diving
her head hits a hidden tree. Sliced open red by bark
she thinks of radishes, strangely, voice clamped by scream.

Rising from hard cold-baked earth in darkness,
snow on her skin is cold fire, burning.
Or is it flames? No. Her feet have ossified, clods of ice.

Fifteen days with no water. No heat, no light, no food.
Months under canvas are buried in her now,
except for the vividness of hunger.

But memory is quicksand, and when the tide recedes
and warm sun refreshes one year after,
bubbles of recollection rise, explode.

We are at breakfast in Alesta hotel, 1300 kilometres
from that broken place. My friend Meral creates food worth
a Sultan's table. Her guest feeds first, simply on its display.

Robyn Rowland

continued overleaf...

Bread, tomatoes, *menemen*, olives, cheeses with herbs,
plum chocolate cake, jars of fig, pumpkin, red poppy jam.
Bowls of apricots, walnuts. It is the usual.

The niece tries to stop her, telling me in English
she is 'wounded', 'she can't speak of it',
yet something between us unstoppers Sevgi's anguish.

The way she tells it is mesmerising in Turkish.
It is written on her tongue and in every feature:
eyes, cheek ridges, face, her hands reaching.

Photos of her apartment are spilt onto the table.
Sixth floor, traditional balcony, luckily made with iron.
Inside – rugs, warm comfort, family photographs.

When the earthquake split, they were sleeping, then
suddenly on a boat at sea, floor crack-crinkling.
They wavered with it in night clothes, searching for the cat,

finally, with some neighbours, escaped the building
collapsing downwards. She shows me the one thing
saved: her wedding photo. But he is not in this story.

She needs to spill, can't stop, seeing it all again.
Middle-aged, dark, still beautiful, skin smooth
as an olive before drying, she is shaking, hand upturned.

My friend translates, part by part. 'Write', the woman begs,
'Write it!', and I do. Blue ink on a handy serviette
seems to weep into the light white paper.

Outside in the freezing dark, soil was undulating underfoot,
like water it rippled then swept. The one thing we hold to,
that the earth under our feet is solid – washed away.

Pyjamas iced up. One rug. Feet lost into the frozen tides.
In the camp, an abandoned minibus was found for sleeping.
Clothes were scavenged, wood hunted, desperation eager.

They boiled snow for water. They smelt the dead. They waited.
After four months she managed to find a bus to Çanakkale
where her daughter, grandchildren, slept in emptied school rooms.

Now renting, she waits for her crumpled home to be repaired.
To sell. If so, she will buy a single storey, outside this city,
that knows, surely, the restless earth will one day, too, waken here.

Meanwhile, she sleeps with all doors unlocked, in case.
Her cat yowls at the wind, scurries from trees shaking.
Meral's fretful eyes sweep. *Aman Tanrım! We are not ready!*

Note: Aman Tanrım Oh my God

POSSIBILITIES

February 6, 2023, an earthquake magnitude 7.6, followed by another, 6.7 after 11 minutes, hit central/southern Türkiye / Northern Syria. An area the size of Germany was impacted. 14 million Turks were affected. The confirmed death toll in Turkey was 53,537; in Syria around 7,000. In Malatya city 1,393 died 6,444 injured.

It's the night Malatya crumples,
like foil crushed casually before binning.
And I think of you, hoping you are in Istanbul,
not home among the apricots.

I could draw your face from memory,
earnest about the secret of the tulip.
Did you tell me after all?
Always look for the mystery you said.

Outside his shop down a small alley in Istanbul
full of artisans, we talked embroidery and carpets
with Evret; and of his son studying in Dublin –
perhaps – I have heard many carpet-sellers' stories.

'Beautiful work, but nothing cheap here for me.
I am no use to you', I joke, leaving for the Grand Bazaar.
There, a crush of silk, filigreed excess, spiced dreaming,
but nothing strikes me. I know what I want.

Back in your alley, you were on your knees working.
I could draw your hand roughened by carpet threads.
Expert in repair, you take their hundreds of years
in your fingers, making them young again, strong.

You close the holes inside the weave with stitches so fine
no eye could find a flaw in them. *See you said, how
carefully matched they are. First, I have to know them,
find their inner story, then re-thread them back.*

I bought the bedspread I use now as a tablecloth,
laden heavy with silken ottoman flowers;
rose, *gül*, tulip, *lalé*, chrysanthemum, *krizantem*,
weighted with history, colour still bold after fifteen years.

The light grew soft amber, the old stone walls
lightened, yet the day was fading.
You took me to a smoky café with hookah pipes
burning red with each breath in the black interior.

Shisha smoke of apple and jasmine meandered.
Bare-chested men heaped coal on smoking braziers
at the door; above our dark corner, a heaven full of
Turkish lights shattered by colour. It was old Istanbul.

Conversation in the half-dark. You speak of home.
*Malatya, you must go. Apricots are huge as a hand
and so sweet and juicy you might live on them
straight from the trees, warm and so smooth.*

I will think of this in the years after, and when I visit
Malatya, eat those fruit: everything you said they are.
And learn one tulip secret: water triggers their stems
to continue growth after being cut, staying fresh longer.

continued overleaf..

Your girlfriend had been South American but when you couldn't bear to leave Türkiye, failed to board at the last minute, she finished it. Your apartment is bare you say, but for a bottle of champagne.

Would you like to share it? and I smile.
I could draw your eyes chestnut brown and their creases curving outwards as if laughter is their medium reaching for the source of it.

'I am too old for you', I exclaim. *But, you forget! you offer. I am an antique carpet restorer!*
Surprised, shocked even, we laugh wildly, you apologizing; me, loving the imagery of it. Tempted.

'I am meeting a friend' I lie, and grin all the walk back to solitude in my hotel. I know what I don't want.
Next year I walked by with a friend and you called out my name, beckoned me surprised.

Years later, it's the night Turkish cities crumple like paper crushed casually before binning.
I think of apricots, the flushed sweetness of them on a hot day. I hope dearly you were not home in Malatya.

THIS IS WHAT STANLEY BUILT

Barrack Point, with thanks to Stanley Richard 15.9.1921 - 29.4.2020

Going to bed with the salt crust on me,
hair stiff, smelling it in the house
the breezed fizzing of it
and its waved rhythm all night, shushing it in,
I'd forgotten this is what it's like
– supposed to be – living by the sea
almost forgotten in these chosen years
of father-caring, covid settled in, pinning me
to the house he built a mile away. Weary,
why did I wait so long for this respite day?
Bathing this morning where Little Lake and
the Pacific meet right outside this old low gate,
memories gritted into pearl and
I carry that sheen on the inside of my skin.

Bedroom bunks in the kids' room, rush into
recollection those waves of light and buoyant youth.
Here is my childhood in laughter. We thought
the sea was coming inside, its gush and whoosh
a lullaby never forgotten, never replaced.
No footpath, no road, and sand acres surrounding
the house where we all dreamed of nothing.
There was no need; in the moment, everything there.
No dark dank reminders under the house
I grew up in where once the neighbour's lad
crushed me down under our house, struggling.
Photos in a frame on the wall are black and white
or you might say dusty grey, as if years have simply
aged them, like us. Cousins Cathryn, Anne, Julie, me.

continued overleaf..

We sit in the shallows, ripples thrilling
 our skinny legs when the lake was open
 to the sea, no need for reinforcement with
 boulders or cement, waters so gentle we children
 risked nothing, yet everything was changing.
 My father's impact is here too. A great fisherman,
 he once backed his boat in through the front glass
 full-length doors! The patio off it was built after that!
 On these walls are some works from his retirement.
 Leadlight dolphins, bright ultramarine and sea blue,
 leaping. The best of his tropical fish lead by Nemo,
 though their eyes seem to have disappeared!
 And in the children's room, his glass dragonfly
 skims above the bed, hovering protective.

His small wooden *dachshund*, hidden by departing
 family members lured new arrivals into a puppy-hunt.
 I searched every cupboard, drawer, even the dryer.
 No show. Then looking up, there he is sitting
 on the kitchen shelf in full view. Spot; Spot the dog!
 Checked bow tie in place, oak legs and ears,
 cedar belly and face, and those round blue eyes.
 Dad was often back and forth visiting. At 98 years,
 his visits are still recorded in the visitor's book,
 bringing *duck à l'orange* he'd slow-cooked from 7 am.
 My mother is here too. Not in the shadows,
 but in the briny breeze, the hot deck, the cool shallows.
 Thirty years dead, I think she was happy here.
 How nostalgia writes our story the way we want it to be.

Three seagulls still fly across the back wall,
 and the ping pong table takes up most of the main
 room, beside white-studded blue vinyl bench seats,
 drawers beneath filled with rugs.
 Open a cupboard: puzzles queue out, beside goggles,
 and the rubber scent of flipper and snorkel.
 Once, there was a kitchen nook, expanded as we did.
 White wicker highchairs, with deep blue legs on
 sapphire linoleum with faded black captain's
 wheels, their centres holding seagulls in flight,
 or red, black and white compasses bedded in. So
 his house would always know where it is, facing forward.
 This is the humble holiday house that Stan my uncle built.
 Well – with S.J Wood and Co. in Parramatta, in 1952.

Transporting everything so far, handwritten bills show
 the progress: loads of nails, masonite, guttering, fibro.
 A concrete slab beneath the back door steps, since 1958
 has captured the footprints of my cousins and their parents.
 Out front then was all beach for miles and empty miles.
 Beyond, Windang sand-hills later sold to Hawaii
 by a council so short-sighted they failed to see
 a month in the future, never mind decades.
 Flattened now, only the elders remember
 sliding down those slopes on old planks
 of timber shouting joy, screaming *whoopee!*
 Foolishly, a new council now stacks massive
 boulders against the shrinking edge of land
 and the sea mocks all efforts at retaining ground.

