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MAY 2026

Remembering
DAVID MALOUF
Denise O'Hagan

COVER ARTWORK 'KINTSUGI' BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



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

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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Ulyseas
Publisher/Editor

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MAY 2026

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REMEMBERING
DAVID MALOUF
 MARCH 20, 1934 - APRIL 22, 2026

'What else should our lives be but a continual series of beginnings, of painful settings out into the unknown, pushing off from the edges of consciousness into the mystery of what we have not yet become...'
 (An Imaginary Life)

Vale David Malouf (1934-2026), distinguished novelist, poet, essayist, librettist and playwright as well as passionate supporter of literature. A giant in the Australian literary scene, he was also a generous and kind friend to many and devoted family member; he was indeed 'one of a kind', as described in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. He leaves a rich legacy, from his debut novel *Johnno* (1975) to his final poetry collection *An Open Book* (2018), and his very many awards include the Miles Franklin award (1991), the [International Dublin Literary Award](#) (1996) and the Australia Council Award for Lifetime Achievement in Literature (2016).

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Denise O'Hagan

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DAVID MALOUF IN CONVERSATION WITH DENISE O'HAGAN

Denise: *Good morning, David, and thank you for kindly agreeing to this conversation. You're a poet and playwright, librettist and essayist as well as a novelist, so I might begin by asking what drew you to the world of words in the first place?*

David: The need to discover what I most deeply understood at first, as only the writing itself – words in their moment of appearing on the page – could reveal it to me.

Denise: *Inspiration comes in many forms – people, place or something else entirely. What shape does inspiration take for you, and has this changed over the years?*

David: The sudden apprehension, set off by something seen and heard, or misheard or misread, of a new insight into things, that if I allowed the act of writing to reveal it would appear on the page and be there to be read.

Denise: *Turning to your poetry, now, it is known not only for its lyricism and imaginative power, but also for its themes of 'interconnectedness', a sense of navigating the space between things and people. Is this also how you consider your work?*

David: I think of poetry as revealing to me, as writer or reader, what I think and feel most intensely but also most deeply, but in a spirit of play, both verbally and in active consciousness. What I hope to discover there is my 'real' identity.



David Malouf. Photo credit: Conrad Del Villar.

Denise: *It is said that in times of crisis, people turn to poetry for inspiration, or consolation. Do you feel that with the recent crises – the Australian bushfires and global pandemic – poetry may be becoming ‘used’ in the interests of certain ideologies?*

David: Poetry has nothing to do with issues or ideologies or opinions – or not as I – as a writer or reader – understand it.

Denise: *Following on from that, what advice would you give to an aspiring poet?*

David: I’d offer the same advice as Kipling and DH Lawrence.

Kipling - ‘When your daemon is in charge, do not try to think consciously.

Drift, wait, and obey.’

DH Lawrence - ‘A young man is afraid of his demon and puts his hand over the demon’s mouth sometimes and speaks for him. And the things the young man says are very rarely poetry.’

So I have tried to let the daemon have his say.

Denise: *Writers work in different ways. Do you have a favourite writing routine – a time of day, method of working or anything else that you find conducive to writing?*

David: Fiction demands discipline and persistence of a daily routine. Poetry appears out of nowhere, when it wills.

Denise: *And finally, a practical question. We live in an age of increasing dependence on technology for both writing and the dissemination of our writing, yet I believe you prefer to work by hand. Why is this?*

David: Writing is as much a bodily activity as a mental one. The pace at which the hand moves across a page seems to be one where first and second thoughts can appear almost instantaneously.

Denise: *Thank you very much for your thoughts and time. It is an honour for us to have your participation in this special edition, and we have no doubt that our readers will be thrilled!*

MULBERRY TREE DREAMING

Parachute silk comes spooling out of the mouths
of a silkworm factory; rumbustious breath
of the big tree’s rebel stillness rocks the house.
Invisible rip-cords jerk, sing, take the strain,
and new light mushrooms skyward, a ceremony
of change that no hands work; eyelids fatten,
creep, from spirit, its actual meat, shape strange
cosmologies that hold. Lords of the second
breath and transformation, we too shake loose;
our meaty souls grow light, grow luminous,
break free of their sticky net of fingerprints,
dull household chores, events. Is it enough,
we ask, this faith, this breath? Can we ascend
for ever? The grain of doubt finds its counterweight
of earth and earth falls upward, takes us, heart
and heel. The mulberry-tree, its filaments
all sheer flame, seethes and billows. Tough limbs deal
with the play of its buckled shadow on a wall.

David Malouf, Poems 1959-1989, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1992.

FROM A PLAGUE YEAR

A sign first in the sky, then other tokens,
but plainer, on the flesh. June's thirty suns
flared and we were tinder. Flies appeared
and bubbled in pools, their green gaze multiplied
the dead. But we, the elected, all that term
kept house, kept shop, kept silence, knowing no harm
would come to us. We paid our taxes, served
on juries, saw men punished or reprieved
from death under the law. God's eye
was on us. Like a red-hot cautery
it pricked and burned. *Who keep His just commandments
shall live. No terror can afflict the saints.*

But still each week the numbers swell, the needle
glows. In a devil's covenant, through all
the colours of the rainbow, pale flesh bruises
black, then stinks and softens. We stop our noses,
the death-cloud blooms. We find its dark seeds scattered
like sunshine, everywhere.

And so we board
our houses up, burn pitch, read in the Book
and choke. By day no footfall, no wheel's creak
in the cobbled square. At night the town's aswarm
with cries, a fearful traffic. Dung-carts climb
to where, in moonlit fields, whole families meet
at the real pit's edge, new nameless suburbs greet
new citizens; they seethe like privy holes.

Some say the plague's a rat, soft-bellied squeals
in the rushes underfoot, a red-eyed fever
that glares. Or blame the Jews. Or claim the air
itself turns poisonous; where warm breath clouds
a glass invisible armies spawn, one word's
enough to quell a city. It is death
we suck on now. The plague in our mouth.

