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JUNE 2026



MARK TREDINNICK  
*The Names of All You Hold Dear*

COVER ARTWORK 'QUINTESSENCE' BY IRISH ARTIST EMMA BARONE



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.



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Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Ulyseas  
Publisher/Editor

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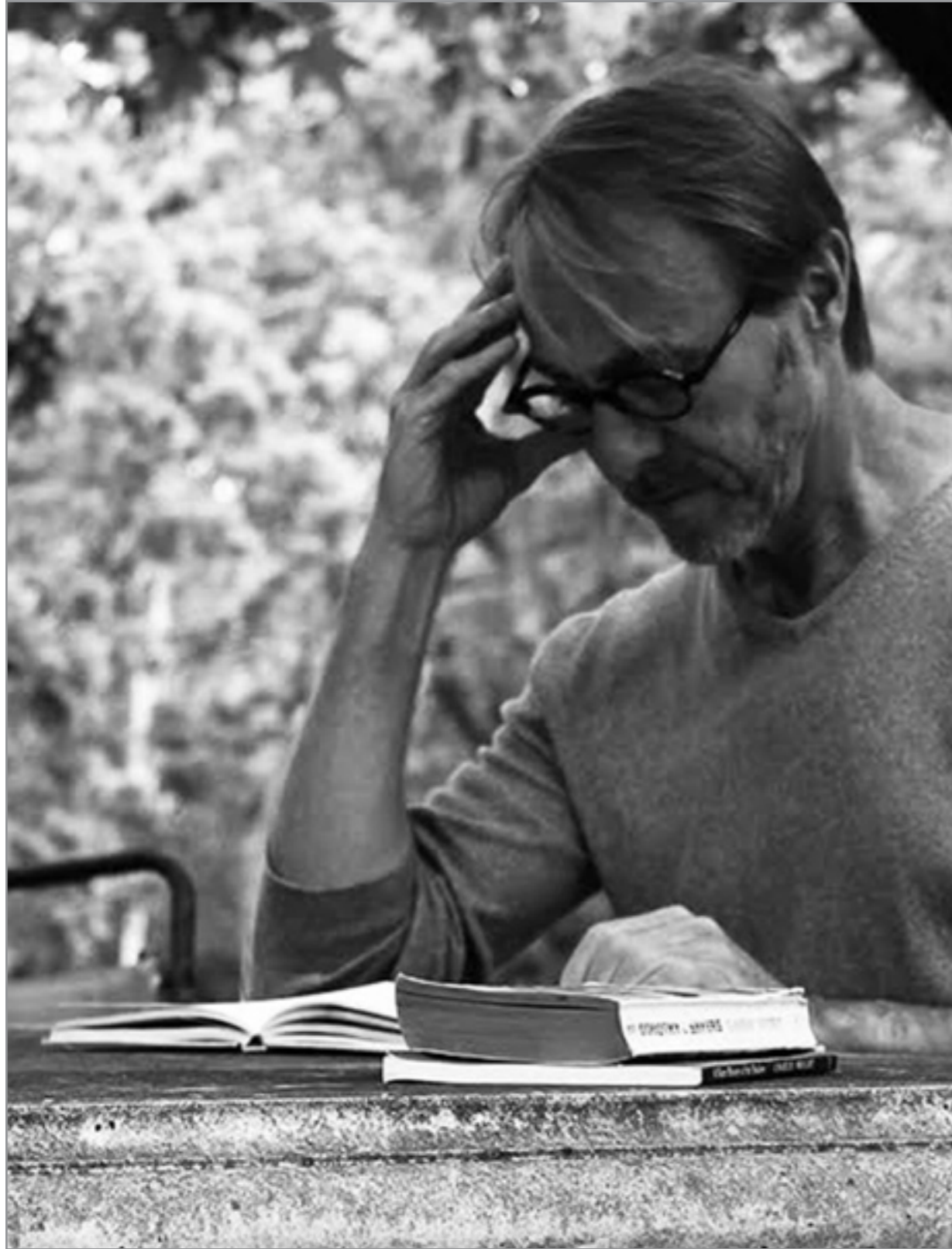


JUNE 2026

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



## THE NAMES OF ALL YOU HOLD DEAR: A NOVENA

1.

MAY it be true that, though we shed the years, the lives we spend stay  
Where we spent them, and with whom and what. So, though you've stepped, Mother,  
From the burning circle of our days, your life is carried on.

2.

Who takes form must give it back: that's the deal life makes with time. But  
That which was once embodied, so that it might know love and be  
A voice in love's long choir, never finds an end. And nor will you.

3.

Is the longing one feels, all one's days, a foreknowledge of this  
Missing the departed feel for the living world? Tell us what  
You most miss—high cloud, dawn song, preludes, frogs—and we'll miss them more.

4.

Across the rooftops and through the spreading pinions of the pines,  
Day fails and night rains a fine dust my daughter sits and reads in,  
Till she can't. May it sometimes be like this, too, where you are now.

Mark Tredinnick. Photo credit: Isabella Brown.

*continued overleaf..*

5.

May the birds gather like a well-tempered synod of weather,  
Here in this grey haven of gums, where all that's not yet transposed  
Of you into eternity's holy thrum stays on a while with us,

6.

Prays on a while with us, and with the bluewrens and grass parrots,  
The passing seasons and the ordinary hours they traffick.  
And let's join you in the raven's caw, the morning rush, the hush.

7.

Surely time runs rings around us, and we are still on Copeland  
Road, headed for school in the Escort; and these are your soft shoes  
Running like four young boys and a dog up and down the pedals.

8.

A name for the whole world is Mother. Child. Woman. Wife. Heather  
Runs fragrant where it always ran. Heaven is scented with song,  
Some of its notes yours now, the names of all you held dear on earth.

9.

When the storms stopped, fire sang the world into the kind of stillness  
Trees could grow in and love might start. Words made a hearth of wildfire.  
And you fall back now, soft molecules, into the canticle.

## THE AGE OF STARS

*For Dave at Sixty*

*l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle.*  
—Dante, *La Comedia* (Par. 33.143-45)

*... we should be careful  
Of each other, we should be kind  
While there is still time.*  
—Philip Larkin, "The Mower"

*And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehendeth it not."*  
—John 1:5

1

ON LITTLE MOUNTAIN deep in winter stop  
The car at midnight. Stand among the gathered

Bands of barrel gums and contemplate  
The sky. This is the age of stars, this many-

Billion-yearred experiment in light,  
When nearly all the matter in the world

(This universe of forms and voids we are)  
Is organised in luminescent mobs

Like those assembled on the plains of time  
Above our heads. Our being here at all

Is down to them, their coming and their going,  
The way their being comprehends the dark,

So while this holds, stand glad among the living  
And let your breathing fall in with the stars.

*continued overleaf..*

\*

2

THE ERAS age; all light in time will dim;  
Then nothing much will happen—on and on.

But let's agree Forever has a few  
More miles in its old legs. Let's make a pact

To sow the light that's left to us; let's scatter  
All the starlit matter we can spare.

Let's dance quite often with the one we love;  
Let's wage iambic warfare on the prose

That dumbs the days; let's praise in jazz and think  
In syncopated rhythms like the winds

Of early spring. Let's ebb like ageing stars,  
You say; let's spend our waning energy

Among the constellations of our care.  
Let's learn to fall the way we meant to live.

\*\*

3.

BESIDE THE pool across the tracks from where  
You've lately made your home, an episode

Of winter rain makes landfall like a meteor  
Shower among the teeming white of prunus

Trees, as if to flush their Seraphs out.  
But when you wake into the seventh heaven—

The Cielo di Saturno—of your way,  
Your contemplative era, your temperate zone,

You'll find, above the multitude of fallen,  
A throng of thriving stars intact. The nearer,

It seems, you draw to the stars, the farther from home,  
The more you get to weep at the comedy

Of life. But the more, if you're smart, you learn of the love  
That burns in the sun and all the ageing stars.

\*\*\*

## NEAR SASKATOON

Ten minutes out of Melville, the train  
sounds its rude horn at a level crossing,  
and I watch a cardinal fly a ploughed field,  
changing its mind in open ground  
between one bare copse of wattle  
and birch and the next.

The water  
is dark in the shining ponds, and the grass,  
where it stands, is straw. The beaver  
lodge is an unreconstructed temple, a little  
out of its depth, and even the water here  
has lost its faith in spring.

But if you look closely,  
the birches are budding: the sun  
is out and the air is hitting 18 degrees,  
and I guess this feels to the trees like their  
moment.

Except for the traces it leaves,  
the art of ploughing is very like the art  
of flight—how do you read the field  
as you write the field, and how do you  
know when to turn?

Grace is a knack,  
which comes by art, and it makes nothing  
much happen;

nothing like this, for instance:  
a cardinal sows the Saskatchewan  
sky, and the birches begin to reap.

## AND THEN, THE HORSES

A W I N D bright as prayer flags tears the floodplain  
Apart. Mid-August never felt so warm.  
Beside the car, unsteady in the wild air, my father seems uncertain  
Where he stands and what's become of everything

He knew. Five miles north the mountain rests  
Like St Exupery's hat.  
The gale blows the inland inside out  
And drops it here like silt across the afternoon.

And then, at the fence, among the peppermints, the horses,  
The foal, *green in judgment*, rolling in her mother's feed—*her salad days*—  
and beside me, my father, at his ancient ease again.