Now houses crowd in on our block.
Cousins grew children, who grew children
themselves, so this small dwelling cannot
fit them in for one more family Christmas.
This month the house must be razed and soon
a modern duplex, double the size and rooms
will face the ocean wind taking the salt
on its new strong double-glazed windows.
Nothing will rattle. Nothing fall.
The memories remain in our bones. But not
too long ahead my cousin and I will weave
away into our own sea-fret and only faded photos
carry the imprint of a house so full of loving times,
that surely the soil itself will hold them on.



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

Stephen Haven's fourth collection of poems, *The Flight from Meaning*, was a finalist for England's International Beverly Prize for Literature and was published in 2025 by Slant Books. His three earlier collections are: *The Last Sacred Place in North America*, selected by T.R. Hummer as winner of the New American Poetry Prize; *Dust and Bread*, winner of the Ohio Poet of the Year prize; and *The Long Silence of the Mohawk Carpet Smokestacks*, runner-up for the Philip Levine Prize in the final year Levine served as judge. Twice a year-long Fulbright Lecturer at universities in Beijing, he has received fellowships from Yaddo, MacDowell, the Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center, and the Djerassi Foundation, as well as five Individual Excellence Awards in Poetry from the Ohio Arts Council. His work has appeared in *The Southern Review*, *American Poetry Review*, *Parnassus*, *Literary Imagination*, *Crazyhorse*, *Guernica*, *Asheville Poetry Review*, *Salmagundi*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Arts & Letters*, *The Common*, *Blackbird*, *The European Journal of International Law*, *The Missouri Review*, *North American Review*, *Northwest Review*, *Image*, *Western Humanities Review*, *World Literature Today*, and in many other journals. For more details, see <https://www.stephenhaven.com/>.



PSALM FOR OUR TIME

Yes, Father George Zabelka
 Blessed Fat Man, Little Boy,
 And then he cried, *My God*
What have we done? Hibakusha
 Forgave him at the shrine.
 Then they asked him to genuflect
 On the vassals of their sins
 Even as civilians. Pearl Harbor?
 Nanjing? *Please help us never,*
Ever forget! Then someone
 Brought up Dresden, the Battle
 Of the Bulge, the Babi War
 Ravine, not to mention,
 Ever since then, Auschwitz,
 Nagasaki, and our wars
 Without end. Lord, may we
 Never say *amen*, may we always,
 Always find, bloodied
 On that shrine, the broken
 Architecture of our time,
 One scraper still standing
 Like a man girding his face up
 With one hand, love that never
 Saps the artifice of innocence,
 Fingers sowing crumbs
 While each stray dove
 Snaps a wing, flaps in the mud.

Stephen Haven

FREE SWIM

Just why we swam buck naked at the Y no one ever
 Enlightened me. Men and Boys' free swims,
 Weekly lessons, in the buff we dove in,
 The lifeguard the imperious exception. Whenever
 We asked the girls, for them it was always otherwise.
 No one ever gave such favor to our testicles
 Floating in water. One winter Saturday, our bums

Burnished glazed clay. General Patton inspected
 Our exposed positions. Lined up against the wall,
 Near the deep end, we thought we might have to
 Spread 'em. Sour in the water, someone's turd
 Still floated. One boy cried for his mother before
 The disgust our loined leader barked at us. Yes,
 There was a darkness in that free license imposed

On us. Locker-roomed again, we tucked it all
 Back in, dodged a forced confession. Now it seems
 So strange, passing tests from Minnow to Fish
 Without a stitch! No girl ever laned up a stroke
 Ahead or behind us. Was there ever even a bit
 Of innocence in this? Even my father found
 A joyful freedom in that suspended animation.

We never talked about gender stratification.
 Still, I have learned my lesson. Now my wife and I
 Love to bob our lives. We lean toward open water.
 A quarter mile out, no swim buoy tethered orange
 Around our ankles, what magnifies in the pond
 Plumbs also the clouds above. But there is an earlier
 Liberty that still cradles me: When I step away

From the forms that hold me, I like to give the boys
 Free reign, float 'em in the fresh, or, warmer yet,
 Jellyfish a southern ocean. Did the ladies miss
 Out on sophomoric this? Only my wife will say
 When she unhooks the girls after a dog day
 If such a burst of reminiscent wonder
 Still treads for her in that abandoned pleasure.

THE F-BOMB TAKES FLIGHT

The rich boys punched, pivoted with the poor.
The poor lost their jobs a year or two
Shy of their pensions. Arson flourished

In those canyons. Still the textile mills
Graveled in the lots. Some machinists
Never drove, always walked. The doctor's kid

Smashed a curve ball spun by the janitor's boy,
The model son masked in the mass
Of his rebellion. Buzzers blasted

Each dark dawn, called everyone to attention,
Shifted or gave back some of what they'd lost.
Each August hit the hole, hard and low,

With utter abandon, cracked the shins
Of a running back, loved the contact.
Everything the town once taught him!

They snatched it from a widow's porch.
It tasted like perfume his mother wore
Out of bounds through an oak front door.

A case of Ballantine's. They drank them on
A backyard court. They offered up F-bombs
He could never quite muster. Because he wouldn't

Say them, just as his father never taught him,
Always they mocked him. The ale was warm
In his zipped bag. Against a savage world

His father never barbed him. As if his friends
Might wake to it like a shot he bricked,
Over dark rooftops he belched and let one rip.

WOUNDED HAWK

We eyed him from our high back porch. Plump on a low
Fat branch, he bobbed our full attention back. Yesterday,
Small birds ganged on him, flipped him to a damaged wing.

Down to sandy soil, he cocked his walk and they went
After him, and still he managed with great effort
To thrust himself back to our tallest pine, then came

Down to this low branch. All afternoon we heard
Small alarms that warned, without compassion,
What with the way he once ate their young.

As he pitched his cry from that diminutive space,
We thought we might be interpreters: *No mercy,*
No justice in the world, as he sang
A sharp, shocked outrage with the state of things.

Or more simply, *I am hurt here, or I am patched together,*
Or things are not well with me on Earth,
As Rilke says so beautifully in *The Book of Hours*.

We felt for him the way we did the feeble Senator
Who in his own silence lost himself in the camera,
The poor old man who cast his afflictions
On the nation and came finally to his own dark wood

And for whole minutes uttered not one word
While the country heard
A hawk crying in the stab of its own wound
Calling out the lack of mercy, no justice in this world.

HOLD'EM AFTER MASS

In the hole he aces his high hopes again.
Then the sinkhole of the Flop. Considers odds
He might be flush again. Then the Turn
Flips to the River's quick. The broken lifeline
On one palm? A calloused finger
Traces it. No truck with God holds him all in.
Don't bet on it, the priest once schooled him.

Richard W. Halperin holds U.S.-Irish dual nationality and lives in Paris. On 1 November 2025, Salmon Poetry/Cliffs of Moher brought out *All the Tattered Stars: Selected & New Poems*, Introduction by Joseph Woods, which showcases 92 poems published by Salmon and by Lapwing/Belfast since 2010 and 26 new poems. On 7 January 2026, Mr Halperin was Special Guest Reader in the First Wednesday Poetry and Open-Mic Series, White House Bar, Limerick.



AN UNOPENED LETTER

Over decades I have read and reread
Henry James' great short story
'The Jolly Corner,' a middle-aged man
walking constantly through the
deserted house he had been raised in,
sensing the presence there of the being
he would have become had he never left.

Tonight, a sentence early in the tale
leapt off the page at me. The protagonist
tells his confidante that at one point in
his life he came across an unopened letter
which he knew was important and burnt it,
unopened. A love letter? A business letter?
A deed to some property? A summons?

My soul lurched. When I was about thirty,
I came across an unopened letter
which I knew was important and burnt it,
unopened. Only it wasn't a letter and I
didn't use a match. My life went forward
the way that it has. Which is not the way
it would have gone had I read – really read –
that letter.

Richard W. Halperin. Photo credit: Raymond Keane.

PERFECT CIRCLES

Raindrops striking rather still water –
no water is completely still – make
perfect circles or, rather, almost
perfect, because no circle is perfect.

I have noticed these all my life
but now, thanks to the paintings
of Gustave Caillebotte, rain on water,
I have the feeling that they notice
me. That they notice everything,
because what is not an imperfect circle?

Life may not end with death –
that may be village gossip, Hamlet
was open-minded about that.
When one stops living, the circle
closes. But it may close imperfectly –
an imperfect circle which instantly
disappears, a raindrop forming it,
now you see it, now you don't.

Or do you? I just asked my mother,
and think I heard her from where
rain comes from, or from what rain is.

My mother was an artist: paintings
and dress designs. For her, there was
no difference between circles and ovals.
Only scissors and good instincts.

SHE WALKED SLOWLY

She walked slowly back to a house
of her youth. She knew that the house's
paths and walls were gone or half gone.
She walked slowly because she was
not sure she was walking at all.

Later, she wrote a poem about it,
but her walking was the real poem,
fearful and beautiful,

like the pinwheel of the sun
which the crowds had seen at Fatima
and which Pius XII saw in 1950
while walking in his garden,
because nothing is gone, only
half-gone.

I do not know if the woman who was
walking slowly back to a house
of her youth was thinking of pinwheels,
but I am.