No help! Gender of spiders on the tongue
that preaches, curses, pleads, God's judgment wrung
in black sweat from our limbs. Are we in Bedlam
or is it Hell that rocks us with its flame?
The sickness in this month is grown so general
no man can judge. It comes to this: we kill
our neighbours with the very prayers we sigh
to Heaven. O my Lord, spare me, spare me.

TO BE WRITTEN IN ANOTHER TONGUE

As for example, the language in which my grandfather
dreams now he is dead, or living,
muttered in his sleep. Clouds

flow to a different breath, daylight moons hatch from the stillness
of a different dark,
where owls drop from the sun, dirt-coloured starlings

by other names than we know them gather
the dusk, grain by grain let fall the shadow of their bodies.
Such ordinary events

are poems in another tongue and no translation
possible. Owl
with its heavy blood and vowel an open mouth

too slow to snatch the heads off
dustmotes. Humming-birds
like Giotto's tear-stained kamikaze angels

sorrow, having learned
their name in a dead language
is entrée to a steel-meshed aviary or Table of Contents,

some grey *Jardin des Plantes*. Grandfather mumbles
our names in the earth. We come
to light out of his mouth, oracular bubbles.

I range through the thesaurus
for a word: homesickness, yearning
of grandsons for a language

the dead still speak, the dying in their sleep still
mutter, the advent
of common objects, strange upon the tongue.

Dominique Hecq is a widely anthologised and award-winning poet, fiction writer, essayist and translator. She lives and works on Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung land. Hecq writes in English and French. Her creative works comprise a novel, six collections of short stories and nineteen books of poetry, of which *Errances* is the latest (Recent Work Press, 2026).



RETURN TO SENDER

Whiff of perfume. When I lie down on the couch my dreams slip away. The analyst is a white lilac tree with fleshy nipples. A honeysuckle abuzz with bees. A cherry tree puffing under the weight of plump redness. I have much to do today, he says. But I love you. Speak, my love. A bird crashes into the window and drops on the back veranda, wings spread out, beak wide open. I cup my palms over its ribcage. Feel its heart throb. I touch the analyst's hand. It's warm. The two of us, he says. Sunday. My father picks his teeth. I watch his ears. They quiver with each movement of his jaw. Large, fleshy ears stuck to his skull. Curly. Lots of creases and grooves. Furry and hollow in the middle. Furry funnels. My silent words pour in there. Cascade. But my father's ears are deaf to my calls. Two massive doors with a locked safety screen each, a keyhole, peephole, bell and knocker. No mailbox.

Dominique Hecq

SCENES FROM GHENT

After Jarad Bruinstroop

From the Gravensteen donjon
the city is an Astérix cartoon
wavering in haze. The moat
fed with water from the river
stinks of sewerage.

Smell that? You say. That's
what meat tastes like here.

Teetering with thirst
we spiral down & out
the stairs towards the exit.
Cross the square & drink
bad coffee in a posh café.

What did you make of the bit
& bridle in the torture chamber?

I peer into your cinereous face.
See that your jaw has dropped.
Look, I say. I know what you mean.
These were used to prevent free
speech & perhaps also free love.