## THIS LITHE MOON TONIGHT

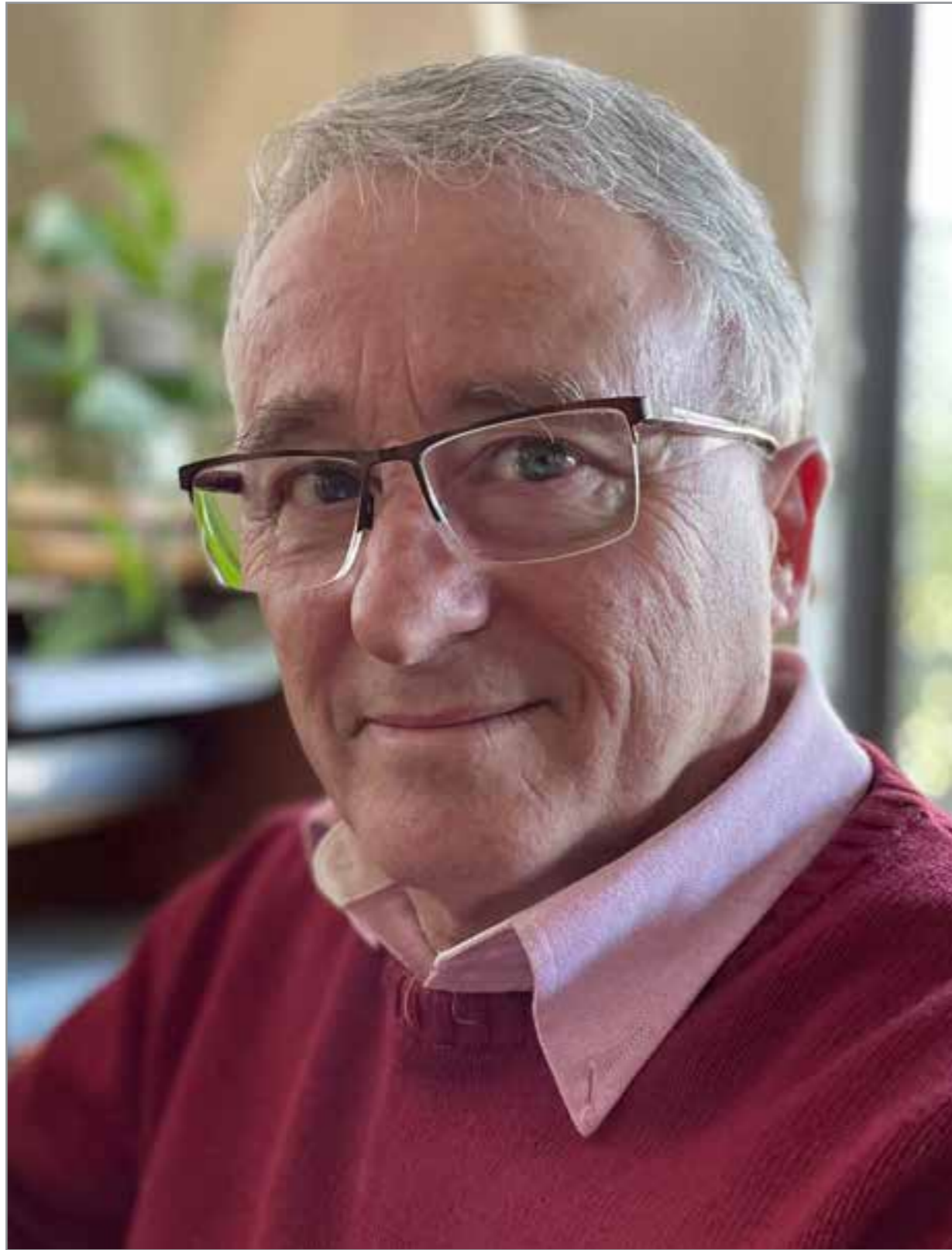
ONE DAY I may write  
three lines that outlast time. Like:  
this lithe moon tonight.



©Mark Ulyseas

Half moon at dawn against a grey sky. Photograph © Mark Ulyseas

Isi Unikowski lives in Canberra, Australia. He has been widely published in Australia and overseas, including *Best of Australian Poems 2022*. His collections 'Kintsugi' (2022) and 'Re:Vision' (2025) are published by Puncher & Wattman, New South Wales. His published poetry can be viewed at <https://www.isiunikowski.net>.



## THE DESPOTS OF EPIRUS

Like missing-person posters at the local mall,  
 the faces of the last rulers of the Despotate of Epirus  
 look out from their keeps in tapestries and icons  
 with enough detail to be plausible; but,  
 as I squander an hour or so by tapping on links  
 for 'predecessors', or 'fathers',  
 and lineages stumble backwards over history's uneven pavement—  
 arrival of a greater power from somewhere else,  
 or the matrilineal line cracks  
 with treachery over supine scions—  
 their faces take on the physiognomy of doubt itself,  
 vulnerable to time's rucked weather; a muddy coin  
 waiting to be dislodged by a plough;  
 mosaics tiled in cloud and snow; a fresco  
 in a ruined abbey, that's half profile, half stain,  
 reminding me how I used to procrastinate, making  
 photocopies of photocopies of photocopies  
 in the library basement: the very last one always  
 precarious, like something almost appearing  
 in rain's cold, dented pewter.

Isi Unikowski

## THE PRIME MINISTER LISTENS TO THE LAST MOVEMENT OF MAHLER'S NINTH

We saw him once: ushered into the back room at the record store, where it was known he'd make his choices among the late Romantics. He sailed serenely past us while we paused, a little awestruck, from flicking through the racks and bins, then turned to one another, agog. So it might have been Boulez at that time, or others of that ilk, from where he'd go back to the eyrie he was known to inhabit among his antique clocks and furniture; his Parnassian mode. Later, it was said that he might even have been depressed at times, 'somewhere else' when the call for him to join the battle required his characteristic aggression and drive. But he was troubled by Mahler, who prescribed *abandoning 19 out of 20* ideas every day. That's how I see him now: all he can hear is that final coda behind the sense of crisis, the raised tones around the table; those sparse, lingering notes demand that he change his life, not the country's. *A symphony must be like the world*, says Mahler to Sibelius; why not vice-versa? broods the PM.

## THE FIRST TIME I WATCHED SKULL MURPHY AT WORK

I'd watch TV while my grandmother baked and roasted, and today the wrestling was on: some guy performing a knee drop onto another guy's elbow,

held outstretched beneath him. It wasn't that, so much as every time he did, the young man's head bobbed up and down in agony;

again and again, that awful motion with his head, as if affirming his pain each time those knees landed. Bubba must have come in and noticed the hold

I was held by before the screen. I heard her offer to go outside and help my grandfather, up a ladder with his old, blunt shears, hacking at the hedge.

It wasn't so much the violence I was watching for the first time, but how hard I found it just to look away, for all my distance from that tiny screen.

Ormila Vijaykrishnan Prahlad is a widely published and awarded Indian-Australian artist and poet with works in *Cordite*, *Black Bough Poetry UK*, *The Salons*, *Poetry Sydney*, and other publications. She has performed internationally, including at *Oxford Poetry Circle*, *The Surrey Laureate Lounge*, and *Charing Cross Library UK*. She won the 2025 *Bankstown Poetry Slam* (Sydney Writers Festival), the 2025 *Bread and Butter Slampionship* at the Opera House, the 2025 *Don Bank Short Fiction Cup*, and the Curator's Award in the 2025 *Grieve Anthology*. A multiple *Pushcart Prize*, *Best of the Net*, and *Best Small Fictions* nominee, she is the author of *Patchwork Fugue* (Atomic Bohemian Press 2024) and *A Second Life in Eighty-eight Keys* (Hedgehog Poetry Press 2024, winner of the Little Black Book Competition). Her new collection is forthcoming from 5 Islands Press (2026). Her artworks have been published on the covers of *Yale Divinity School*, *Pithead Chapel*, *Amsterdam Quarterly*, and numerous other literary magazines. She is the current and inaugural Writer in Residence at Woollahra Libraries. Find her @oormilaprahlad (X) and @oormila\_paintings (Instagram)



Ormila Vijaykrishnan Prahlad

## TWO-NOTE DRONE

It was a wicked prank, really—  
older sister telling her younger brother  
of the mysteries of the deep,  
of the great white patrolling the waves,  
lurking to chomp an arm or foot.

Of course, there were no sharks  
in that placid gulf—just schools  
of mackerel, and red-gilled anchovies,  
but I would slip beneath  
the waves at high tide,  
gliding under to find the leg  
of my unsuspecting brother,  
nipping like a blunt-toothed turtle,  
pretending to be Bruce  
from Spielberg's ruthless sea.

The jump scare always worked  
and the joke played on for years  
till he grew up and realized that  
our childhood sea was harmless—  
that the periwinkle folds  
kept nothing in its depths.

Such was the fun of those times—  
innocent, distant now.  
I stand at a southern harbour  
watching the nylon netting  
holding away what the waters  
at Shark Beach really harbour—  
the two-note drone growing loud  
above the crash of the waves:  
*Ta-dum, ta-dum, ta-dum.*

## CHRISTIANSSEN PARK, VAUCLUSE

*for Nik*

Remember that time you said that flying  
was trusting the wind,  
that a moth or a bird,  
or an archaeopteryx in its time,  
just took to the skies, knowing  
it would be buoyed.  
A reckless leap—  
no trace of hesitation  
to weigh its body down.

It is the same here,  
on this green wedge  
where the wind is a whistling force  
and I feel airborne though I have  
no wings, and the lighthouse fears  
for my waif-body as I toe  
the beaded edges of the cliff.