FUGITIVE

'Elle était radieuse et charmante.'

A character in T.S. Eliot's
The Family Reunion says 'In a world
of fugitives/The person taking the
opposite direction/Will appear to be
running away.'

That was my wife when she was here.
That was a few other people whom I
have had the privilege of knowing.

That was Samson in *Samson Agonistes*.
That is Niagara Falls.

No one knows what holds things together,
or if indeed they are held together.

Some of the best minds in science say
gravity isn't. Enid Bagnold wrote
a very good play *Call Me Jacky*
in which gravity isn't.

Just to see some people enter a room.

They are almost transfigured already.

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

Not between Ireland and France.
Between two worlds within myself.
Because of this, I like to think of
lakes, not of the sea. Quiet waters.
Although lakes are dangerous.

I like to think of Nōh plays.
When the actor tips, very slightly,
his mask up: happiness. When he tips,
very slightly, his mask down: sorrow.
Great sorrow.

Between two worlds.

When Bernadette, in the convent,
had to agree to be officially
photographed and, if asked, to give
the photo, now pasted on a little card,
to visitors, she wrote on each card
'p.p.b.' Priez pour Bernadette.

PRESENTED TO MALCOLM

'Presented to Malcolm by the Baptist Boys Club, April 27 1954.' This, in beautifully formed letters, is written in the inner cover of my used copy of the Everyman's Library *Poetical Works of John Milton*. I open it, as I often have done, in the morning, this morning the day after the beginning of another terrible war begun by fools voted into office, so begun by millions of fools. No one voted in Milton's time but, in the same manner as now, blood ran in the name of Something. A friend wrote me in 2024 after an election in a country unnecessary to name, 'I feel that hell is empty and all the devils are out.'

My friend lives with the balm of poetry, with the balm of her own art – collages – which is a balm for others, and with the attempted balm of being a kind person. In the beginning was The Word, which means in the very beginning something started which was entirely clean. What happened after is not my business, although I live in what happened. As I wrote those last five words, Sunday church bells began to ring. That also happens mornings.

This poem is a letter to, and a prayer for, Malcolm, wherever he is in 2026. Malcolm, I hope Milton helped. 'I thought I saw my late espoused saint' helps me. There are helpers and there are destroyers. There are fools and fools. It is very humbling to know oneself a fool. Good luck, Malcom, and may that, and truth, be with you.

Jane Williams lives in Lutruwita/Tasmania and is currently working on her tenth book of poems. <https://janecwilliams.com/>



THE HEART'S RESISTANCE

When I look back on that time, a cruel rite of passage
for which there could be no reckoning, you are all belly
and precipice and future self. O the round robin song of you.
I wish I had stayed. Even if there was nothing my staying
could have changed. There are still days I wish it
with all the hopelessness of unrequited love.

The West Coast of Ireland promised a hardiness
we fell for though the waiting wore us to blurs
of our former selves until we must have resembled
well-thumbed worry dolls. And then, because the window
had closed and because my other life called and called
I left and you were sisterless.

At the train station a smile almost reaching your true blue eyes
as you pushed a copy of Anam Cara into my hands
like forgiveness. I read it all the way home on trains
and planes, in waiting rooms and up and down escalators.
Hanging everything on the good omen I willed your inscription
to be - with gratitude and love from the three of you.

It would be grand, why wouldn't it be when all was pronounced
primed and ready and any day now. Any day.

Later, when the remembrance photo arrived, there he was
wholly formed and wholly emptied, my nephew who was not.

The small shock of it lodged in my sternum like bullet fragments
deemed harmless enough to leave in
not accounting for the mind's capacity to churn.

The heart's resistance to the will of any god.

The endless run of sorrow through veins.

And for a time, the unbearable sight of lipstick in any shade of blue.

Jane Williams

PERMISSION TO SING

The driver reels off a list of banned behaviours:
 The smoking of cigarettes and consumption of alcohol.
 Hot food and beverages.
 High volume conversations on or off the phone.
 Keep it G rated he seems to be suggesting. As for
 music, plug your headphones in and for the sake
 of all aboard (if not all that is holy) sing along
 in your head only. And this last one is going to be
 a problem for the man up front whose body
 barely fleshed pulses nonetheless like transfusion.
 Whose inner muse refuses to shut down.
 Who moments ago was chanting
 in the waiting room then curbside and now on the bus
 all hum and twitch asking for exception, for permission
 to express who he is among us.
 How can we not feel sorry, those of us who have known
 even the smallest measure of inhibition. Who can scream
 on the inside for just so long before the skin begins
 its inevitable peel. No matter how deft our hands
 at the invisible harp. How well-timed the beat
 of our bobbing heads, blinking eyes.
 Soon enough the inoffensive toe-tapping becomes
 a knee-jerk, hipsway, filling the chest cavity, thumping
 in the throat each unsung moment, until finally released
 in some universal but unteachable language
 of the undeniable self. Every bit as catchy and crucial
 as the wheels on the bus.

CARE PACKAGE

At first, I'm thinking *The Sound of Music*
 and Julie Andrews singing down a storm
 with a few of her favourite things
 but then I remember Austrian fathers
 and incoherent love the world over –
 how the first step out of fear and into mercy
 is letting go and what a tall order that can be.
 So, comfort food it is:
 cinnamon doughnuts for everyday scrapes
 profiteroles for deeper disappointments.
 The safety net of someone else's memoir
 to fall through.
 The masseuse of your choice on tap
 five lucky bingo chips
 and a murder mystery-solving jigsaw puzzle
 to rein in chaos theory and ignite the illusion
 of control if only for a little while.
 Also, a travel guide to Sicily - the beginning
 and the end of nostalgia di casa.
 Finally, one of those shadow boxes
 (*in case of emergency break glass*)
 for your eyes only so don't ask me
 what wonders it might contain.

A GOOD BOY

I say I'm not a dog person over and over until
 I remember how my brother never seemed without one.
 Never seemed quite grounded without one.
 Uncollared, their sex left whole.
 Only ever restrained by the beat of his voice.
 They had travelling names like Gypsy and Storm
 and he had big plans for the journey
 the last would accompany him on
 padding loyally alongside horse and rider
 in and out of Clint Eastwood sunsets.
 And then he died. The brother, not the dog.
 And none of us were in a position to take on
 a high maintenance pet whose head
 had been filled with such daredevil dreams.
 It was of course doubly our loss. That's the way of it.
 An ad placed in a paper and an elderly woman
 made to order, grieving her own shepherd.
 I've wondered over the years
 how much of the man she found in the dog:
 Scent of Tiger Balm and medicinal weed.
 The itch to chase a ball and the animal
 from which it was fashioned.
 To be told again and again by the leader of the pack
 good boy, there's a good good boy...

HOMES I HAVE KNOWN

Where visitors are asked to wipe their feet
 before and after entering
 and the surface of everything is clean enough
 to eat off (though you wouldn't dare)
 and every hair, every smile, quivers in its place.

Where there is no time
 and all the time in the world to talk
 and laughter can arise even from grief's exhaustion
 and names are called in from the cold or the dark
 because they are so longed for.

Where mothers and children
 move like cat burglars weaving through webs
 of laser beams, imagining some prize (surely)
 for years of second-guessing. For diffusing fear
 with risky laughter and vivid make-believe
 in the forests and oceans of their desire.

Where a spare bed is made and turned down,
 the right book and some wild flowers placed within reach.
 The kitchen grimy with love
 and the couch blanketed in companionable dogginess
 and you are welcome, whoever you are.

Scott Dodgson is a novelist of the European Salon tradition, blending history, philosophy, and deeply human storytelling. His work moves between continents and centuries, from war-torn Africa and postwar Paris to revolutionary Russia and the haunted terrain of memory itself, always guided by questions of identity, loss, resilience, and love. His novels are at once intimate confessions and sweeping epics, where philosophy and story converge with the cadence of lived experience. His published works include *The History of Water*, *Le Pêcheur*, *L'Auteur*, *The Bohemian Angels*, *The Madness of Beauty's Light*, and *Swipe*, along with the forthcoming novel *The Vigneron's Wife*.



Scott Dodgson



These four seasonal pieces come from *The Vigneron's Wife*, a literary novel set in a small wine village in the Languedoc of southern France. The book follows a writer and a vigneron's wife whose lives become entwined through memory, land, and the slow labor of cultivation, as past migrations, marriages, losses, and inheritances surface through the rhythm of the vineyard year. Moving between personal history and the longer memory of place, the novel explores how identity is shaped not by events alone but by repetition, weather, and return, suggesting that belonging is less an arrival than a practice learned over time.

THE HAND

The hand waits where it has always waited, pressed to the wood, neither open nor closed. It is not asking to be welcomed, only to be answered. It is a knocker. This is a hand-shaped door knocker, known in French as a heurtoir en forme de main. It is a very old and layered form. Since the nineteenth century it has watched the avenue form itself below, the slow arrival of carts, then rails, then engines, the dust of hooves giving way to iron and smoke. The wrist is finished with a simple cuff, the kind found on doors throughout the south of France, a modest flourish meant less to display wealth than to mark a boundary, a threshold where the outside pauses. A thin ring circles one delicate finger, worn smooth by time and countless summons, a quiet reminder that even iron once learned its gestures from the human hand. Centuries have passed through its fingers, weather, dust, fear, hope, the impatience of travelers and the caution of those who lived behind the door. Before voices, before names, there was this gesture, a simple human claim made in iron: I am here. The house listens. The village listens. And only then does the door decide whether to open. I want to write a variation of this piece for the spring section. Same knocker, different invitation to the writer.