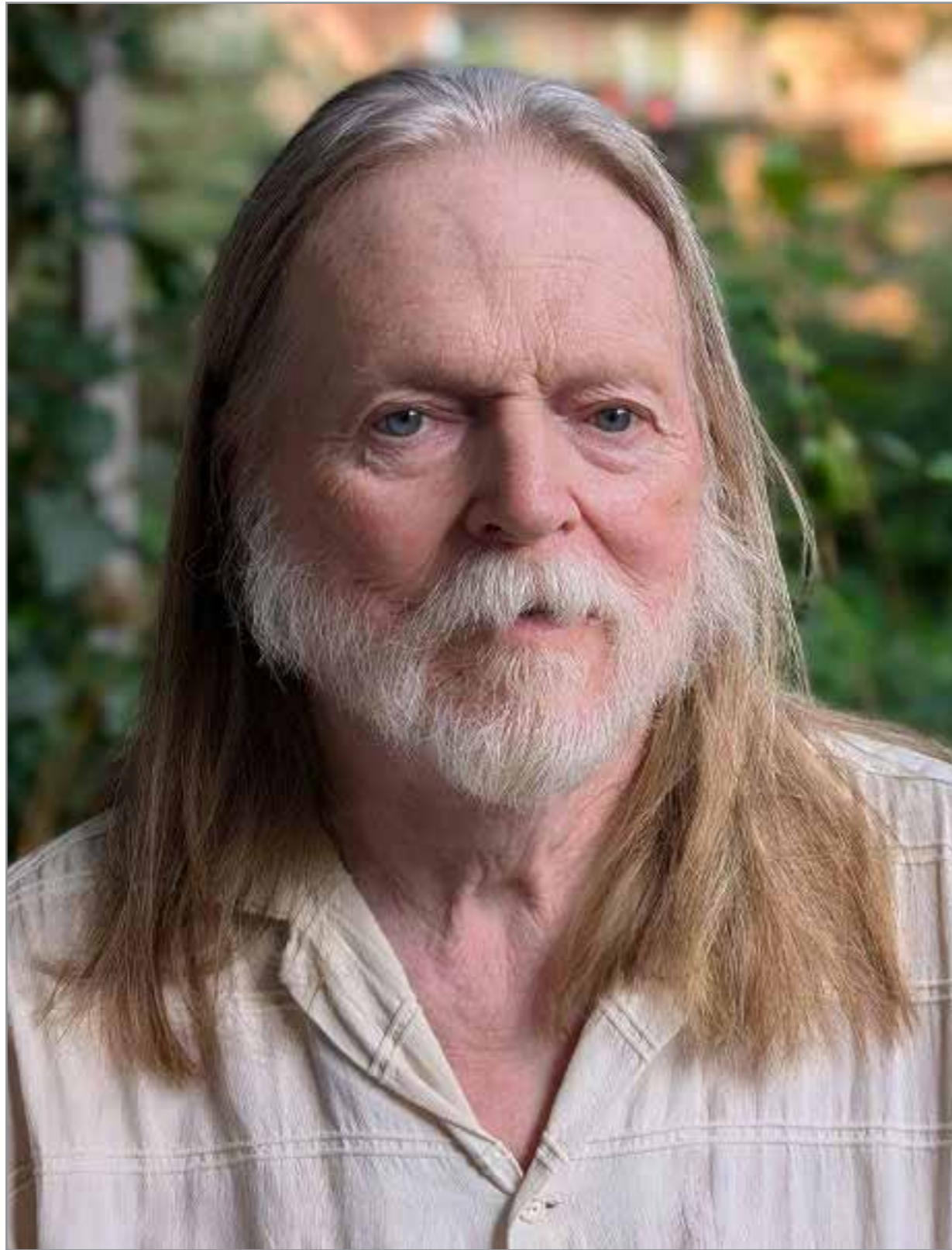
H. G. WELLS UNPLUGS HIS EARS

On each new moon, clockwork oranges unnumber our days. We pull down our lower eyelids in turn and smash an opaque contact lens onto each of our eyeballs - no mirror. Because every calorie fights for its life, we scaffold our life around sleep. Munch ginger, garlic, hemp seeds, blackberries and macadamia nuts. We block blue lights. Embrace plume growth therapy. Discard quantum mechanics, smart phones, antibiotics and vaccines. We scoff at the idea of electromagnetic spectrum and AI. We're hooked on Ozempic and metabolically cold plunge in diatonic scales. Soon, we'll wing sororal songs between Aeaea and Scylla, rocking vessels with white ink and limestone breath from microbiome to velour galaxies. I will slam my hands over my ears, my shadow over her eyes.

With ears to see and eyes to hear, we are beauty that seduces the soundest for after silence, that which comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible is music.

Note: 'After silence, that which comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible is music' is a citation from H. G. Wells.

James Deahl was born in Pittsburgh in 1945; he moved to Canada in 1970, and is the author or editor of over thirty-five books, his five most recent titles being: *Releasing The Wisdom Of Stone*; *To Possess The Land: An Anthology Of Confederation Poetry*; *Four-Square Poems*; *Awareness*; and *The Confederation Poets: The Founding Of A Canadian Poetry, 1880 To The First World War*. He is the editor of *Tamaracks: Canadian poetry for the 21st century*; *In A Springtime Instant: The Selected Poems of Milton Acorn, 1950 – 1986*; and *Adder's-tongues: A Choice of Norma West Linder's Poems, 1969 – 2011*. A cycle of his poems is the focus of the American television documentary *Under the Watchful Eye*. Deahl is the father of three daughters, Sarah, Simone, and Shona, and the grandfather of Scot and Felix. He lives in Sarnia, Ontario.



OCTAVIO PAZ'S DREAM

After lovemaking, we slept
in the river of night
listening to the songs
of the seven jade pendants
nestled between your breasts.
All the while, autumn
passed into winter,
snow filling the cedar's boughs,
burying fallen maple leaves.

As dark currents caressed
our naked flesh,
we heard the seven languages
of water speak the seven words
which call forth the sacred:
that land of virginal light,
pure as the first snowfall
of December — a realm
free of human sin.

The river moved ever towards
its ocean, and we moved with it,
carried along on its journey.
Every current and eddy
was a word, precise as stone,
spoken in wonder.
When dawn graced
the water's surface, we knew
the river in its flowing
had glimpsed the fields of glory.

James Deahl

ALONG THE APPALACHIAN CHAIN

With nice weather, in our Ford sedan we'd
 roam the long spine of Appalachia
 from Medix run, up in Elk County
 near the Allegheny National Forest,
 as far south as Preston and Tucker Counties
 deep in West Virginia's coal country.
 Cousins lived in just about every
 remote village and mill town, mountain laurel
 and rhododendron blooming, the ridge tops
 haunted by ghosts of chestnuts. But today,
 seventy years later, not one spectre
 remains. Chestnuts now live in memory's
 sweet chambers. Like all my aunts and uncles,
 only my rememberings hold them dear.
 My kin worked the coal mines, or on railroads,
 or logged the hardwood forests; they raised
 families wherever the Pennsylvania
 or Baltimore & Ohio tracks went.
 In isolated hamlets where the sun
 refused to shine before eleven o'clock
 they watched massive steam locomotives
 haul coal and coke up steep grades a hundred
 railcars at a time. They watched lives get used up
 and saw friends and family laid away.
 The Laurel Highlands endure all our comings
 and goings. These mountains count the years
 of our passing. I remember dead chestnuts
 all along the Appalachian chain,
 their bleached trunks proud among the living trees,
 and coal barges on the Monongahela
 making their slow journey to Pittsburgh.

THE DARK BELL

Snow blankets our trees
 as we embark upon another new year.
 Even here in the city's heart
 as dusk comes down the avenue
 the trees draw back from their houses.
 A dark bell rings out
 to fill the space the trees
 relinquished,
 every sound an echo
 of other, distant sounds.

If you enter the coming night
 the harbour will still be frozen,
 the stars muffled
 by thick clouds.
 What you always think of
 as your own body may not be
 yours alone.
 When you look up
 the trees have completely vanished;
 only the sound of the bell
 remains
 and its long sojourn.

THE RIVER

A river is searching for you
searching from Lake Huron
to Lake St. Clair

And on it goes, from St. Clair
southward to Lake Erie
always searching

calling your name
throughout the cool dark nights
through the mists
of an early autumn morning

Far below these fields
these fields of feed corn
of soybeans, layer upon layer
of bedrock — thick rock
no one ever visits —
lives on in its mineral silence

Yet even at this very hour
in its honeycomb of darkness
our bedrock prepares once again
for winter.