Brush and stone spill  
into the mouth of oceans.  
Sometimes, it is hard to remember  
you are not a bird.  
But I don't think that is you—  
you who are always sky-ready  
in your metal armour,  
flight bones primed as you thunder  
A320s off the tarmac.

We are sky-sirens—  
I taxi off the page,  
you glide into the clouds.  
This is where we will skim together,  
arms outstretched  
like when we were children:  
airborne, not knowing  
if feathers will sprout  
but leaping anyway  
to meet the glitter below.

## LIMBO CHILD

*A golden shovel after Song of the Future*

*The native grasses, tall as grain,  
Were waved and rippled in the breeze;  
From boughs of blossom-laden trees  
The parrots answered back again*

-Banjo Paterson

How do I look this conundrum in the eye, the sting every time I bare my face—*not native enough*—a ferret that has crept out of the grasses. When will I convince myself I am allowed to stand tall wear my hard-earned victories with pride just as much as anyone else who has toiled against the grain? Am I the face of the future, and is it something that were desired, or am I something to be awkwardly waved into a corner—a token, a temporary reprieve and a problem to be tamed. Who am I in whom much has rippled, a vessel to hold so many disparate worlds in bronzed silence. Will I ever find my place in the lines of this red earth, I who have floated on the breeze so far and so often that now I am from nowhere, of no land, and all I hang upon the boughs of memory are the curled and distressed maps of lands and rivers too far-flung, childhood blossoms whose shape and feel I forget, their pollen laden with the prints of faded mountains and trees. I am the limbo child of another earth, and no earth, the sky above me filled with rose-ringed parrots, asking if I would answer back. I have answered, I say, with both ink and dignity, even though I hold back often—and words seem to fail me now and again.



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Photograph © Mark Ulyseas

Anne M Carson is an Australian poet, essayist and creative writing teacher living on unceded Bunurong Country, whose poetry is published widely and acknowledged in awards including the Society of Women Writers NSW (2024). Her fifth poetry collection, *George Sand (and Me): a poetic biography* is forthcoming, and in 2027, Liquid Amber Press will publish her collection *Originary*. Her PhD received an Outstanding Dissertation Prize (2024).



## PROTEST IS A CREATIVE ACT

after Jemima Wyman *Haze 20*, 2024

*Hand-cut digital photographs of smoke sorted by colour and then chronologically*

At first the hung fabric seems to be outsized shower curtains or draped room dividers. Hanging floor-to-ceiling, two giant pieces, gossamer-thin. People passing cause them to billow and blouse. Hued in muted rainbow tones – abstract, almost floral.

Cut up photographs of smoke from hundreds of world-wide protests collaged into a dynamic roseate pattern. It swells and swirls like a mushroom cloud, like a geyser already burst. Photo-fragments of fumes from stacks of burning tyres (acrid, throat-tearing), smoke bombs (viscous), incendiary vehicles, the choking 'green' smoke from piles of manure and hay- bales, from flares, Molotov cocktails, tear gas. In that photographic melange, amongst all the poisonous lung and windpipe wrecking smoke – one whisp of the healing herbal smoke of sage.

Each citizen action is named, located, dated – farmers, (with and without tractors), students, environmentalists, anti-environmentalists, animal rights activists, people pro-squatting, pro-Monarchist, anti-Government, demanding justice for Palestine, for Israeli hostages, for farmer's rights, the end of femicide, against the granting of amnesty for Catalan protesters, for and against abortion and euthanasia, against the resumption of bullfighting, against the EU Green deal, against tariff-free trade with Ukraine. The billowed smoke from the actions of right-wing activists inseparable now from the protest smoke of left-wing activists.

All the particulates absorbed now into the lungs of the protesters, bystanders, emergency services personnel, the put-upon somewhat forgiving air, and the respiring body politic. What remains is the battered and burnt beauty of human action – imprint in the fabric of the world.

Anne M Carson

*Protest is a creative act*, an exhibition at Museum of Australian Photography 2025

## THE REV SKATES

after *Reverend Robert Walker (1755 - 1808) Skating on Duddingston Loch*  
by Henry Raeburn - National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh, online collection

The weather is stormy at the far end of the Loch today, clouds  
heavily freighted although up towards heaven they thin  
and a blurred blue pool leaks through. Sheets of rain

(or are they brushstrokes) pelt down. Mist hangs off the crags  
and the ground is moody with brooding and melancholy.  
A faint mushroom light illuminates a patch above the valley.

But weather is clear where the Rev takes his exercise  
on the ice. Untroubled by inclemency (he is made of sterner stuff)  
the air around him seems to know this and part for him.

Not even a rain-jacket or hood to keep possible precipitation at bay  
just his frockcoat dress hat and a nicely ruffled cravat at his throat –  
gear of choice for skating gents at the tail end of the 1700s.

The Rev bends an exact forty-five degrees off perpendicular, erect  
(though cantered), adopting travelling mode. He makes it look easy  
keeping his angle just so, his balance and his arms crossed

at his chest but it's not easy (which is why he likes it). He likes  
to pit himself against a worthy foe and keep his composure  
his rectitude, his eye keen on the goal. He makes a neat parcel

of a man – nothing gangly or awkward to muddy his presence  
in the world. His faith is an impenetrable aura, confidence gathered  
in. He has inscribed circular patterns in the ice – a member

of the first figure-skating club in the world, he loves practicing  
finds it calming – the regularity of the moves, the rhythm of glide  
unweigh, glide again, the cold air, his solitude in a wild landscape.

There's some soul-quirk that he can find the Almighty as present  
here, figure skating alone in the Scottish Highlands as at his Kirk's  
altar leading his congregation in prayer and Presbyterian praise.

Shona Bridge lives and works on Darkinjung land (NSW Central Coast). She is currently working on her debut collection of poetry. Her poems have appeared in *The Marrow*, *Hecate*, *Ribbons*, *Kokako* and various anthologies. When she's not writing, Shona is out in her community sharing the skills and tools of Yoga. She is passionate about nervous system regulation as a counter movement to the challenges of our lives. Shona loves well-crafted writing that dares to speak from the heart. Insta: @shonawrites



## RIVER STONES DREAM OF THE SEA

What will happen  
when I ford the river's

cool quickness,  
washing away the silt

of all the places  
my mind lures me,

like yesterday  
and tomorrow?

Threads come loose  
when I pull them,

careful stitches  
unravel. What will

happen when I wade  
long-hemmed

into the homing current  
of all that flows?

Shona Bridge

## WILD

Have you seen how trees  
offer branches, forgiving  
the seasons? I am learning  
the language of leaves;  
I want to believe it's not  
too late. When I am  
bones, earth will hold me.  
Like trees, poets already  
know they belong. If they are  
wrong, so are the trees.

## PAPER DAISIES

Standing over the  
neighbour's mower, my father  
frowns. Citrus rises

on the threat of rain.  
My father yanks the mower's  
chord but the motor

doesn't fire. He pulls,  
pulls again. His face is now  
as dark as the clouds.

At last, the motor  
flares, catches; spinning blades rush  
over grass until

the mower strikes poo.  
My father swears. His words land  
hard on my memory

of our kind neighbour,  
fallen under her clothes line,  
her skin tracked with ants.

Now the afternoon  
stinks and the bees are gone from  
the paper daisies.

Ma Yongbo was born in 1964, Ph.D, representative of Chinese avant-garde poetry, and a leading scholar in Anglo-American poetry. He is the founder of polyphonic writing and objectified poetics. He is also the first translator to introduce British and American postmodern poetry into Chinese, making contributions that fill gaps, the various postmodern poetry schools in Chinese are mostly guided by his poetics and translation. He has published over eighty original works and translations since 1986 included 9 poetry collections. He focused on translating and teaching Anglo-American poetry and prose including the work of Dickinson, Whitman, Stevens, Pound, Amy Lowell, Williams, Ashbery and Rosanna Warren. He published a complete translation of Moby Dick, which has sold over 600,000 copies. He teaches at Nanjing University of Science and Technology. The Collected Poems of Ma Yongbo (four volumes, Eastern Publishing Centre, 2024) comprising 1178 poems, celebrate 40 years of writing poetry.



## READING VIRGIL IN AUTUMN

Before facing the future, return first to the silence of the dead,  
phantoms shun you three times; even your own father  
passes dreadfully through the yard, his long hair ablaze, his face unseen.

Those phantoms drifting in the air pierce straight into your eyes,  
every embrace of ecstasy passes hollow and unfulfilled,  
while suffering, woven with memories of suffering,  
becomes sorrow doubled upon sorrow.  
Enjoying is the gate of ivory, suffering the gate of horn,  
whichever gate you take to leave the underworld,  
you return to the same lost path.

Dido looks Aeneas up and down,  
her desperate silence drifting like white doves upon heaving tides.  
Smoke curling upward from the funeral pyre,  
and masts dwindling low above the sea  
measure the helpless rift between love and duty.

After death, we are mere shadows, never to walk the mortal world again,  
though surrounded by shades of the departed,  
it cannot compare to carving oars beneath the sun.  
See how the wedge-shaped prow rises high once more,  
its hull cleaving the water, ploughing through the waves—  
exile itself becomes homeland, and all things have only just begun.

Therefore, Virgil—my guide, my master—  
I shall take jagged reefs for an altar,  
no longer dividing the underworld from the living world.  
From you alone I learn the true meaning of courage;  
as for fate, I must turn to others for answers.

Ma Yongbo

## SPENDING A QUIET AFTERNOON READING OVID ON THE DOUBLE NINTH FESTIVAL

Sunlight glimmers high above,  
chrysanthemums everywhere shake their small fists in quiet protest.