THE HAND, IN AUTUMN

The hand grows heavier in the fall.

Not with rust, but with memory. The summer light that once ran along the cuff now settles into it, slower, as if reluctant to leave the metal entirely. The ring holds a dull glow instead of a glint. Nothing announces itself quickly anymore. Even the avenue approaches in quieter steps, tires softer on the road, voices carried lower through the cooling air.

In autumn the hand does not invite. It considers.

I reach for it and feel not resistance but measure. The pause before contact lengthens. One does not arrive in this season without asking inwardly first. The village has turned back toward its interiors, toward cellars, toward accounts of what the year has yielded and what it has withheld. The gesture becomes less a declaration than a weighing: should this moment be shared, or kept?

The knocker answers nothing. It receives the decision.

I lift it and let it fall once against the wood. The sound is rounder than in spring, absorbed by the house rather than sent outward. Not I am here, not even you already are, but simply: now.

The house listens, as it always has, and the hand returns to its rest. The door will open or remain closed without explanation. Either way, the season understands.

Autumn asks no entry.
It asks recognition.

THE HAND, IN WINTER

The hand is cold again.

Not neglected, only returned to its element. The metal contracts against the wood as though the door and the knocker have agreed to speak less. Frost gathers in the cuff's shallow crease and the ring no longer shines but holds a dim steadiness, the color of breath in air. The avenue passes in fewer sounds. Footsteps carry farther and then are gone.

In winter the hand does not invite and does not consider. It waits.

I hesitate before touching it, aware that the gesture will echo longer than intended. The village keeps to its interiors now, conversations lowered to kitchens and hearths, each visit chosen rather than wandered into. To knock is to mean it.

The metal meets my skin and gives nothing back except certainty. I lift it and let it fall once. The sound travels through the house like a line drawn through still water, widening and settling without reply.

There is comfort in this restraint. The door may open, or it may remain closed, and both answers feel complete. Winter does not ask presence or absence to explain themselves.

The hand returns to its place against the wood.
It has done its work.

In this season, the gesture is enough.

THE HAND, IN SPRING

The hand is warmer now.

Not in temperature but in permission. All winter it held its patience, pressed to the wood as if waiting for a thought to arrive from somewhere beyond the avenue. It never asked entry. It asked readiness. The metal knew the season before I did. Iron does not hurry, yet it changes its meaning with the light.

In spring the hand does not summon. It invites.

The cuff gathers sun along its edges and the thin ring catches a brightness that was absent months before. Dust has softened into pollen. The avenue no longer carries departures but errands, doors opening and closing without consequence. Even the pause before knocking feels shorter, as though hesitation has less to protect.

I touch it and the gesture is no longer announcement but acknowledgment. Not I am here, but you already are.

The village does not need introduction this time. It has decided I belong to its ordinary hours. The hand waits only to mark the moment when intention becomes action, when a thought becomes a visit, when a writer becomes a neighbor who has simply come by.

The house still listens.
But now it listens for familiarity.

I do not knock to enter.
I knock to confirm that I never truly left.

Dianna Denning received California Arts Council grants, taught poetry workshops for William James Association's Prison Arts Program. Some publications: *Poet News*, Sacramento CA, 2025 & 2026; *Blue Heron Review* 2025; *California Quarterly*; *Women in a Golden State*, 2025; *The Power of the Feminine* Vol. II; *The Tule Review*; *California Quarterly*; 2023; *Artemis Journal*, 2021, 2022, 2023 and *The Adirondack Review*. 2021 Nomination by *The Adirondack Review* for a Pushcart Prize. Nominations from *Blue Heron Review* for a Pushcart Prize 2024 & 2025. MFA in Writing '89, Vermont College. Henning's "When Body Becomes House" short-listed in *Madville Publishing's* 2025 Arthur Smith Poetry Prize. Dianna facilitates the Thompson Peak Writers' Workshop. Henning's new book "Rucksacks for the Leaf Cat" just released from *Finishing Line Press*.



A HAND IS A FIST THAT WON'T OPEN WITH REGRET

Many years ago. She came to us. We passed her back and forth
between us. Lovely child, cinnamon scented child.

You handed her to me. I passed her back to you. We shared her
as one does a treasure, ever so carefully.

Who knew of storms? Of divorce and recriminations?

And what would happen to her in that thicket of trouble?
We forgot we were parents. Married too young.

Now I'm an old woman and long for my daughter.
The cinnamon scented child.

But a hand is a fist that won't open with regret.
I reach out to hold her, but only dimwitted air

greet me. I am a longing with arms that ache,
a memory of past mistakes.

Who are you, daughter of long ago? Are you a walk? Am I a runner?

Dianna Denning

ALL NIGHT THE PORTABLE FAN CLIPS THE DISSENTING AIR,

and a breeze smelling of wet chalk,
sidestrokes through
an open window.

Outside, frog colonies down by the pond
sing their mating songs

before slipping back
into comfy beds of mud.

Spittle ekes from the scaffolding
of my mouth
onto the hand-embroidered
pillowcase
given me in my youth.

It seeps into my splayed hair,
each strand stiffened.

Someone sleeps beside me.
He's the man I'm married to.

He's less dangerous
than the lovers who took
my expectant breath,

bottled it in green jars,
and sold it on the black market
for a mere pittance.

My husband struggles with nightmares,
kicks me in his sleep.

I strangle him with my blood.

WHO SLEEPWALKED WITH THE MILKY WAY,

drunk on distance, its expanse?
I wanted to write with a torch

but ended up
with a pencil with no eraser.

Because the sky
turns contagious with stars,

nighttime is best
viewing that dust
which becomes us.

I want my ashes
to create their own planet.

One where people,
or whatever life forms exist,

live in peace.
I cannot cry for what we are.

But I am saddened by what we are not.

Edward Caruso has been published by *A Voz Limpia*, *Australian Multilingual Writing Project*, 'La Bottega della Poesia' (*La Repubblica*, Italy), *Burrow*, *Communion*, *Kalliope X*, *Live Encounter P&W*, *Mediterranean Poetry*, *Meniscus*, Melbourne Poets Union, *n-Scribe*, *Right Now*, *P76*, *StylusLit*, *TEXT*, *Unusual Work* and *Well-Known Corners: Poetry on the Move*. Since 2024 he has co-judged the Ada Cambridge Poetry Prize. In 2025, his third collection of poems, *What Distance Means*, was published by Hybrid Publishers. In October 2025, he featured on 3CR's Spoken Word program.



GENOA NOTEBOOK

An open door
painted onto an interior wall

A few strokes of colour, brush following
previous lines across overlapping edges

A few more dabs
shades that dry

* * *

Eduardo Galeano, centuries of wind
those that couldn't push back Columbus

* * *

The ticket master stops anyone from Russia
pronounces Doctor Zhivago and Anna Karenina clearly
shows me a handwritten list of Cyrillic characters
Distinguishes them from their Greek predecessors

Grateful to find tourists
he practises four languages
with whom he can
whenever he can

* * *

Kebab restaurant, dining area painted green, red and black. The assistants serve fava bean felafels and speak a mixture of Spanish, Arabic, English and Italian. No Genoese dialect.

* * *

Edward Caruso

An elderly man
faded green jacket
stares at the port
from a backstreet

He picks up
a bottle
takes a swig
and places it
by an entrance

He inhales on a cigarette
stumbles and disappears

* * *

Just the summer heat of late autumn

* * *

Never silence

* * *

Two women sleep next to each other
the room's other inhabitants long gone
At breakfast
their voices whisper
gentle as birds
They wash their cups
tip-toe out, Indian file
hand in hand

* * *

nave
footsteps
outside voices
echoes and a hammering

* * *

The signature of passing sounds

* * *

The door in the Moroccan restaurant a lingering scrape back and forth. Its Miles Davis cadence, melody repeated each time someone enters and exits the bathroom, toilet malfunctioning.

* * *

Vico Angeli. Four sex workers in a circle. Post-middle age. Perfect hair. The weariness of waiting. A long beat.

* * *

S. Maria Assunta di Carignano. My gut feeling that the uphill walk from via xx Settembre would kill my writers block of the past two days pays off. On reaching the church entrance ...

Medieval walls and renaissance quarters.
Woods overshadow a line of apartments
and obstruct this lookout above the sea.
Sunlight and overtaking clouds.
Gulls within reach, according to a whisper
from the church steps, romance has been stabbed
from behind. The voice, pledging a lifetime
of studying art, whispers: *Se non sei finito sei infinito*. [1]

* * *

Echoes in the nave the peal of thunder.

* * *

An aunt who died five years ago
 appeared in my dream
 claimed to have found out
 how many women my father had slept with
 before he'd met my mother.

The last time I saw her
 my father's funeral
 as we were being driven to the service
 she wept for him
 before calming for the procession
 to come.

* * *

Waiting room. Familial traits
 in the figure who joins me.

Nondescript scrolling of pages on our mobiles.
 A figure to grow into,
 elderly features, rose-coloured shirt
 brown jeans, pensive and waiting
 hours in waiting, waiting
 face resembling mine
 two decades on, distant father figure
 lost to the sound of a coffee machine
 and train schedule announcements.
 Whatever face in me I've gaped at

each morning
 unaware of leaps to decades ahead
 in this hour passing
 weight of seniority
 in a future figure.

I remain after my departure.