ONE DAY

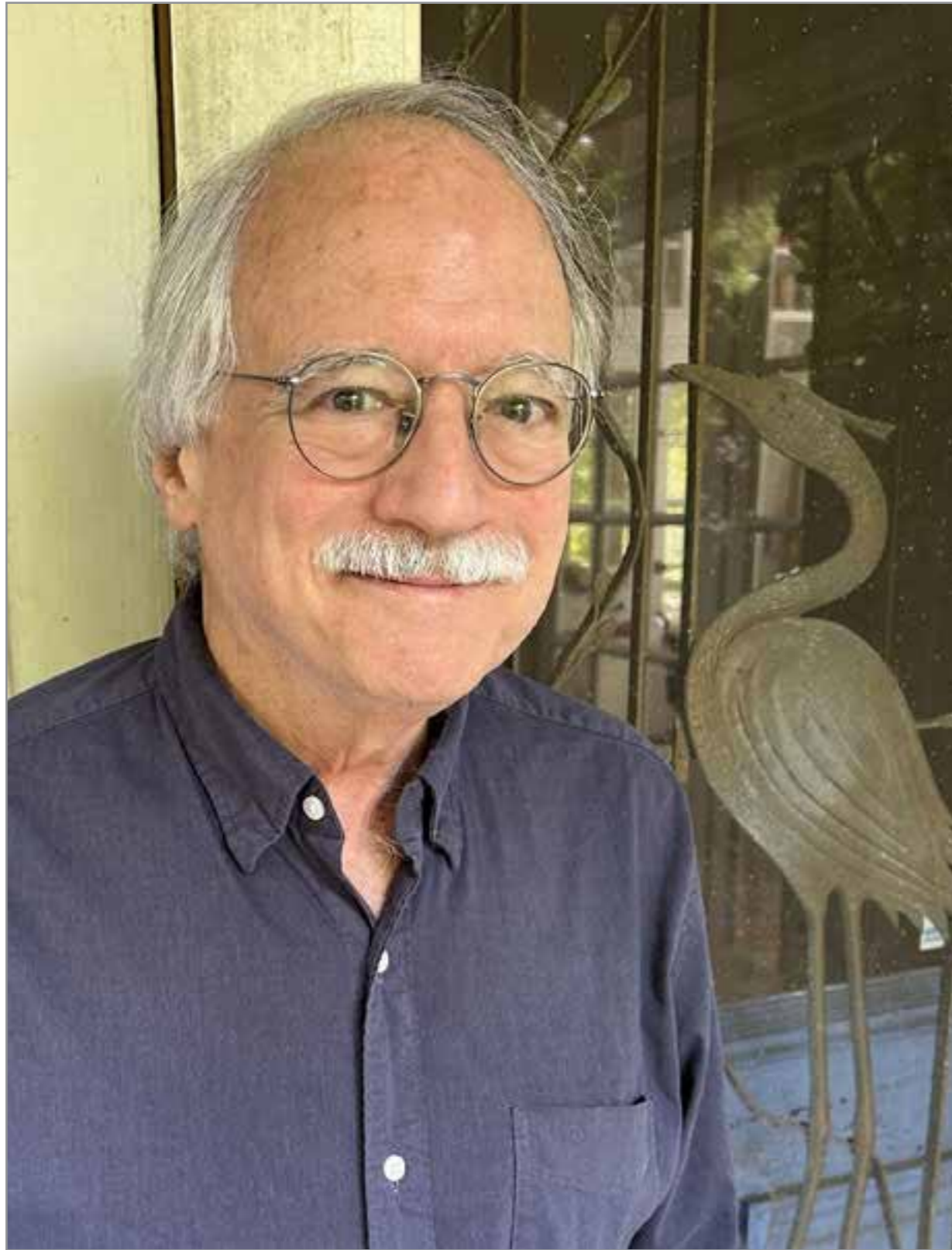
All substance is one.
— Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*

Tonight's winter storm
tossing among my cedars
is the roar
of waves along
the Maine coast.

One day
the Angel of Light
will release me;

one day I may
walk again
where water and rock
are one.

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



THE CHAMPAGNE SPECIAL

In 1947, Lucius Beebe and Charles Clegg chartered a train to celebrate the publication of *Mixed Train Daily*.

They gossiped in top hats and tails, two dandies who lived together, loving trains, fine wines, and each other. They lounged on a flatcar fitted with a line of benches, the shadows of the engine's smoke fluttering on hillside pastures. The train swaggered on the swaying uncertainty of trestles, passing a way freight halted on a siding. Whistles hooted and moaned at each crossing.

At Rocks, above Deer Creek and below an outcrop, they stopped for a picnic, popping corks, pouring champagne from chilled magnums, offering toasts, and feasting on squab. At Delta, the crew pushed hard on cracked wooden beams that moved a turntable, spinning the steam locomotive for its return trip.

On the way back to Baltimore, a jazz band jammed on the main line, syncopating the click and clatter of wheels over tracks. On tangents, they played fast, vamping out Dixieland across the Mason-Dixon line. When tight curves or steep grades strained the antique engine, the band slowed down like a Bourbon Street funeral—the sad joy of horns, blowing sweet licks to fuel the dance of everything that comes to nothing, a cargo of empty flutes, bones on platters.

John Philip Drury. Photo credit: Tess Despres Weinberg.

BRIDGE CREW

Everyone else is overjoyed when the sun comes out after two weeks of rain, but I say “Hell’s bells” as we get our orders to run a work train to the maintenance-of-way yard, two spurs in a weedy field.

Once there, we lift and load new mud sills, scaring away a fox from the pile of ties, Jimmy aiming an imaginary ten-gauge as the smoke blows from Number 26.

The engine stops before a curving trestle and we clamber down the rocks and muddy paths. Blue sky above, but a wet mess in the valley when we set up camp beside a telephone pole.