Green mountains lie not far away, I do not go,  
yet they remain, unchanging,  
autumn and silence abide there too,  
as do the brown birds,  
for years, they have trodden through fallen leaves,  
wandering toward the deeper mountains,  
like a crowd of noisy, tumbling children leaving school.

The gaunt little lake lingers there,  
lingering over blue skies and distant echoes.  
Dark silt hidden in reed beds,  
a frail symbol of humanity, also dwells there.

And so I stay at home,  
on the low southern slopes of Purple Mountain,  
immersed in Ovid's recollections,  
lingering through a slow, tranquil afternoon.

He preserve autumn cherries in dark crimson lees.  
for he once said:  
so long as one knows not who he is,  
one may live long into old age.

## THOUGHTS ON READING SYLVIA PLATH'S DIARIES

"How dreadful it is to live into a cold middle age—  
well-educated, once full of promise,  
yet fading into the crowd, good for nothing."

To live into a cold old age,  
to live through any cold, indifferent years,  
is no less sorrowful.  
So long as you go unseen by others,  
so long as such words ring like the tongue of a politician.

She brought it all to an end.  
She outwitted middle age, never to be given the chance  
to break down doors in valiant old age,  
and die the death of a young person.

M. L. Williams is the author of *Game* (What Books Press), the chapbook *Other Medicines*, and coeditor of *How Much Earth: The Fresno Poets*. His poetry and prose is published in many journals and anthologies, including *Salt*, *Western Humanities Review*, *Hubbub*, *Plume*, *Miramar*, *The Journal of Florida Studies*, and *The Cortland Review*. He teaches creative writing and contemporary literature at Valdosta State University.



## POOL KINGDOM, 1978

Izzy pulls up in his low-rider Impala  
 all chrome shine and polished clean,  
 hydraulics to bounce, sweet rims to cruise  
 with some girl he hopes, and the Clovis kid  
 and his blonde buddy give him racist shit  
 before Roger sends us out to trim hard-pan  
 with picks and shovels and jackhammers  
 for a liner built-in, 108 degrees in that hole.  
 Raz and Dean light smokes and pick hard ground  
 to shards for inches the backhoe missed  
 and I ask how they can put fire in their mouth  
 in this heat. "It cools me down,"  
 says Dean who plays guitar and sings  
 when he's not in a hole or hanging liners  
 and then goes on about John Prine again,  
 schooling this college boy home for summer.  
 Mike, the boss' kid, chimes in, who'll blast  
 Van Halen all the way home and Raz  
 will roll a joint and pass it after this long day,  
 twelve hours. Quiet and beat, evening coming  
 into red sunset, we'll sense the blown cool  
 that open windows give our sweaty arms  
 all the way back from Firebaugh or Mendota,  
 small towns where a four-foot piece  
 of braced sheet metal and a vinyl liner  
 are heaven to people who work  
 the Thompson seedless vines or grow  
 fat cotton, and our Kingdom the white van,  
 palace of butts and fast-food wrappers,  
 rusting tools and empty talk of songs  
 or cars or girls, the day broken only  
 by blessings of water gushing from a hose.

M L Williams

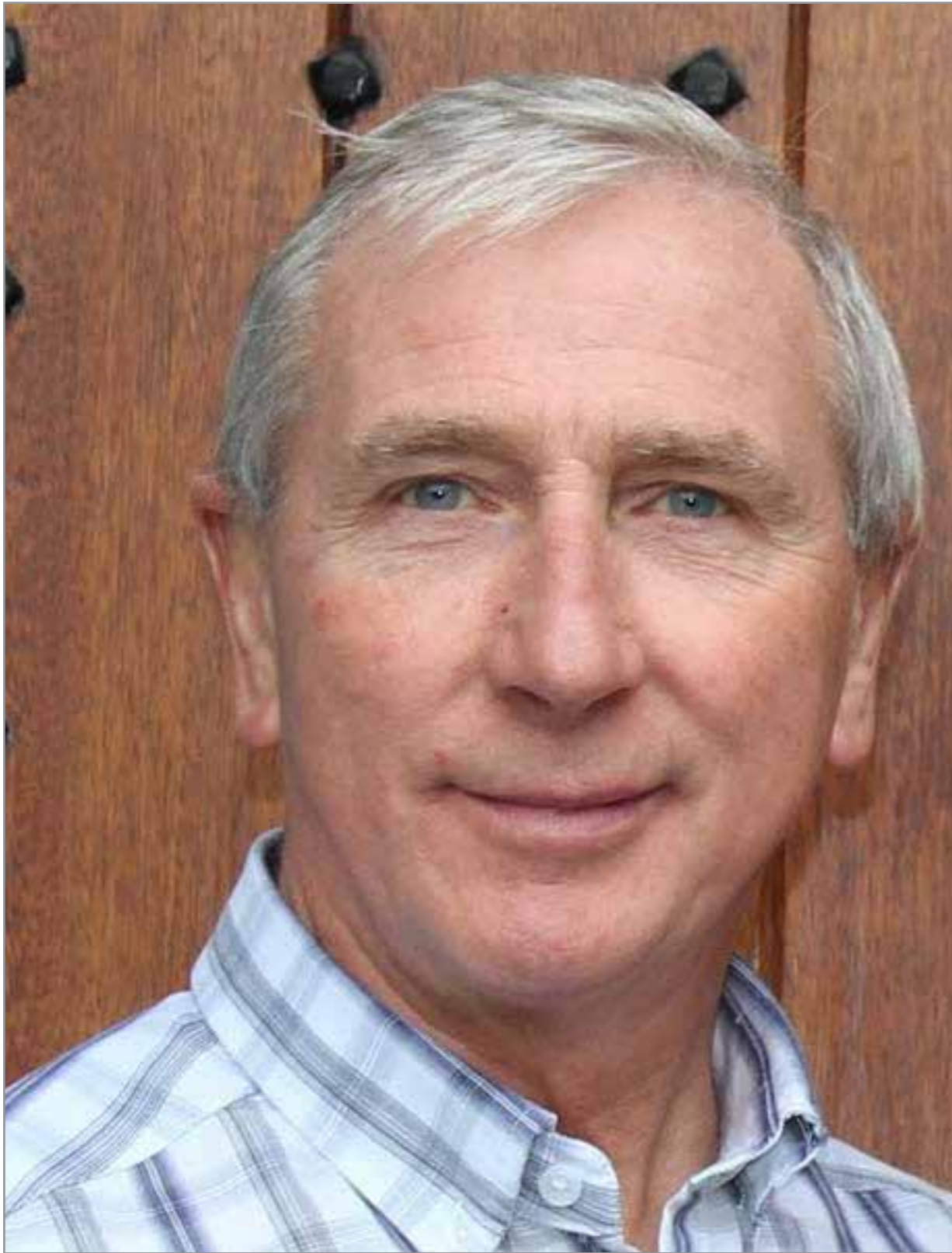
## SOMETIMES THERE IS NO STORY

Rows of Thompson seedless vines,  
Paper trays of raisins, 99 degrees and no  
shade, blue sky bleached by haze.  
Check for black widows  
that hide under the trays. If  
you find one, let the paper down  
softly and stomp it when  
it tries to crawl away. If not,  
roll the paper around the dried  
grapes, not yet black, and place  
them on the trailer bed—roll, load,  
walk—all day, short break for lunch,  
no shade and dust in the nose  
and mouth. No story. They pay cash.

## WITHOUT LEAVE

We go to the National Gallery  
to see Cezanne to Giacometti  
bored fiancé elaborated cat  
Klee's geometries Picasso  
blue and cubed faces  
Matisse's magazine covers  
Braque's pipe but on the way  
out the deserter Sidney Nolan's  
larrikin bandit Ned Kelly  
gang leader his angry  
Jerilderie letter condemned  
the mistreatment of poor  
folks in the bush  
two years running from his murders  
his rifle his horse his armored head  
tilted his last days canvased here  
his square and heavy  
head flat no eyes  
but the bush seen through  
he is hollow he will  
be hanged he is  
hollow but not  
empty

Born in Glencolmcille, currently residing in Bundoran, Paddy has been writing poetry since his school days. Widely published. He was the Donegal Bealtaine Poet 2025, facilitating workshops across Donegal. His 2024 collection, *Leave Taking*, was shortlisted for the CAP Awards. Founder of Bundoran Writers Group and Atlantic Writers Ink.



## MOONSTALKER

Snow flurries peppered his coat  
as he scurried along the streets  
near empty - in the dusking of the day  
some rushing to nowhere in particular  
some to homes - or noisy houses  
others - to lonely apartments  
to hide time in melancholy.

While he -  
hurrying - in the opposite direction  
fleeing from - his own hopelessness  
absconding the claustrophobic  
existence of his own life - in isolation  
lived in a state of solitude - of aloneness  
where daylight hours were measured  
in cups of coffee and cans of beer.

And when the evening news - scratched  
across the old black & white - in the corner  
his wake up call - a siren to quake him  
unleash him into the prowling hours  
of dimly lit streets and alleyways -  
roaming time for the moonstalkers.

Paddy Donoghue

## LADY DAYS' VOICE

*(i.m. Billie Holiday 07 April 1915 – 17 July 1959)*

A voice - chiselled  
by years of hardship  
roughened like a  
worn path - trodden

over by unscrupulous  
vendors of tragedy  
seeking selfish profit  
courting glory and fame.

A voice - smoke deep  
after a night in drawing  
applause from punters  
in some seedy bar.

A voice - reeking of sadness  
telling its story of a life  
lived on the threshold  
the very edges of society.

A voice - fuelled with a  
loneliness that would freeze  
a legion of soft hearts  
comfort the broken.