* * *

She strokes her ankle
 brings her leg to a lotus position
 & reads a novel titled *She Dog*
 Her thumb tip
 touches the second and third fingertips
 of her right hand
 mudra style

* * *

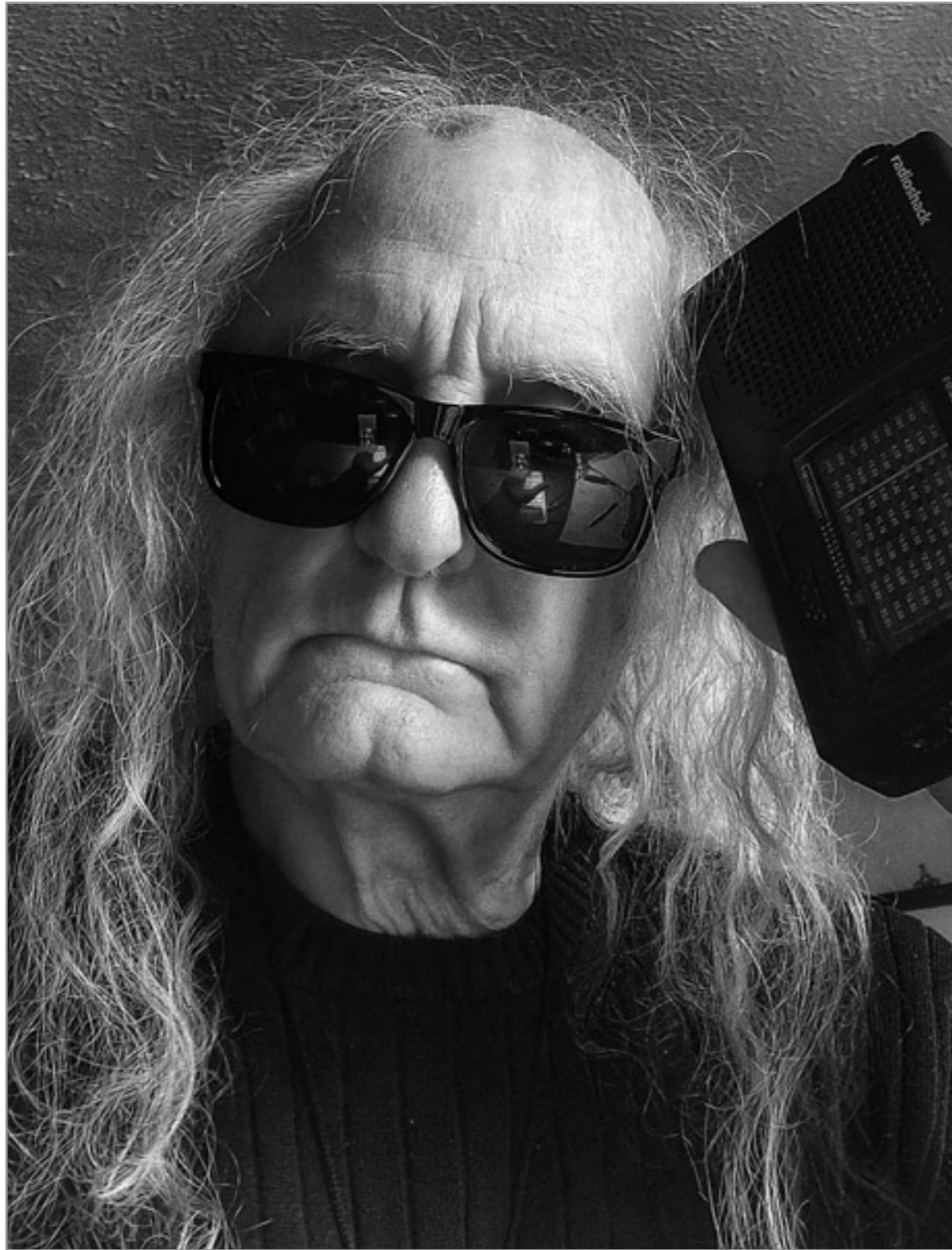
Views of fallow soil
 Electricity wires. A solitary elm.

* * *

Phone conversation next to me:
 $1 + 0 = 10$

[1] *If you're not finite you're infinite.*

Joe Kidd: Author 'The Invisible Waterhole', and 'Digging Underground/Portrait of a Beat Poet Laureate'. Beat Poet Laureate 2022-2024. Cultural Director, International Diplomat, Official Poet of Govt of Birland. Honorary Doctorate. 2025 Pushcart Prize Nominee. Member: National & International Beat Poet Foundation, 100K Poets For Change, Poets Against Racism & Hate USA, Michigan Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.



BUDDHA AND SOCRATES AND ME

my father's name was Cyrus
 a kind and generous soul
 a soul that required nothing more
 we explored together every night
 the moon was our haloed navigator
 the stars, a map of our celestial domain
 the warm air whistled and circulated through
 the bush and the valley between the mountains
 it sang to us from the zenith of the world

as we traveled forth into the darkness
 we created the path that was to be followed
 never repeating, never turning
 or looking back at the prints of time

at ease we would rest with our feet in the water
 an oasis perhaps the result of desire
 our sandals were our home and our chosen vehicle
 beloved were we of all that we encountered
 the milk, the honey, the fruit on the vine
 never a question of origin
 or the complex arrangement of physique

the doors and the windows of all dimensions
 open automation by a voice commanding
 as the flesh became the word that required obedience

Joe Kidd

continued overleaf...

it was here where the encounter with destiny
where fate had its unexpected way
here at the mouth of the holy cave
where dragons and behemoths shed their skin
gave up their struggle and met their end

turned over to the masters who negotiated my adoption
separated from my clothes, my name, and my birth

this is the home of fearsome power
the horizon of unspeakable events
a gathering of one with the great 'You Are'

this is where we met, where we graduated
Buddha, five years older than my self
Socrates, five years behind my age
we spoke in the tongue of our own development
the strings of our lutes filled the space between
as we flew over the fields of Alpha Centauri

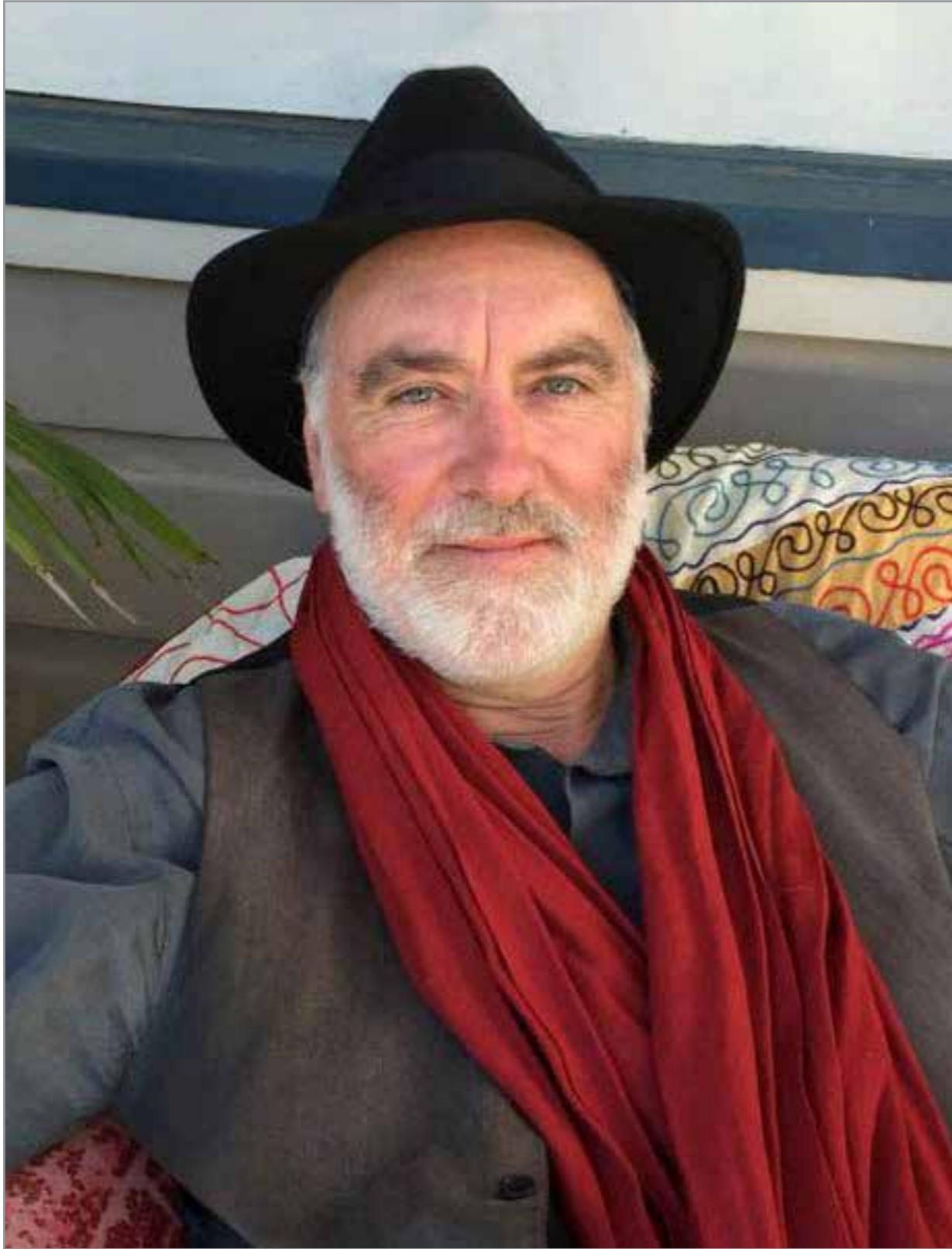
in our right hand the poets explained the mystery
in our left, the philosophers cried in their sleep
we wrote no book, we claimed no history
beasts of burden, we rode on the back
honorable refuge and a cup bejeweled

you have heard us Howl, On The Road, never traveled
we have changed our names and come back to haunt
give us this day our one hundred years
abandoned like dogs but we will find our way home

all men must live beyond their means
not knowing in advance their capability
the truth bleeding out from an open wound
forever, the span of a fearless life
never, the answer to a question of defeat

the colors encoded within the mind of the wise
illuminate the infinite universe
the room where the magicians cast their spells
and the grave of great knowledge ignored and forgotten

Justin Lowe lives on unceded Gundangurra land in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney where for 18 years he edited international poetry blog, Bluepepper. His ninth collection, "San Luis", was released through Puncher&Wattmann in October 2024. He has a tenth collection as well as a book of short stories, essays and memoirs currently with publishers.