Loads waggle down on ropes. Through biting sunlight, we steady them against the muddy flood plain. It’s bad with wooden sills and stone abutments—the way wood settles, knocking sills out of true.

I give the wooden board an extra kick with a boot that’s like a pound cake, frosted with mud. “Get down to business, sun,” I say, “Start shoveling. Make your firebox burn like hell.”

THE BRAKEMAN’S DREAM

For once, the mail train ran on time and switches seemed to throw themselves. The locomotive sped up stiff grades and slid through cuts in a hillside, taking tight curves like a bobsled. None of the passengers complained of jolts and jostling. The train moved silently: no screams of babies jarred by stops and starts, no whine of flanges grinding on the rails, no chuffing from the engine, no whistle blowing at crossings, no bell ringing. We glided past each depot, pulled by motive power that put the crew to sleep and drifted over trestles that had collapsed, slowly descending until we skimmed the tassels of corn, leaving a wake behind the coach. That’s what I saw when I woke up and clutched the brake wheel, turning and turning but stopping nothing, afraid that if I halted, the train would finally crash and all the sounds that had been hushed would burst. But there was no explosion. I turned the wheel, and fields darkened, our lanterns flickered, white flags signaled that we were arriving, on time, for once, at the terminal.

John W Sexton lives on Carn Mór, a mountain on the Kerry side of the Beara peninsula in the Republic of Ireland. He identifies with the Aisling poetic tradition and his work spans vision poetry, contemporary fabulism and tangential surrealism. His poetry is widely published and he has been a regular contributor to Live Encounters. He is the author of eight poetry collections, the most recent being *Futures Pass* (Salmon Poetry 2018), *Visions at Templeglantine* (Revival Press 2020) and *The Nothingness Kit* (Beir Bua 2022). In 2007 he was awarded a Patrick and Katherine Kavanagh Fellowship in Poetry.



TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY BRANDED FRUIT VERSUS THE DREAMING

No one anymore wants to shop the true
but misshapen fruit of the myth-aisles,
to caress the velvet foreskin of the apricot,
the golden apple that a male god and his male devil
first used to implicate a pristine Eve.

There's no knowledge in the fruit aisles now:
Granny Smith and Old Mother Williams
usurped by a young pink lady and her siblings,
hybridised with modified code;
the cloying, sickly pineapple, symbol of old money
and corporate wealth; and, of course, the F-worded
phallic banana waiting to be unsheathed.

John W Sexton

continued overleaf..

But split the true pineapple from its crown to its base,
the pineapple of the first garden,
and here you see the two golden sisters, shoulder to shoulder,
their stiff upright hair of green, their owl's eyes of bright gold:
Two Equals One. For in Nature
division does not mean fragmentation, but regeneration.

Halve the pomegranate from its vulva to its skull-button,
and you will see the many wombs
and their manifold gem-like foetuses:
the many children destined
all to become the one Mother again and again.

The Multiple, Manifold Goddess,
now swimming, now rising through the meniscus of sleep;
the Dark Goddess in her crab-claw necklace,
burrowing through the tidal muck, up to her imagination
in lugworms, razorfish, black winkles;
the Bright Goddess, her itchy-ball menses spreading forest upon forest;
the Goddess who offers her fruiting heads to the pecking crows;
whose eternal suffering is in turn repaid by the myriad birds of the air,
who fertilise her branches and roots with their lives, with their deaths,
so that they may be birthed in turn
as petal-winged sirens emerging from blossoms.

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



AMPHITHEATER

Let's pretend that Heaven is merely being part of an audience. Your work or your mistakes, your poor showing on the raised dais are over, now, and all you are expected to do is sit in an amphitheater with sweet breezes and dappled light to watch the ongoing play of how life is. At times, you might enjoy someone else's comeuppance, as if this production were all in your honor. Look how that one who was unkind to you is no longer such hot stuff herself. Look how she has softened enough to see, in her mirror, that she no longer needs to lop off her hair so brutally—one side so short, the other side as long as Rapunzel. If her features were too regular, too beautiful to be spoiled by an odd haircut or unbecoming glasses (these ugly aids that showed her lack of vanity while she looked so good anyway), now she is nearing that stage of life that seems no more than her own unbecoming. Her rejection of you was never significant. Why did you take such notice of it? In the plush theater seat you might be weeping, now, for your enemy.

LaWanda Walters. Photo credit: Tess Despres Weinberg.

BAREBACK HEROINE ON EARLY TELEVISION

At the circus or the ranch
on the tv show, you could always count
on the headstrong girl with the broken back,
beautiful in her jodhpurs, but close to naked now—

you could count on her being okay, later, walking
just fine and marrying the man who carried her,
unconscious and almost naked except for an army blanket
wrapped so it looked like a strapless dress.

She'd be just fine, although she had to be undressed,
first, so the doctor could listen to her heart as she lay
in a strapless dress made of an army blanket—
this was to prevent shock, I think they said.

The doctor used his stethoscope to listen to her heart
and then pronounced she'd broken her back.
She was naked and wrapped in a blanket to prevent shock.
That was their excuse, but it really made the show better—

how the doctor who learns she's broken her back must begin
with getting those clothes off. So it used to be a romantic thing
that made a story better if a beautiful woman was broken.
So we got the wrong idea about doctors—and painters, too,

like the one who seemed romantic to me, knowing my body,
when all I knew came from playing "doctor" with some friends.
I no longer think a story should be violently romantic.
I know the girl in jodhpurs couldn't walk away forever.

NORTH CAROLINA LOGIC

One weekend, they were getting along
and working together to till their lawn.
He'd "borrowed" someone's pickaxe,
and she was scared at first, but the way it just sank
into the soil, inevitable, made gardening
easier. Fresh tomatoes, and later on, jail.