A voice - that told the story  
of the many lives lived  
alone and in silence  
in obscurity - unnoticed.

A voice - that offered  
a bridge connecting  
storied people - a thread  
a lifeline and a hope.

## TRUTH DISTORTED

mirror a  
reflection without

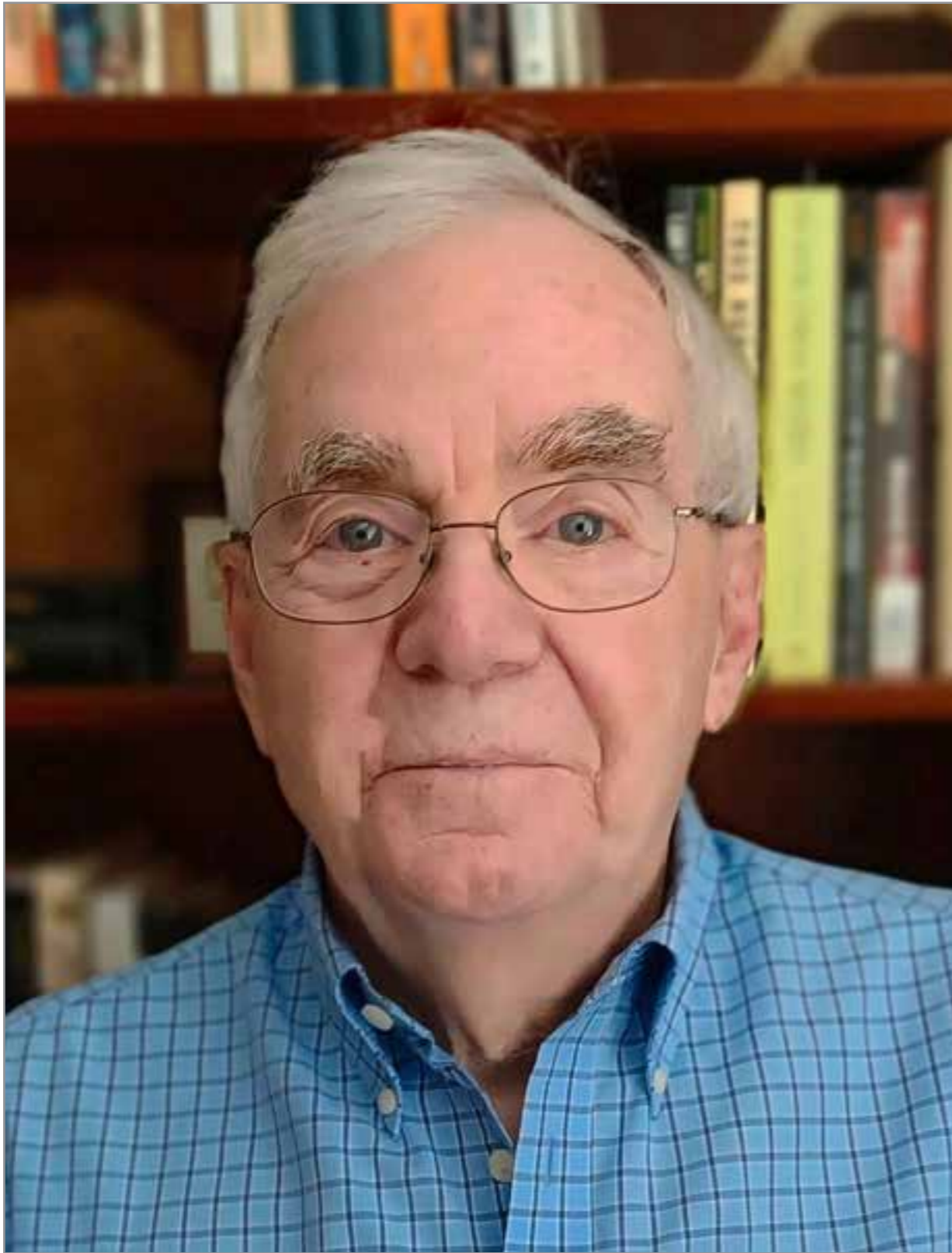
suspended  
place fire the above  
not - things of destroyer a  
anymore required

reality the distorts  
facts in find to hope we  
real the for searching while  
world unreal an in

truths as - veiled deceits where  
conscience our flood  
judged are we - questioning  
undesirables or traitors

establish to seeking merely when  
facts the -  
believe to told are we stories the in

Peter A Witt is a Texas poet, with poems appearing online and in print publications such as Bluebird Word, Verse-Virtual, Live Encounters. He is a former university professor who now devotes his time to researching and writing family history and poetry. He's twice been nominated for Best of the Net. He is also an avid birder.



## SMALL POEM

My poem is so small  
it would be comfortable  
sitting on the tip of a pen,  
a secret passenger riding the ink  
like a lone sailor on a vast, blue ocean.  
It is so tiny it doesn't appear  
on google earth, slipping past  
the unblinking eyes of satellites  
that map every mountain and street.

It is so minute it goes unnoticed,  
fainter than the dust motes dancing  
in a single, slanted shaft of light,  
or a whisper lost in a crowded hall.  
It breathes in the margins of silence,  
waiting for a quiet moment to bloom,  
an invisible seed tucked deep  
within the heavy soil of the page.

Peter A Witt

## EQUATIONS IN THE SNOW

The storm shut the road, blurred the fence line,  
and the barn drifted off in a tide of white.

The fields turned to ledger paper,  
each flake a faint number falling  
into the margin of silence.

Inside, the stove murmurs to itself,  
iron expanding like breath in a chest,  
a kettle hums, steady as thought.

I sit with a pencil,  
snowbound with arithmetic,  
counting the shapes that winter hides,  
mailbox buried,  
gate swallowed,  
sound of the creek gone still.

The figures won't hold,  
they scatter like dry oats  
spilled from a feed scoop.

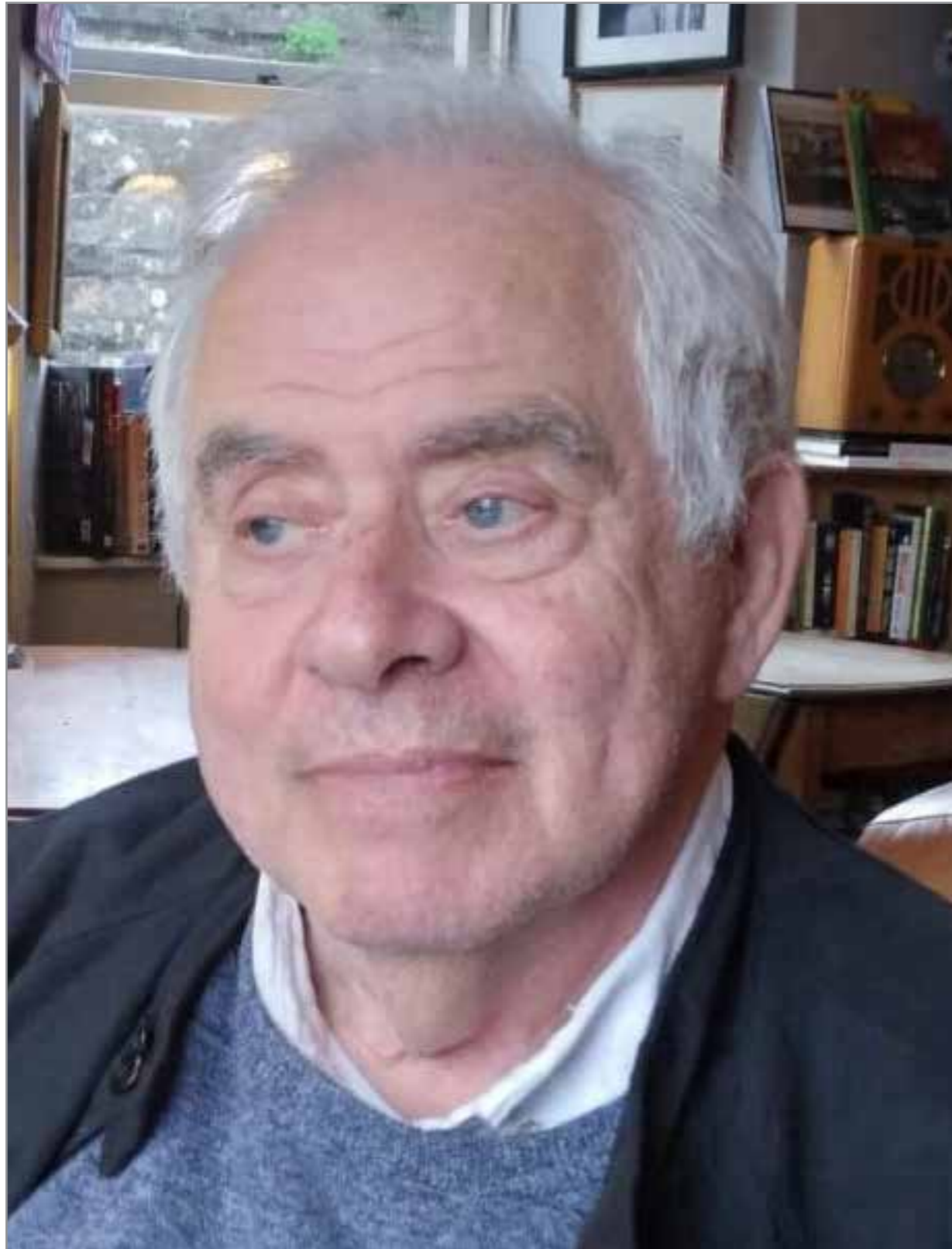
Memory seems cleaner,  
your scarf smelling of cedar,  
voice rising through frost  
as sure as smoke from the chimney.