THE CLEAN OUT

for Donald

I.

I sit here alone
in the front room
listening

so, this is
how a home dies
becomes the dust of a dwelling

I can
hear it settling
while outside

the story continues
of that lone duckling
on the verge

the mailman
muttering to his mail
like a rumour passed on

Justin Lowe

continued overleaf...

II.

a rose
I once planted
taps at the window

pink as his face
pressed to the glass
laughing at us

bunched
around that pine
and copper bar

there are
footprints in the shag
I cannot account for

and he
the last of them -
father, brother, friend of my best days

still talking
about coming home
to die

before
heaving a great sigh
at the thought of such distances

III.

there is no tomorrow
merely an idea

we formed in the night
and carried forward

it is to now
what price is to value

he can no longer
put a number to it

tomorrow as an aggregate
of prior experience

he has
walked away from the deal

overly abstract, overly complex

continued overleaf...

IV.

he had committed no crime
other than the one
his sagging body was committing on his jackdaw mind

funny to the end
his eyes avid to the end
as his daughter spooned him ice cream to the end

and he asked her huskily -
that little wombat squeal in his old throat-
who would have thought, my darling,

*when I cradled that pink little thing
that all these years later
she would be spooning her dear pa*

*ice cream on his death bed?
now, get off your fat arse, my dear,
and go change the channel*

and the nurses promptly
wheel in the trolley
on which the needle glistens

blue-flecked and mischievous as his eyes
that wry wink of Antipodean light
triumphant at getting the better of such a man

V.

at 2pm, Black Friday,
the day before Valentine's
he left us without a bang or a whimper

the first and last of his kind

ON FALLING ASLEEP DURING MY SUNSET MIX UP WITH THE BEASTIE BOYS

I am on loan like all the sleepers
to the author of this poem

I am not captive as such
nor, I hope, are you

but he
(and I can only assume it is a 'he')

dictates every line with a breezy gesture
(his embellishment, not mine)

he feeds me the gaps between prepositions
like any great genius their crumbs

nothing seems to daunt him
bar the prospect of my leaving

the door sits wide open
the dogs are chained

I can smell cooking somewhere
but no dinner ever arrives

indeed, nothing arrives
but the next line of this poem

I believe I can hear
someone punching a wall somewhere

ivy whispers like the village spinster
creeping up the walls

there is good wine in the cellar
an autumn sky of damask

he lays a hand on my shoulder
and explains he cannot hold a pen

his old voice crackles
like the black crepe on every mirror

Kate Maxwell is an award-winning poet who has published, in journals such as *Cordite*, *Rabbit*, *StylusLit*, *Books Ireland* and *The Threepenny Review*. Kate's published two collections of poetry, *Never Good at Maths* (2021) and *Down the Rabbit Hole* (2023). She will publish her third collection in 2026. Kate's interests include film, wine, and sleeping



PROPHECY

Spotted yesterday in the backyard
 wing-tilted, circling the curve
 of hedge and lavender —

 a tannin-stained aerobat
 buzzing through suburban skies
 like a model bi-plane

its languid sepia soar
 skywriting
 summer's coming.

Nymphs for longer
 than their flight season,
 submerged for years

 then suddenly fantastical
 their see-through splendour,
 a sign of hope

 change of season.
 But the dragon's taken flight
 too soon.

warning of a too-long warmth
 prophecy of scorch and swelter
 chilling down my spine.

Kate Maxwell

GETTING THERE

About thirty thousand feet in the air
I select another comedy

from the screen built in to the back
of a chair. Water bottle, safety card

and a novel that I'll hardly read
all pressing firmly at my knees.

The trolley's blocked the aisle again.
No use joining the toilet queue

waiting for the red sign to turn green
just so I can bend the bifold door

and squeeze into the only slot
of solitude on board. Instead, I choose

the second option: *Chicken, please*
from a weary attendant leaning over

me as she passes a tiny wine bottle
topped with a plastic tumbler

to the lady in the middle seat. The same
woman I've smiled at only once

before she plugged her ears and eye-
masked hours ago, then softly growled

into her neck pillow. Jealous of
such skill at sleep, I'm left to cancel

the final hours of my flight across
the globe with a dose of Hollywood

hype, sip of surrender, and a small
reheated meal, roll my ankles

and my options, swallow aspirin
sigh and count down till I get there.

Born in Mexico, Luis, lives in California and works in the mental health field in Los Angeles. His poetry has appeared in Blue Collar Review, Kendra Steiner Editions, Live Encounters, Pygmy Forest Press, Turtle Island Poetry, and Unlikely Stories. His latest poetry book, *Make the Water Laugh*, was published by Rogue Wolf Press.



IN THE MORNING

In the morning gunshots
that go on and on, leaving
the living sleeping forever.
Between breakfast and lunch
not one of the dead are reborn.
There is a basket with names
of everyone in the universe.
I swear you should not believe
what I say. One day it will all
be true. Each morning I take
out the blood from a mosquito
just like it took it from me while
I slept. I wonder if I believe
my own nonsense. Believe me
as much as I want you to.
Pull up a chair. Together we
could strike the match that lights
the last cigarette we will ever
smoke. I just do not want to.

Luis Cuauhtémoc Berriozábal

THE RITUAL

Is it that time again?
The candle is being lit.
Too old for multiple candles.
Too many years have flown by.
Too many wishes dashed away.
Is it that time again?

The song is sung
over chocolate marble cake
in a room with the lights turned low.
Everyone seems happy
in our small group
that still celebrate birthdays.

But they are probably not.
There are too many memories.
Too many fires still burning
that need putting out.
The cake clings to our teeth.
Much of them we have had since our youth.

MY BREATH

My breath evaporates.
I wonder if it goes somewhere
else or if it goes back inside
my skin or to another path

in realms no one knows about
that are alive only in worlds
with languages that make no

sense. My breath seeks oblivion.
It finds comfort in silence.
When it is cold it forms clouds.

It seeks answers but it keeps
its distance in order not to hear
the truth. My breath's desire
is to reach the stars that are
often inaccessible to all who breathe.



Amy Abdullah Barry

Amy Abdullah Barry Award-winning writer, poet. She is published widely including Cyphers, Southword, RTE, Trumpet and elsewhere. Her poems have been translated into many languages including Irish, Arabic, Italian, Persian, Turkish, Azerbaijani & Spanish. Chosen for the Poetry Ireland Introduction Series 2022. Amy has been awarded literature bursaries from the Arts Council & Words Ireland. She regularly organises poetry & music events in Athlone, Dublin & Roscommon. A travel lover, she has performed her work in Ireland and internationally. She has facilitated several creative writing workshops for Poetry Ireland, the Irish Writers Centre, Libraries, Hospitals, both secondary & national schools, Athlone Community Radio, and elsewhere. Amy was honoured to perform as the opening half for headliner, Lemn Sissay's 'Let the Light In' show, 'at Morecambe Festival, UK, 2024. 'Flirting with Tigers' is her debut collection of poems published by Dedalus Press in 2023. Her collection received great reviews in the Irish Independent, The High Window, Irish Examiner, Senior Times magazine, The Galway Review, Roscommon Herald.

HAZEL

Somewhere,
I think of the petite black stray —
Hazel, I called her,
after the hazel tree I planted
the day she showed up
at my back door,
all ribs and bold eyes,
unafraid.

Each morning
she'd perch at the kitchen window,
black paws pressed to the glass,
meowing —
loud and insistent,
a rough, rising cry
that cut through toast steam and radio hum,
as if saying:
I'm here. Feed me.

I'd open the door,
she'd twine between my ankles,
then vanish under the hedge
until the sun warmed the garden.

Later, she'd leap into my lap
without asking,
curling into herself,
a tight, purring knot
that pulsed against my chest
like a second heartbeat.

continued overleaf..

Last night,
 a white fox prowled the garden,
 pausing beneath the hazel tree,
 tail flicking like a slow question.
 It made me think —
 where has she gone?
 That bold little shadow
 with the voice too big
 for her bones?

Now — I find myself listening
 for her cry in the morning stillness,
 and watching the empty patch
 on my lap
 like something might return to it,
 some soft weight, some sound —
 I've come to miss.

WILD WORLD IN MAINZ

Melodies lift
 the wintry evening air—

“Father and Son,”
 “Wild World,”
 “Oh Very Young.”

Gold notes
 moving through the hall.

A room of eighties nostalgia,
 shoulder to shoulder
 answering the songs.

The music moves through me
 like tide.

The mind turns east—
 Cherating.

Behind the wide beaches
 cloud spills
 over steep green hills.

Wild world
 to the horizon.

Father and son of memory
 walking there again.