He had "anger issues" and was in and out of jail.
She'd tricked him into marrying, he said, all along.
She knew he'd love her and their child. The garden
and the little girl would help. They forgot the lawn,
though, and how they'd had fresh tomatoes, sinking
their teeth into the sweet fruit. And that pickaxe—

it lay out on the lawn, half-buried, a pickaxe
that a child could fall on. He'd be in and out of jail.
She wasn't pretty enough for him, and so he liked to sink
his fist into her jaw, bash her head. She took it for a long
time. He was handsome. He didn't have to mow the lawn.
She let him buy a Harley, his real love. She'd try to garden.

She worked fulltime as a court reporter, guarding
their child from his drinking, his fist. The pickaxe
must have been out there for years, deep in the weedy lawn,
Chekhov's gun. One day, she saw it and picked it up. Jail
for life is what she might get. They hadn't gotten along
for years. What came over her to think she could sink

that pickaxe into the head of her husband as he lay, sunk
in a Coors Lite dream? The glancing blow just put him on guard.
Wide awake, he was chasing her. She would not have long
to live now. Thank God her girl was at a party! The pickaxe
had not worked. Had she meant it to? Who would go to jail
now for murder? He was strangling her while he called the law.

She got to the kitchen drawer. Why did she go out to the lawn
and pick that thing up? Adrenalin? Her hands slick, she sank
a kitchen knife into his stomach and forgot about murder or jail.
Once you start to kill a snake, you'd better stay on guard.
She stabbed herself too, but that bloody pickaxe
witnessed from the floor. The snake was dead before too long.

And before too long, there were lights circling on the lawn,
a noir effect, blinking black and white, inside where the pickaxe
spoke: *There are no gardens in the jail, and now you're sunk.*

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



IN THE ERA OF DICTIONARIES

In the era of hardback dictionaries
I was young and proud
to be the bearer of a mighty book –
bigger than a bible – bound,
covered, arranged, dressed
and as full of mystery as any dream.
It nourished and defied me
with reams of words – all fresh,
smirking and nonchalant as you like.
It didn't ever complain when I dog-eared
while snatching at elusive meaning
like a young saint sucking up sanctified water
from an eternal spring.

Dear Dictionary,
I haven't lost respect or forgotten but,
like others, I've joined the net race
to look elsewhere for untried language.
In reflective moments, I see you –
quiet as an endless autumn,
smiling down from a top shelf,
urging me to sit on a granary step
in a bundle of calm among breezes
perusing and skimming through leaves,
as song-birds sing songs I'd like to sing.
After all,
we are of element, word and creature.
We are one.

Terry McDonagh. Photo credit: Joanna Longster McDonagh

SOMEWHERE A LONE BLACKBIRD SINGS

From over the hills and far away
where grass was always greener,

I would serenade childhood memories
and meadows that don't recognise me –

now that I'm back – or ask me
what I got up to in my long absence.

Today, a blackbird sang on a withering branch
but that's not the bird that used to intoxicate me

nor is it the bush that housed my dreams
and reached out to autumn that kept on dying.

It's spring. Calves are gimping. I'm not
my younger self but I am patient as I wait

for my past to catch up with my here and now,
as I strain for the faint song of a lone blackbird

in the pilgrim stillness of bog-cotton and hawthorn.



Photograph courtesy: By Juan Emilio from Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, España - Mirlo. (*Turdus merula cabrerae*.) Uploaded by Snowmanradio, CC BY-SA 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=14512312>

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.



THE THIRD ANNUNCIATION

The Annunciation.
No one knows what happened,
but everyone knows
the result of what happened.
That could be said about almost anything.

Patrick Pye, whose art I live with,
often draws people – and sometimes angels –
with scarves blowing in the wind.

Scarves are not breaths, or are they?

Wuthering Heights is read, but not understood.
Wind is the title.
Heights is the title.
Artists are on to something.

Scarves, let's call it.

Richard W. Halperin. Photo credit: Raymond Keane.

ON MARGATE SANDS

There are no words for how it feels to be alone,
yet the fact that being alone at times feels abnormal
is important.

At age 12, in Chicago, I was reading a T.S. Eliot poem
and came across the phrase 'On Margate Sands.'
I had no idea what it meant.

At age 82, in Paris, I just reread the poem, came upon
'On Margate Sands' and have no idea what it means.

But then and now, it helps.

He touches upon either something or the source
of something or the source of everything.

That calms and reassures me.

Also in Yeats.

A good friend, a theatre man, told me that when
he is in *The King of the Great Clock Tower*
or *Purgatory*, without understanding anything
he feels that everything is correct.

That calms and reassures me.

Are Chicago and Paris, are age 12 and age 82,
veils blown out the widow?

In my youth I saw several times Martha Graham
in her ballet *Clytemnestra*. But I also saw her once
darting out of the 50th Street exit of Saks Fifth Avenue.
St. Patrick's Cathedral, which is right across the street,
blew out the window.

POTS OF PAINT

In Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Yeomen of the Guard*
the Fool dies.

Dorothy Parker's longest short story
is 'Big Blonde.'

Those most gifted with wit can portray,
and do, grief.

As an artist, one works with
the pots of paint one is given.
One can call them Muses or pots of paint.

I prefer pots of paint.
Among mine, grief.

The Mother of the Muses is Memory.
I wouldn't say this at a party,
or maybe I would,
but I think her biggest pot of paint is grief.

Pots of experience.

THOUGHTS GOING NOWHERE LIKE AN ORIGAMI PEACE CRANE

Before I met my wife, she and her
entire school class, like many worldwide,
would fold origami peace cranes which
then were shipped to the Children's
Peace Monument, Hiroshima.

Telling me this, she took a scissors,
cut a small piece out of a paper placemat,
folded it into a peace crane and handed it
to me to flap its wings, because the crane
itself couldn't flap its own wings.

This past weekend, yet another insane war
begun by fools whom fools have voted for,
who claim that use of nuclear weapons
is both the cause of going to war and –
stockpile stockpile – the best deterrent to war.

Thoughts going nowhere like an origami
peace crane. Peace cranes are made of paper
but they are also made of the human soul.
As I face this terrible morning
flap flap.