Outside, the wind starts over,  
scrubbing the fields again,  
like a fox circling back  
to cover its tracks.

## TO THE EMPEROR PENGUIN

You know the weight of winter,  
in a land of silence where nothing grows.  
Now, the sky softens and light returns.  
The landscape is a vast expanse of white.  
This is not a pale or empty white;  
it is an aggressive, shimmering white,  
brighter than a thousand polished mirrors.  
Your presence is a testament to survival,  
a reflection of the fierce tenacity  
needed to endure the long night.  
You waddle toward the breaking ice  
where the sea surges, as the warmth  
returns like a slow, deep breath.  
You dive, leaving the frozen shore behind,  
resolute emperor penguin.

Richard W. Halperin is a U.S.-Irish dual national living in Paris. His poetry is published by Salmon/Cliffs of Moher and by Lapwing/Belfast & Ballyhalbert. His November 2025 collection for Salmon *All the Tattered Stars: Selected & New Poems*, Introduction by Joseph Woods, was one of three finalists for Best Poetry Book of the Year in the annual Poetry by the Sea Conference in Madison, Connecticut, May 2026, Rachel Hadas adjudicator. One of the New poems in the book was The Poem of the Week in The Guardian, January 19. Mr Halperin is Featured Artist in Edition VI of *Tintreach: The Smashing Times Arts and Literary Journal*, Sandycove, April 2026, which includes an interview about his poem 'The Arcades Project' which first appeared in *Live Encounters Poetry & Writing* in April 2025. Several of Mr Halperin's poetry readings in Ireland are on the internet, e.g., First Wednesday, Whitehouse Bar, Limerick, January 2026; Heinrich Böll Memorial Weekend, Achill, May 2024; videos taped for University College Dublin's Irish Poetry Reading Archive. In October of this year, his poem 'Antigone 3' will appear in the bilingual *Carnet No5, ShannOdet Quimper-Limerick*, French translation by Lionel Poiraudau.



## UNDER THE GREAT BEECH TREE

That is where Lord Claverton,  
the title character in T.S. Eliot's  
*The Elder Statesman*, at the end  
of the play tells his daughter  
and her fiancé he has been standing.  
Somewhere on the grounds  
of what is either a rest home  
or the in-between of this world  
and the next.

What is 'elderly'? What if eternity  
and what if in-between – the real  
in-between – is in fact young?  
As are the parts of the Bible which  
remain after one lets fall away  
all that noise. The play demonstrates,  
without demonstrating, that no one,  
including the statesman, cares  
what a statesman states. He is under  
the great beech tree.

A neglected play, launched with  
a perfect cast in Edinburgh in 1958,  
the year after the Callas *Sonnambula*.  
Edinburgh, which had and still has  
a glow to attract such things.  
Seventy years ago now, which are  
still somewhere. A play written in  
my lifetime. What is my lifetime?  
An appointment in Samarkand or Edinburgh.

Thoughts one on a day.  
Claverston, which is a little like *clavier*.

Richard W. Halperin. Photo credit: Joseph Woods.

## THE OWL OF MINERVA

*'The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of dusk.'*  
- Hegel, via Hannah Arendt

What light there is at dusk is like a veil.  
Like lakes at dusk. They, too, become veils,  
veils which one can hear, slosh slosh.  
At dusk, my thinking begins to stir.

In Genesis, God creates both the visible  
and the invisible. Reality and reality.  
Thinking is bumping into reality.  
Thinking is bumping into the furniture.

Stage actors are trained not to bump into  
the furniture. I was also so trained,  
in order to enter the work world. Selective  
oblivion helps one get along. Even in friendships.

At dusk, the owl of Minerva spreads  
its wings, bump bump. Owls are ungraceful.  
At dusk, one can almost hear Minerva  
herself, bumping into everything.

Minerva who, as Athene in ancient Greece,  
was judge in the trial of Orestes who had  
deliberately killed his mother Clytemnestra  
for having killed his father Agamemnon.

When The Furies scream for Orestes'  
punishment, Athene says, 'Please know  
I sprang directly from the forehead of Zeus.  
Mothers mean nothing to me.'

At dusk, what does Mary think? About anything?  
She who had a mother, she who is a mother.  
When she, some evenings, is alone.  
When she is, finally, alone.

## THE COLOUR BLUE

A good marriage is a perpetual conversation.  
It goes on well after death.  
The same for a good friendship.

In this I admit no impediments.

John Field wrote beautiful nocturnes.  
They are very Irish and written  
well before others took up the form  
he invented. Beethoven, Brahms,  
Barber, thought him a great composer  
and so do I. His music heals me.  
As do his interpreters, John O'Connor,  
Mícéal O'Rourke, among others.

He spent two-thirds of his life  
in Russia, where he was adored.  
One of the older Rostovs  
in *War and Peace* one evening  
asks their harpist Dimmler to play  
a transcription of a Field nocturne,  
and the whole room falls into a hush,  
especially among the young ones  
like Natasha and her brother.

Why do I divert my poem to him?  
No impediments

## THREE PAGES

I have just read the last three pages  
of 'The Window' in *To the Lighthouse*.  
Mr and Mrs Ramsey alone at evening.  
Moments in a good marriage.  
Something I know something about,  
although my wife did not knit stockings  
and I did not read Balzac.

The narration is Virginia Woolf's.  
She *squeezes* words, as song seems  
squeezed from a nightingale.

Is death such a squeeze?  
Is that how the entire song gets out?

Associate Professor in Creative Writing at Griffith University and Executive Director of Asia Pacific Writers and Translators (APWT) Sally Breen is the author of grunge memoir *The Casuals* and the neo-noir novel *Atomic City*. Her short form work has been published widely [www.sallybreen.com.au](http://www.sallybreen.com.au)



## ELLE MACPHERSON'S BEAUTY MACHINE

I think my body wants vodka

the clean endless cut  
my body does not want potions  
designed to intervene  
with my sad eyelids  
my mom jeans face

interrupt a conversation about the past  
already going on  
inside my hair follicles  
my sunset skin

without me

My body wants vodka

my body does not want  
ex-model snake oil  
saps for sale  
from the tall, lonely tree

slippery limb elixirs  
late-night hot chocolate ghost gums  
rewind residues  
dusty powder regrets  
the unstoppable dangling bits of her  
falling out of the internet

toned flexxy stick leg  
curled up  
inside all my open pores  
flawless peddler of nutrient

endlessly patient  
waiting to be fed

Sally Breen

## TALKING WITH INCELS

Talking with Incels  
on a cyclone ravaged beach at 2am

it's definitely you not me  
it's definitely the way it's always been  
it's definitely just the planet correcting itself  
again

just gravity  
on my face  
they still think is ok  
their boy skin talking  
boy-splaining me

I forgot the memo  
about women not existing  
just like the mother  
he doesn't love

my hair  
just like hers  
he says  
just like  
a cliff on a beach  
when there is no beach left

And we are still sitting here  
on top of the ancient Egyptians  
something something

and none of this is their fault  
toes curling in the cliff face  
and I know they're right  
in a way

nothing can be changed  
so we stop anger managing  
start seeing

at 2am with incels  
that the earth is indeed flat  
that it's flat to the cliffs  
that it's flat in the Balinese father I can see in him  
that he doesn't want to admit

young boys with hurt hearts  
incels smiling  
at me  
at the ripped shadow  
of their mothers

and far be it from me to say  
they're into the wrong deities  
we are all on the cliff  
and the plants and the sea have always been changing  
have always done this  
they say  
it is what it is

*continued overleaf...*

I try to tell them about changing tides  
currents  
damaged seas  
is this something you got from *Finding Nemo*?  
they ask me  
smirking  
and I am back on the cliff  
finding Nemo in the open unscarred faces of incels  
their beautiful skin  
they think will never be damaged  
by the hardness of their eyes  
but already is

No wonder we pay for the sand to come back  
from where the sea has taken it  
the sea doesn't want us  
doesn't want the sound of us talking on the cliff  
calling for restitution or reminder

on the rim of the flat flat earth  
and still not seeing  
anything beyond it



©Mark Ulyseas

Photograph © Mark Ulyseas

Nigel Spence is an emerging poet who lives on Wallemudegal land (Hunters Hill), in Sydney. He worked for many years as a child and family social worker, child rights advocate, and CEO with overseas aid agency ChildFund before completing a PhD and working as a research fellow and associate lecturer at the University of New South Wales and University of Wollongong. His lifelong hankering for poetry has found time for expression in recent years, and the poems are coming. His poetry has been longlisted for the Lane Cove Poetry Prize, and he is a regular contributor in Mark Tredinnick's Poetry Studio.



Nigel Spence

## CITRIODORA

At the corner,  
 a junction of no consequence,  
 corymbia citriodora spreads,  
 sinuous, tall,  
                                 spare as bones  
 with an open habit to share  
 its sheer limbs,  
                                 creased under-arms  
 beneath boughs that snake  
 out,  
 up  
 to fringes of slender  
                                 crescent  
                                 leaves.

It's a corner where  
 nothing happens.  
                                 Turning traffic ticks by,  
 a council worker trims  
                                 the verge,  
 dogs sniff, on the adjoining  
                                 field  
                                 schoolboys collide  
                                 at rugby.

The corner  
                                 is the end  
 of my road. An intersection:  
                                 one street  
 an explorer, the other  
                                 a saint.

It's where  
 I find heaven  
                                 after rain, when  
   the citron mist  
   descends.