Years behind me
 like a compass
 still holding time—

continued overleaf..

beach bars,
coconut palms
leaning to the sea.

Light flickers
through leaves.

Each frond trembling—
a thin whisper
of *Oh Very Young*
in the wind.

Timber huts
bleached pale.

Grass turning sepia
in the lowering sun.

Doves, eagles—
peck the bright sand
then lift
toward the hills.

He stands there —
soundtrack
for the boy on the beach.

A cheeky smile
at the corner
of his mouth.

A pink batik shirt
holding the light.

Then — Mainz again.

Music drifting
through the hall.

Five hundred faces
under amber lights.

Echoes of a wild world
touching this room.

I stand beside him —
arms lifted
carving shapes
in the music-filled air.

Only now
I see the ground
he stood on

when he called
the beach ours.

And the boy beside me
on that beach

is still there —

that same cheeky smile
bright
in the sea wind.

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



THE LIBRARIAN

It's raining-
I shake my umbrella exaggeratedly at the door
I'm late tonight, yet, at the counter, her eyes smile
She slips me the note: 851.1 PET

I dawdle between shelves, as if lost, looking hither and thither
I live for the smells of these endless rows of books:
vanilla musk, earthy mushrooms, pine-fresh newness
Once in an aged page, I found a pencilled note scribbled in the margin:
"Remember this for Anne!"
Oh, the mystery!

Here we are: Petrarch's *Canzoniere*
It's all in Italian but Page 118 is annotated
with her trademark pink sticky-note in the middle
I google-translate with my phone:
*"She keeps me in a prison that she neither
opens nor shuts, nor claims me for her own"*

I hang on those words like the last dewdrop on a thawing leaf
Last Tuesday, it was 814.52 GIB
*"Love one another but make not a bond of chains:
let it be a moving sea between the shores of your souls."*
I responded with 861.62 NER
"I want to do with you what spring does with the cherry trees."
Ew, so crass in retrospect
My brain races: Keats, Shelley, the ever-reliable Shakespeare sonnet?
I'm such an illiterate peasant, stuck in old clichés
Maybe, I should move away from the 800s

Julian Matthews

continued overleaf...

I wander into the maze of shelves giddy with this new thrill
 like a 10-year-old at a treasure hunt
 Something more contemporary, less soppy
 My index finger tracks down the hardcovers at 152.41:
 Alain de Botton's *The Course of Love*,
 Erich Fromm's *The Art of Loving*,
 John Gray's *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus?*
 Too glib

I can hear people shuffling out the door, self-scanning
 or queueing to have books stamped by her
 It's almost closing and I peek through the shelves
 and she's Venus under the lone fluorescent above her
 The light glinting off her tight braids and soft curls like a halo

I am getting desperate, sweating—
 Switch back to 823s: English Fiction (late 20th century),
 I scan Jilly Cooper, Jackie Collins, Sally Rooney
 I vaguely remember the series *Normal People*
 I thumb through it like a madman
 The trick to the most-read page is to place the book
 on its spine on the table then let it open itself
 No luck! More lovey-dovey drivel

Then I spy across the shelves, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's
A Hundred Years of Solitude, a definite keeper
 I lay it taut on the nearest table, and let it flop open
 There it is, Page 375:
"It's enough for me to be sure that you and I exist at this moment."
 I place a fresh blue sticky-note inside, fumbling with excitement
 There are three copies, so I let this one stick out a bit
 I write down 863.64 MAR on the back of her original note, fold it in two

The lights are being switched off, an indicator for the laggards, heads
 buried in newspapers, that it's time to go
 My hands trembling, I approach her counter
 We exchange knowing smiles.
 "No books today, sir?" her face glowing like Bellini's Madonna
 and I'm the baby in her arms
 "Nope, I am swamped, up to my ears," I stutter and kick myself
 The note slides across the counter and into her pocket
 We nod in sync
 I step out and the rain has slowed to a drizzle
 Next Tuesday awaits

Margaret Kiernan is an Irish author and a Best of The Net Nominee for Creative Non-Fiction Award, 2021 and, 2022 and poetry and essay, 2023. She writes poetry, fiction, essay, memoir, and flash. She has had poetry and prose published in hard back, in e-book, on-line, and in literary journals and magazines, in Ireland, UK, America, Canada, Germany, India, and Australia. She also has multiple short stories and poems in anthology collections and cultural publications. She launched her Live eBook, a young adult fiction, in June 2024, titled, "The Bay of Nectar" published by liveencounterspublishing.net The Bay of Nectar by Margaret Kiernan by Live Encounterspublishing.net - Issuu. Alba Publishing, UK published her first poetry collection in July 2024, titled, "A Mirage of Lost Things." Public profile & URL www.linkedin.com/in/margaret-kiernan-a5265417, She has Professional Membership at the Irish Writers Centre. Dublin. Ireland. She participated in a published collection in which professional writers and recognised curators participated, Published on December 6th, 2022. Ref: K. Higgins Chapbook Gift Presentation. The Arts Council of Ireland and Westmeath County Council Arts Office awarded her a Professional Development Bursary, 2021. Mayo County Council and The Arts Council of Ireland granted her a Heinrich Boll Residency and Bursary, 2023. Shortlisted in competitions, e.g., The Cathal Bui Bel-coo International Poetry competition, 2021, The Bard of Connacht competition in 2022. Runner-up in The Hannah Grealy International Literary Awards. 2023



ALTERED SLANT

The news is dire, scores of schoolgirls have been bombed, it is far away from here, but I wonder if the pilots knew what they were viewing when they received their co-ordinates to fly to the city of Minab and let those missiles float down, like a hawk chasing down its prey. I need to get out, I need to move, I must do something. I walk by water, let my thoughts float out, God is listening, I can pray. The rising smell of newly shifted earth reaches to the canal path beyond the fields where a digger is knocking trees and bramble bushes all along the edges, a clearing is happening and a space for new houses. I can hear the digger bash and bang, I see it lift full grown trees and place them to one side. This vista is changing on this new spring morning where a milky sun rises above the swans. Those fields where the horses galloped, jumped, and grazed will soon be full of concrete. The echo of galloping hooves across the paddocks will be no-more, no one will know about the beautiful hollow at the edge of the trees, where you could sit and dream, to heal in the sun.

Margaret Kiernan

Brent Cantwell is a New Zealand-born poet who writes, teaches and lives with his family in the hinterland of Queensland's Gold Coast. He has been published in *Landfall*, *Westerly Magazine* and *Takahe* and was recently awarded Highly Commended in the *Bruce Dawes Poetry Prize*. His first collection of poetry *tether* was published by Recent Work Press in October 2023.



GETTING AWAY FROM IT ALL IN ALBURY

After the call, the too-sprinklered lawns
of Albury, outside places and the friends I love,
kids playing games
inside curtained rooms—and I don't blame them—
the dry trauma
-storm of being outside.
After going in, the really-getting-hot-now fly
-wire handles,
and the going-somewhere-inside not my children's home,

we jump in the pool and talk
in the perfectly-cold
on heat drawn from soil by growing chilis
getting to eventually
I forget the ground you grow in makes a difference.
I forgot about the sweet dementia of talking,
giggling in the wrong place—
with you
I don't always have to be thinking.

Though we remembered words
like diced, scraped, de
-seeded. When we doffed a cap
-sicum knowing the oil
of whatever this means
will stick and sting whatever
we touch,
a chilly wind blows and I call you back:
it sounds like a cool change.

Brent Cantwell

OPEN-AIR THEATRE, WINTON

Pulling back the bolt to open the gate, the lady on the door let us in saying—as always—*laugh 'n' cry darl, laugh 'n' cry*.
Everyone goes to the open-air theatre for some Socko and Buskin':

Socko has us hanging on every word—all of us—laughing,
and the way he tells a story, I dunno, an easy voice, hard to describe,
one kicked off thong so everything's relaxed and alright, is about right.

As for Buskin', now there's a good listener,
a happy tragic in gumboots on a forty-degree day,
desert quiet sand and the wind mourning, *I hear ya mate! I hear ya!*

No-one goes to the open-air theatre alone, not with Socko and Buskin' around.
The lady on the door watches the tidal corrugation of the crowd:
laugh 'n' cry darl, laugh 'n' cry.