IF THERE IS A DIFFERENCE: MOONLIGHT IN GALLIPOLI

There is Augustan verse and there is so-called free verse. If the poem is good, is there a difference? 'Is there? Is there?' has, in my view, no use at all when it comes to being kind: he who hates his brother is a murderer. This – and the interpretation of dreams – is for another poem.

In the mist. Sometimes Russian paintings pull me into them. This evening, a watercolour by Karl Ivanovich Rabus: '*Claire de lune, Gallipoli, détroit des Dardanelles,*' circa 1820. In the exact centre, a perfect full moon, sharply outlined, blank-faced. High above it, purplish clouds. Below it, the path of one pale moonbeam, crossing the mountains, spilling into the sea, traversing a wide stretch of open water, passing under a tiny iron bridge uniting two town structures, and arriving in the foreground, a harbour where a few people are clustered.

The air, which Rabus renders visible – good artists can do that – may be a mist. Or – I think of Bishop Berkeley – the mist may be in me, since I can only perceive anything through the mist of my senses, except sometimes. All of Plato, all the great religions of the world, and some surprises, are 'except sometimes.'

I trace the moonbeam back to its source, so, back under the tiny iron bridge, over the wide stretch of open water, up the dark mountains, into the purplish sky. The sky has no stars and no stairs. If there is a difference between the two.

I see, close up, the blank-faced moon. I also see many people whom it has been my good fortune to know and to love. Is love – I am not talking about passion, although that may be part of it – always there, sharply outlined, bright?

In the watercolour, Gallipoli is calm. That would not always be the case.

Michael Minassian is a Contributing Editor for Verse-Virtual, an online poetry journal. His poetry collections *Time is Not a River*, *Morning Calm*, *A Matter of Timing* and *Jack Pays a Visit*, are all available on Amazon. His collection *1000 Pieces of Time* was released October, 2025 by Sheila-Na-Gig, Inc. For more information: <https://michaelminassian.com>



A TRICK OF THE LIGHT

At the edge of the garden
I saw a thin black snake

stretched out on the grass,
so still it seemed

a twisted branch some storm
had torn away from the limb

of the apple tree, bare now
with winter's derelict wind.

Perhaps in the morning
I will wake to find the snake

was simply a length of rope
or a random stretch of garden hose,

a trick of light and shadow
no more deadly than other

illusions, stories we tell ourselves,
to welcome or shun the darkness,

on the wounded shore.

Michael Minassian

THE MODELS ALL HAVE DIFFERENT PATHS

says the weather man
and at first, I think
he is talking about
Fashion Week
in Manhattan,

but then he mentions
wind speed
and barometric pressure,
says this storm
will be called Jerry,

my father's name,
on the 10th anniversary
of his death,
just weeks after
he told me about his time

in the navy during WW2
typing supply requests
in San Francisco
or San Diego,
he couldn't remember where.

The eye is clearly formed,
the weatherman continues,
and I know just what he means—
my father suddenly
colorblind late in life,

stopping at green lights
until I took away his car keys—
another cone of uncertainty
before landfall,
the beginning of the end.

EXIT STAGE LEFT

My colleague and office neighbor,
a professor in the theatre department,
caught a late summer cold.
By fall, it turned to pneumonia,
then cancer, then death—
how sudden and inevitable it seemed.

I remember our conversations
about acting, theatre, and students,
comparing notes on our careers,
and college years,
how we ended up in Florida.

*There are more moments
lost than we know,
he once said
when we were having lunch.*

Every semester, he visited
my British Lit Class,
reciting the Prologue to Beowulf
in Old English from memory,
my students looking bored
and impressed in turn.

His wife took my course,
and dropped by my office
while she waited for Richard
to finish his last class,
telling me funny stories
about how they met
and fell in love.

When he got sick,
his students collected money
and sent flowers when he came
home from the hospital.

*He knows he's going to die,
she once told me.*

I drove down to Key West
for Spring Break that year
and when I came back,
he was gone—
a kind and gentle man
he took his last exit
with no dragons by his side.

Nora Brennan's second collection of poems, *Still Time*, was published by Revival Press in November 2024. A prize winner in national competitions including the Jonathan Swift and Francis Ledwidge poetry awards, her poems have appeared in Crannóg, The Kilkenny Poetry Broadsheet, Skylight 47, The Stony Thursday Book and elsewhere. She lives in Kilkenny.



ELEGY

I used to love how snowdrops waited for the year to turn
before breaking ground,
fingers pushed through a blanket of clay, their need
to stretch and step onto the stage, perform
the opening movement; robed in white, joined by
crocuses, hyacinths and the golden bells of daffodils,
a sublime symphony to announce spring.

All that constancy I took for granted,
happenings that remained steadfast through the years.

Now, not long after Samhain,
before the ghosts of their ancestors have come to rest,
before the waning light stands still,
they rise like bewildered children in the night,
cast out on empty stomachs, confused by the warmth,
caught in the crossfire of our greed, they risk annihilation,
frost burn, a late November cut.

Children of the earth, *our times have robbed your cradle.**
We who should know better, close our eyes to your distress.

* Eavan Boland *Child of our Time*

Nora Brennan

WARMING THE SPACE

Rain, and more rain.
Snails creeping up the walls again.

When a warm air mass meets the cold
the meteorologist tells us, rain falls.

Kindness has that effect too.
The unexpected sweetness of tears

when a cold heart is touched by love
a graced seeing when fog clears,

not the one who turned her back to you
but a child, frightened and alone.

At the grave, your watering eyes warm the space
where forgiveness shakes the hand of pain.

HARVEST

remembering Vincent's Wheatfield with Crows

August and the golden fields,
rich and generous, dry as a whistle,
heads of corn bowed as if knowing their fate;
my father on the headland,
an ear of barley scrunched between his hands
knowing, as he chewed the grain,
the time was ripe for cutting;
the hum and thrum of a thresher,
crows gathered in the trees,
toiling men, mugs of tea and currant bread,
a meitheal to ferry the grain home.