## TURRUNBURRA MIDDENS

Bank-embedded, trail speckle litter  
diffuses in casuarina-rooted Turrundurra alluvium.

Fragmented badanyi, gadyan, hairy mussel,  
in a long line mosaic stretching back before Byzantium.

Quiet antiquity without monument,  
form and place same same,

as country ingests feast fragments.  
Maugro bones, crab shell, daringyan cartilage,

absorbed in a second consumption.  
Wallumai and wallumil, badiwa and burra are long gone.

Hardier porcelainite remains remind of millennia  
interrupted, yet unsilenced Wallemudegal

stories seep from tidal soil  
conjuring figures along the sandy marrang.

Splash and spear, small smoke, oyster cut  
by sparse yarn and birdsong, djanaba bilya.

This valley I thought I knew,  
tracing its lines a mere three generations,

child's play beneath overhangs,  
fishing for eel with bread on a bent pin,

never knowing the words:  
gibba, yerung, ngurra, yura.

Driving roads based with shell grit,  
historic homes mortared

by the limeburner's midden-stacked fire,  
never knowing the words:

bembul, guwarra, gwianga, badu.  
Sounds in the shells, stories in the sand.

**Dharug translations**

badanyi – Sydney rock oyster; badiwa – flathead; badu – water; bara – fish hook made from shell; bembul (bemal) – earth; burra – eel; daringyan – stingray; djanaba bilya – laughter; gadyan – Sydney cockle; gibba – rock; guwarra (guwayana) – wind; gwianga (guwiyang) – earth; maugro – fish; ngurra – environment; Turrundurra – Lane Cove River; wallumai – snapper fish; Wallumedegal (Wallumettagal) – traditional custodians of the Ryde / Hunters Hill area; wallumil – bull head shark; yerung – trees; yura (iyora) – people. (Attenborough, V. 2002, Sydney's Aboriginal past, UNSW; <https://dharug.dalang.com.au/language/> accessed August 2021 and November 2025)

Stephen Haven's fourth collection of poems, *The Flight from Meaning*, was published in 2025 by Slant Books. His three earlier collections are: *The Last Sacred Place in North America*; *Dust and Bread*; and *The Long Silence of the Mohawk Carpet Smokestacks*. For more details, see [stephenhaven.com](http://stephenhaven.com).



## TITLE PAGE

On the edge it matters, your song being glad or bitter,  
Only you are singing. It matters, the song,

Apart from the singer, apart from the mic,  
The megaphone, the portable podium,

Only that it's strummed. Peripherally, it matters.  
Apart from singing, what can you do who live

Slim on the edge of things? You must sip,  
You must tip the frame of that silence.

When an entire continent hangs its purchase  
In the bandwidth, the broken bark of you,

You must sing, being glad or bitter,  
To no one, to someone, you on the edge.

Stephen Haven

## BUTTERSCOTCH

He'd pitch his billy bats where they were sure to lock  
 The mower's ride and rip, the engine choked  
 And farted when they hit. He'd clock you in the shins,  
 Limb you across the grass, no wider berth  
 For your unsuspecting kids, each elementary emergency  
 Pausing just a few webbed feet away. He'd peel the paper  
 From the walls, gnaw the door jams down.  
 He'd tuck the cat's head entirely in his mouth,  
 Scaring her to the point of his jaded pleasure.  
 Her talon tip flipped his switch. Then suddenly he'd go  
 Super Mario, two black coals in a sixty-five-pound pack  
 Of snow, baby bear snout, stubby legs, a private  
 Pamplona bursting the gate of your beige carpet, where in  
 The living with the picture window your daughter turned

Her cartwheels. The kids laughed at his mad mud!  
 No shock could wake him to his better senses.  
 In the sound a leaf blower might make in a wish  
 For silence or grace, you remember his run beneath  
 Lollipops in baskets that poked Ohio's sky,  
*Wild Fire, Wings Over Wicker*, blimping each July.  
 One came down behind the house, the pilot ditching  
 Her day's levity in the wireless street. A fire-breathing  
 Goddess angled a chariot twenty feet above  
 Your ten-foot basket. From that distance she strafed,  
 Around your colonial, a jolted splotch of ivory,  
 Scotcho scooting for his life, one barbaric yawp  
 Lapping the house. Then one day you sent your son,

Too young to collar him, to hitch him to the run.  
 Scotch caught his end in the grill of your daughter's  
 Flute teacher's van. Or else you remember  
 The red rabbits, your Butter on the stoop  
 Of a summer you cut tight circles with the tractor  
 Around a rotten stump. Clumped in the grass  
 Without their backs they looked like baby mice,  
 Like a heart with its house of ribs peeled back.  
 The part you shared to the shock of a summer class  
 Was how you bludgeoned them with a cherry kindling,  
 Buried them in the far back garden, where the kids  
 Would never see, the students angered because  
 You offered it was mainly your own trouble  
 That sickened you, with all you had to do.

Scotch had them swinging from his mouth the next morning.  
 Your calico leapt five feet in air the first night  
 He wasn't there, and stuck like Velcro to the sideways circles  
 She ran on your porch screens. That night you were  
 The second thing that scared her, your seven-year-old  
 Whistling a lovely oblivion in the kitchen. Then the stars,  
 The moons of your daughter's phosphorescent room.  
 Halfway between the comforters, your son already sleeping,  
 From the floor you read "Maggie Scraggle Loves  
 The Beautiful Ice Cream Man," *The Oxford Treasury*  
 A tent over your head. In a first-night sort of vespers,  
 Until the moon stole all trouble from your doors,  
 The girl who chatted with the moles, dauntless,  
 Fearless in catacombs, when you asked her  
 From her red covers, rose with the swallows, with all other  
 Creatures that spoke to her, and for the dog years  
 He had given you, lifted one last prayer to the late-night air.

## THE PEACEABLE KINGDOM

Everywhere around you the Hawkins Supermarket cashier  
Exchanges the good news about her Great Aunt Bertha  
With the manicured fifth-grade instructor who cites  
Kids, cousins, purple and gold pom poms, the fundraiser  
She wants to funnel mainly through the Moms and Dads,  
The kids leading the passing traffic through the suds.  
In her charitable vision, windshields they're paid to scrub,

Girls tap dance with signs along the small-town strip,  
5 bucks a pop and you can bet everyone will tip. All this  
In a New York minute gone suddenly slow-mo  
In Ashland, Ohio. All you needed was a little milk for home.  
The cashier doesn't seem to see as you swing the pendulum  
Of your chivalry in a gallon, ready to belt them in their Bibles,

The peaceable kingdom they thought the Earth had gone to  
Right here in the heartland, where once their parents  
Went to school. Your haste pegs you a snob-nosed radical  
Straight from the East. No matter you teach Sundays too,  
Keep the covenant your neighbors agreed to, your lawn in  
Its crew cut, 3/8's of an inch or even your Hold 'Em friends

Start to talk. When the teacher asks her niece for a price check  
She as good as rips the vinyl from your old colonial.  
Somewhere the lion paces with the lamb, the wolf, the yearling  
Dozing together. Ever more genuinely a child leads them,  
William Penn soothsaying Delaware Indians. Your kids etch  
Their initials in one corner of the family portrait the summer  
You fed them straight off the barbecue. Hicks offered something

Like 100 variations, all those Kingdoms peacefully wired  
In his one great gallery. Over a familial cup of Twining's  
Each morning he waited for inspiration, scanned everything  
He once made, the same old business of beasts and burdens  
Lovingly lifted, even among humans, the inner quietude  
For which there is no final herd or hurdle. And when  
He was done, he started painting 101.



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Photograph © Mark Ulyseas

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in *Midnight Mind*, *Novus* and *Abbey*. Latest books, "Bittersweet", "Subject Matters" and "Between Two Fires" are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in the *MacGuffin*, *Touchstone* and *Willow Review*.



## A WALK HOME IN SPRING RAIN

Cool spring rain,  
puddles in the road,  
roots and buds on high alert

Rainy day,  
the people in the passing bus windows  
have that solemn gray look  
of never coming back this way.

I have a vision of eternity –  
folks under awnings  
waiting for the weather to clear.

My hair is matted.  
My shirt clings to my chest.  
There's dribble on my watch-face

What can a guy do  
but head for home  
and damn the weather.

Snails experience  
my brisk walk  
as light speed.

John Grey

## SERENITY PREVAILS

On a night filled  
with everything imaginable  
from a drive-by shooting  
to a prison breakout  
to a fall from a sixth floor hotel window -  
my head is in a pillow's hands,  
my body's half hidden by blue sheet and blanket,  
and, as I snore barely louder than a breath,  
dreams come to enlighten me  
or take engaging liberties with the past,  
with feel-good nostalgia,  
dollops of love,  
wrapped in a quiet  
that pacifies, endures,  
so I can wake up next morning  
fresh and hopeful,  
blissfully uninformed.

## BIRTHDAY BOY

The year has been run through me like a spear.  
I'm bleeding April.  
I'm spitting May.  
January burst my lungs.  
August seared my brain..  
December was the sharpest point  
and it took out heart and kidney and liver  
so now the times are shish-kebob.  
It's the new year  
and what do I have  
but another raw and savage weapon to look forward to  
brandished by who knows who.  
The calendar looks so innocent  
but the evil hides behind that baby giraffe.  
Soon enough, it will find my weak spot  
and start ramming.  
What choice do I have but to suck it up  
and live.

## DISCONNECTED

Shower water  
breaks on my skin  
into gleaming bracelet gems.

Border patrol  
wipe the desert clean  
of interlopers.