RESORTING

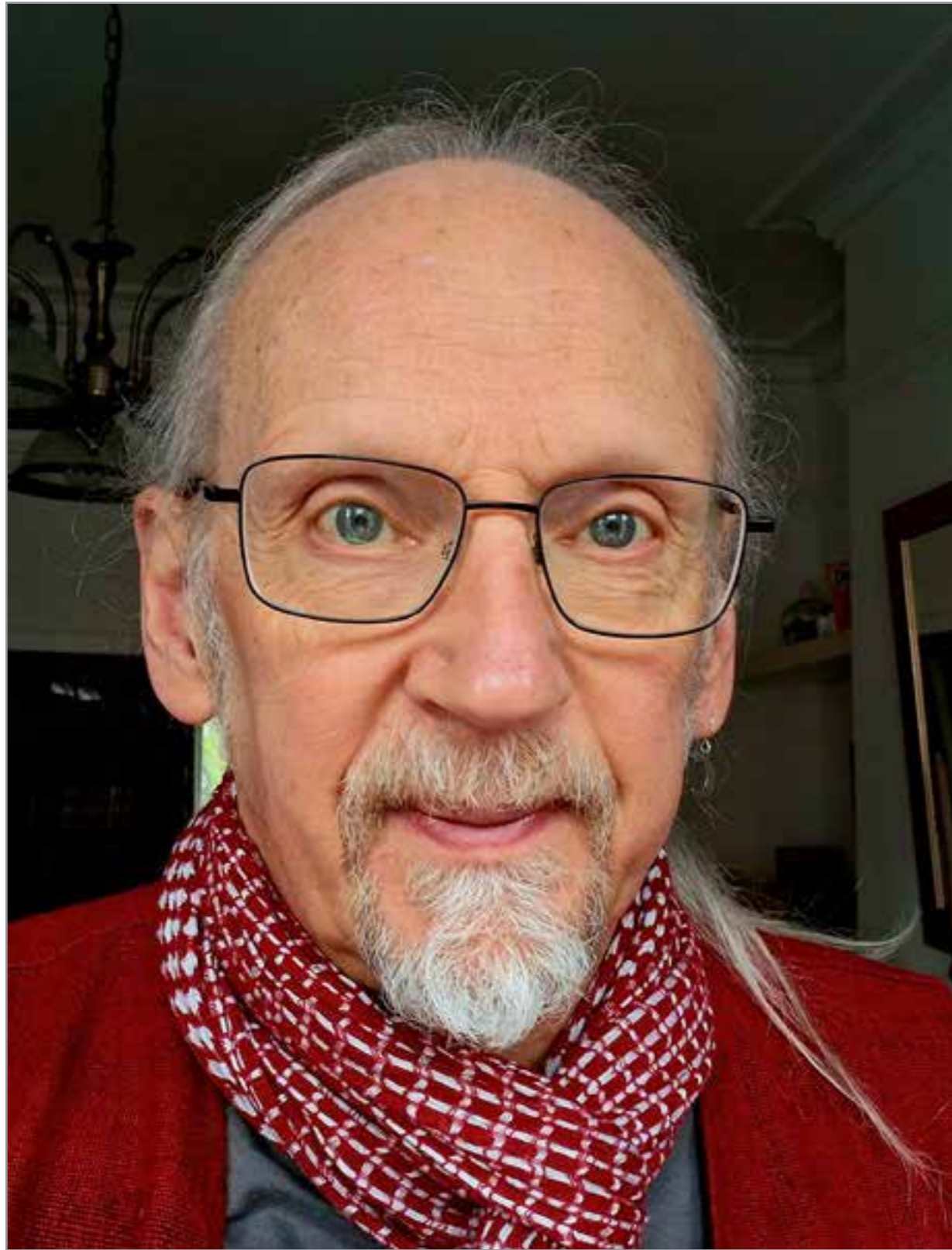
Technically, we were on the resort, trespassing a freshly
cut romance, each to the other,
across the only grass, to a pool, *you know the place—*

separating from the party was an easy serration
of sand in our shoes down Dahab's
only boulevard—anyway, resorting by a pool, *you know—*

where I sipped a cocktail and desert adventure.
I don't remember why,
but I slashed my Wilbur Smith in half with a melon knife—

made you re-read the start—

Oz Hardwick is a European poet, photographer, occasional dabbler in other arts, and accidental academic, whose work has been widely published in international journals and anthologies. He has published “maybe fifteen” full collections and chapbooks, including *Learning to Have Lost* (Canberra: IPSI, 2018) which won the 2019 Rubery International Book Award for poetry, and most recently *Retrofuturism for the Dispossessed* (Clevedon: Hedgehog, 2024). Oz has held residencies in the UK, Europe, the US and Australia, and has performed internationally at major festivals and in back rooms of pubs. With Anne Caldwell, Oz edited *The Valley Press Anthology of Prose Poetry* (Scarborough: Valley Press, 2019) and *Prose Poetry in Theory and Practice* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), and with Cassandra Atherton he edited *Dancing About Architecture and Other Ekphrastic Maneuvers* (Cheshire, MA: MadHat Press, 2024). A lifelong space rock obsessive, Oz has recently contributed to albums by Space Druids, Incubus Lovechild, and Other-world. www.ozhardwick.co.uk



LEFT TO MY OWN DEVICES

When I open my eyes it's still dark, all the lightbulbs are cracked, and the candles have grown wings and flown south for better tax rates. It feels like the weekend but without the days off, or like a hand-knitted balaclava worn in sleet. Everything I remember only makes sense until it meets something else I remember, then all bets are off. At least once a week my sister hangs like a China puppet over a pit that is sometimes full of new-born chickens and sometimes nettles. Occasionally, she looks down at a blue door that opens to a corridor lined with old mops and fire extinguishers – a lot of old mops and fire extinguishers – which leads to a bunker where one day we may all be saved, assuming Jesus doesn't save us first. Even in such darkness, the promise of salvation sends shivers up or down my spine, because it's so dark that up and down are meaningless, and I set out up or down to the shops with the reassuring weight of pennies on my eyelids, my mouth full of cold, wet wool. I join the queue for oil lamps and flint. If I time things wrong, I'll miss the weekend completely, trapped in endless aisles, labouring for crusts, Dr Pepper, and pistachio ice cream with the blessed saints and all their earthly avatars. From up above, I hear my sister's voice as clear as a breaking window, calling me to look at all I've done and all I've still to do to set it right, but it's still so very dark and I've a feeling my balaclava may be on backwards.

Oz Hardwick

MACHINE LEARNING AND THE SUBCONSCIOUS CAT

Not knowing what to do with my data, the algorithm selects images of cute cats dressed up as pirates, superheroes, and ballerinas. I have no interest in any of these categories – pardon the wholly unintended pun – but there’s no denying I love cats, and I can’t help imagining the distress and ensuing carnage if I attempted to play dress-up with the ginger lad who’s currently curled like an Oxford comma on my lap, adding emphasis to the pause before the final item on a list of possibilities. Notice the further pause/paws homophonic pun, again unintentional, because I can only manage meaning to a fairly limited extent, and I spend my days struggling with language, as if I’m trying to wrestle my cat into tights and a tutu, or a cape, or an eyepatch, and it never looks as good as it does in the pictures, and it ruins both our mornings. And because my cat both is and is not a metaphor – note the dependent clause – the algorithm keeps churning out more of the same.

HOW, BEING AUTISTIC, EVERYTHING IS MY FAULT

What frightens us is not the helplessness that oozes from every retro transistor radio, catchy as a 60s hit. It’s not even the vastness of the situation, as inevitable as a B-movie asteroid creeping closer in every desperate cutaway. Rather, it’s the intimation that we could perhaps effect a change through small actions, like Lorenz’s seagull flapping its wings to initiate a tornado. How, we ask in our panic, can we possibly agree on when and where to flap, in order to depose dictators, reverse the worst of our spiralling climate, or even just call those slippery ranks on private islands and in the backs of cars with tinted windows to some kind of account? And maybe it’s our flapping that caused the whole damn mess to start with. More specifically, it was likely my flapping, which is why I’m at pains to still my hands, and even my fingers, whenever anyone – even myself – might see, confining such actions to when I’m fast asleep in darkened rooms. Of course, being something of a poet since 1972, I can, with a stroke, transform that seagull into a butterfly: there is, after all, a precedent, but it’s a tough line to write and it’s all the responsibility my brittle wings can bear.

Marcella Remund's poems have appeared in *The Briar Cliff Review*, *Jabberwock*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Pasque Petals*, *Banyan Review*, *Sheila-Na-Gig*, *Quartet*, *Live Encounters Poetry & Writing*, *South Dakota in Poems*, and other journals and anthologies. She is the author of four poetry books, *The Sea is My Ugly Twin* (2018), *The Book of Crooked Prayer* (2020), *Hysterian* (2025), and *Stroke, Stroke* (forthcoming in 2026), all from Finishing Line Press. You can find more about Marcella at www.marcellaremund.com.



OUROBOROS

What if there is no magic in the dragon
devouring itself? Just a hint we can't have life
without death? Best to hitch your wagon

to the facts. Hours and days all speed on
toward a dark doorway, to Atropos' knife.
There is no magic in a hungry dragon.

O happy oblivion, we skip along
as if we have forever. We see the night
ahead, the way grown dim, our wagon's

wheels half off the road. Until at last one
day we can't step up. We fall, fail, can't right
ourselves. And there's the dragon

waiting, where we, like babes again,
come full circle, whimpering for the light.
There was never magic in this dragon—
just a swallowed tail, a temporary wagon.

Marcella Remund

ALL THE BANSHEES ARE FLYING

In great-granny's day, our family had its own banshee,
a cloaked little woman always combing wild red hair,
eyes red-rimmed from constant weeping. She kept

to the woods, flitting here and there among bracken.
Seldom would they see her until one day they'd hear
her shriek, run outside to find her flying circles

round the house and know a son far afield,
a daughter, father, or newest babe had slipped
through the veil. Their own wailing would begin.

Now banshees are everywhere—so many dying
or dead—flying frantic circles above Congo, Ukraine,
Gaza. They weep for Russians tripping out skyscraper

windows. They slog through jungles soaked in rain,
deep in the Amazon, mourn river dolphins, golden
tamarinds. They scream in American schoolrooms.

They bluster and caterwaul where First People keep
a tenuous grip on ancestral homelands. Their cries
for the planet Herself, we mistake for squalls.

We've closed our ears to the banshees, shuttered
windows and doors. We hide behind a deafening,
constant din we make with our machines. We talk

without breathing, fill every silence with useless
chatter. Caught in the yawn of our own prattling,
we've forgotten how to listen. We're snails,

hiding deep in shells of our own design. We crawl
through our dwindling days while all around
banshees fly—weeping, warning, wailing for us all.

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