Against all this, you,
little more than half my age,
your easel perched by the edge of a field,
the windswept wheat cut through
by a dead-end path. Here, mid-July
as days shortened and nights grew cold,
you painted a brooding sky, heavy with cloud,
black crows soaring, and swooping down
above the lush luminous grain.
Did you hear the thrum of the harvester then
weeks before the reaping?

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

STORM IN THE DISTANCE

She walks intently forward
 unafraid of grey's lack of definition
 fearing, respecting only the flickering red
 not minding the temporary, wavering oranges
 disregarding the black...
 knowing there is still something green somewhere.

Even tho something is burning
 out there
 perhaps in a county far away
 where strife makes humanity cry.

White snow refreshes everything.



Ray Whitaker

WATER

The headwaters of the Rio Grande are roaring
 full of snowmelt, poured down from high peaks
 rivulets filling rocky watercourse ways,
 those filing small gorges in the high rocks
 all of it pouring over cliffside
 a waterfall white with beauty
 falling two hundred fifty feet
 leaving a wee rainbow of mist in the air.

The Rio Grande flows it's way to Texas
 and here the headwaters are angry
 crossing this now is impossible
 splashes and spray from rocks,
 and a noisy roar as the churning water collides.
 Even Brother Moose, daring to cross, has trouble.

The water could be the trouble with the constructs of men
 anger, trepidation, buffeting, thundering
 the mountain Gods voice their opinions
 with lightening, strong winds tug at trees.

Some Native American tribes say we are the water
 going well beyond a wet
 beyond a feel of humidity
 to the forests, the trees, the animals
 and even when we are laid to rest in the earth
 the flow continues as the earth gladly accepts us
 everything returns in a cycle as old as time
 and ends up in the rainwater falling.

SCRAMBLE

The rush to completion
 like a weighted option
 not like a leisurely pace up the path
 this urgency exists
 because it is Life,
 a birth
 umbilicus cut,
 newness of experience.

Not sure of the proper english word
 for this, this determined rush
 like to save a Life
 in an Emergency Room
 Nurses Respiratory Therapists, Docs
 wading in the crowded space around the gurney
 intention to correct malady
 relieving infirmity, life threatening instances
 requiring highly educated folk
 focused without hesitation.

No confusion.
 Failing not allowed in this moment.
 Again, not merely in a alpha male's way
 or even the dominant female approach
 not that a'tall
 this scramble up a sheer rock face
 repelling ropes in place
 determined to safely make the space
 Brevity intention determination
 Woven and laced.

Valentina Teclici was born in Romania and immigrated to New Zealand in 2002. She holds a Bachelor in Philosophy from the University of Iasi and a PhD in Sociology from the University of Bucharest, where her doctoral thesis focused on street children. Her debut book, *De la noi din gradiniță (From our Kindergarden)*, Ion Creangă Publishing House, 1986, was awarded a national prize. Poems and excerpts from her books for children are included in the bibliography and textbooks for primary and secondary education in Romania. She has published several books of sociology, poetry and stories for children in both Romanian and English. Her work has been translated into French, Te Reo and Spanish, and published in many magazines and anthologies in New Zealand and overseas. Valentina has been a member of Writers' Union of Romania since 1993, and of The Theosophical Society since 2022. In January 2026, she stepped into the role of Theosophy Hawke's Bay Affiliated Centre Coordinator. She lives in Napier with her husband Robert.



THE WORD WAR

In my dreams, words are creatures
with different shapes and feelings.
The word *war*, for example,
appears to me as a wounded human shadow.
Sometimes it has amputated hands and legs,
other times, a disfigured head.
Most often, the word *war* is killed by bombs,
shot in the chest or in the back,
crushed under rubble.
Clothed in blood, it spreads the smell of suffering
and heroism, paid with life.
If it lives, it's only a ghost adorned with traumas.
The word *war* drinks from the cup of fear
until the last drop.
It knows that the bridge between despair and hope
is carpeted with unexploded grenades.
It knows that the defeated and the victorious ones
are twin brothers.
In my dreams, the word *war*,
which has never been warmed by the sun of LOVE,
longs for one of its divine rays,
and cries like a child at the breast of peace
while those who give orders to kill polish it
like a silver trophy
and dream with open eyes of platters of glory.
I wonder how the history of Earth
would have looked
if the word *war* – written or unwritten –
had never existed.

Valentina Teclici

DIALOGUE BETWEEN POET AND READER

“Poet, how will your poetry look
when wrinkles will deeply furrow the field of your face,
when your sight will be a misty curtain,
your hearing, a prison of silence,
your fingers trembling like violin strings,
your legs, woollen skeins, too soft to carry you?
How will your poetry look, poet,
when you will feed yourself,
with the bitter bread of loneliness
or live together in a nursing home
with brothers who have also lost their independence?
Aren't you overcome with worry and fear
at this image?”

“Not at all, dear reader,
because I know that my soul, divine spark,
is forever young and eternal.
If a long life is written in my destiny,
when my body will be a wreck
my verses will express the truth
of my experiences and reflections.
I will see with my blurred eyes
what others, blinded by the temptations of the material world,
cannot even glimpse.
From the prison of my lost hearing, I will listen to music
and divine words, impossible to be heard
by those deafened by their muddy thinking.
My helpless physical body
will be the bird of imagination reaching the peaks of creation.

Poetry, the eternal youth of my spirit
will spring from cosmic thinking,
from the depths of my past lives,
from searching within,
from acceptance, forgiveness, blessing
but especially from the ocean of unconditional love
into which I pour and am poured.
Poetry would appear to me
as a sphere of light and love,
as the beginning without end,
as the answer to the suffering of humanity,
as the flame of universal harmony,
which you, dear reader, will also carry
on your journeys towards enlightenment.”

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