“Illegals”  
mouth the lips  
of a small town bar.

A mother’s hands  
and a father’s pipe  
are my clearest memories  
of parents.

The underground  
befits human waste  
and brown rat conquest.

The woman in the long evening gown –  
the more the dress glitters,  
the more her eyes go dim.

On a wide expanse of shoreline,  
the sea collapses in a faint  
at my feet.

The fields are squared off  
by chainlike fence,  
as seen from the air,  
like a crossword puzzle  
in which all the answers are cows.

Unlike flowers,  
strip malls burst into life  
over time.

After rain,  
such invigorating sunshine.  
Even the potted plants  
believe  
they came by their pots naturally.

Caterina Mastroianni is a poet and educator living in Sydney on the land of the Cadigal and Wangal people of the Eora nation. She has published poetry in various literary magazines and Australian anthologies, including *Kalliope X*, *Poetry of Flight: The Liquid Amber Prize Anthology*, *Oystercatcher One Anthology*, *Burrow*, *Live Encounters Poetry and Writing*, and *Poetry for the Planet: An Anthology of Imagined Futures*.



## THE STITCH UN-PICKERS

Once cameras couldn't see - each learned l-e-t-t-e-r -  
interlocked - into a running thread -  
each learned word - repaired into a seam -  
each learned text - sewn into a handmade pattern -  
a stitched language of resettlement -  
slowly stitched across war-torn fabrics -  
a soft shield deflecting word-bullets - from outside  
the English classroom where the first surveillance cameras  
in Cabramatta could shoot into the consequence  
of translating your being and you being here.

All over the city, cameras insist  
on turning right side up,  
what was upside down,  
on declaring that an image of a text,  
or a snapshot of a scene  
is the whole picture,  
while threads of being -  
- flawed - frustrated -  
- or flourishing -  
are picked and pulled up - - -  
until all the panels of textiles -  
- are unstitched - - -  
and it unsettles me,  
no matter how settled I am.

Caterina Mastroianni

## STEELMAKERS

We were shiny at first,  
then second-hand,  
then obsolete,  
like a rotary dial telephone,  
a Holden car or a used fridge.  
To make them,  
steelmakers extracted a multitude  
of hands and legs from drained homelands  
and filled the emptiness with bank accounts.  
Steelmaking was like people making,  
and though they tried  
to roll and mould our hot bodies  
into a more obedient alloy-  
a colder, more useful form  
fixed into the frame of a built nation -  
we kept the humane parts of ourselves  
for our own making  
of the next generation.

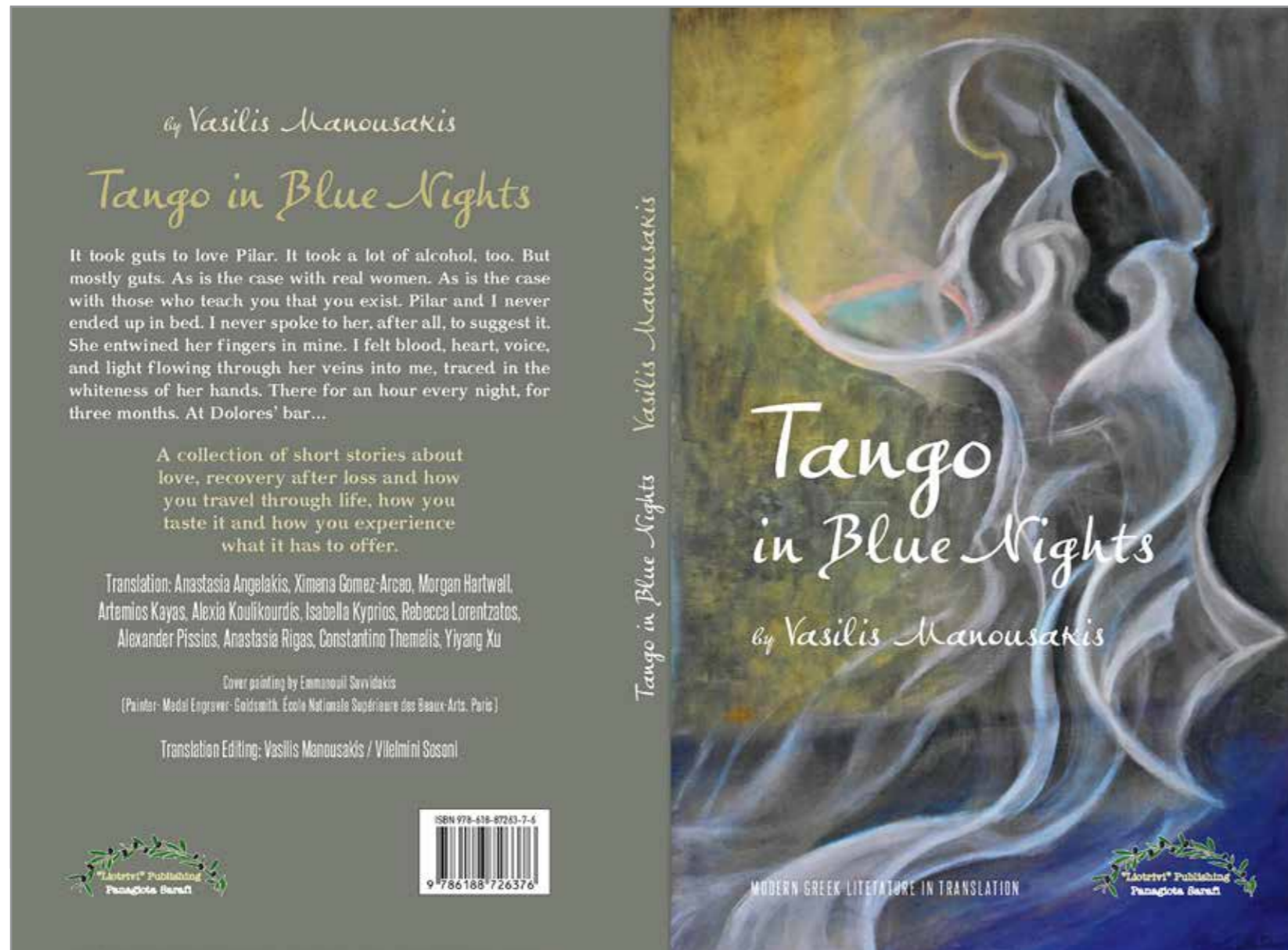
Some iron bits wedged in:  
the metallic taste on our tongues,  
the skeleton steel that braced our houses,  
the scrapped steel that split a home,  
the silent steel inside our bodies,  
the tortured steel that smelted secrets,  
the polished steel that shined our teeth.  
They are rusting talismanic reminders  
at work, and at home  
reminding us that  
we are not cars and houses,  
we are not robots and firearms,  
we are not tools and devices.



Vasilis Manousakis is a writer, translator, mental health counselor, and university instructor. He has taught or given lectures in universities in Greece, England, the USA, Australia and Cyprus. He is a faculty member of New York Writers Workshop in New York. He is a tenured educator at the University of Patras. He writes and publishes poetry and short prose in Greek and English. His last book is *Tango in Blue Nights*, Liotrivi Pubs (2025). He also researches talents and character strengths and he co-authored the book *My child you have a talent*, a manual for the cultivation of character strengths in children. He is the co-author of the student/teacher manual for Creative Writing for the secondary education, which was approved by the Ministry of Education in Greece, and will be taught in schools from September 2026 onwards. He translates and publishes poetry and short prose in Greece and abroad. He also currently works privately as a Mental Health Counselor, specializing in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Mentoring for students and young adults. Finally, he volunteers in prisons and teaches Creative Writing to inmates.



Tim Tomlinson is the author, most recently, of *Listening to Fish: Meditations from the Wet World*, a hybrid collection of prose, poetry, and photographs concerned with the splendors of, and the perils facing, the world's coral reefs. He is also the author of poetry collection, *Requiem for the Tree Fort I Set on Fire*, and the short story collection, *This Is Not Happening to You*. He is a founder and co-director of New York Writers Workshop. He teaches in NYU's Global Liberal Studies and the Deledda Master in Creative Writing & Translation in Sardinia.



TIM TOMLINSON'S  
Review of  
VASILIS MANOUSAKIS'  
*Tango in Blue Nights*  
Liotrivi Pubs, 2025 [LINK](#)

*Tango in Blue Nights*, a linked collection of micro- and flash fiction, reminds me of what we used to call “trip” glasses, those tinted spectacles for psychedelic occasions whose swollen lenses angled into numerous facets. When you look through trip glasses, you see the color-filtered world reproduced a dozen, maybe two dozen times on multiple picture frames, each frame containing exactly the same picture. You wonder which one is the real picture, when they’re all real and at the same time none are. They’re all projections, and the real one is the one inside, and that’s, of course, the one hardest to ascertain. But that’s the one that Greek writer, poet, translator, professor, and psychologist Vasilis Manousakis seems most interested to probe. Don’t waste your time studying all those identical images, Manousakis seems to be saying, look instead at the apparatus making them: your mind.

Where the trip glasses analogy breaks down somewhat is in content, because in *Tango’s* trip gallery, each picture frame is different. The collection’s title derives from its most fully realized characters, Pilar, who teaches tango, and Ray, who is hungry to learn. Pilar and Ray appear in many of the pictures along with a gallery of secondaries. Pilar dances, she teaches, she teases, she recedes, she reappears. Ray learns, he’s seduced, he’s jealous, he’s waiting, he’s otherwise involved, but no matter what, Pilar is on his mind. The themes and devices that drive *Tango* appear explicitly in the opening of “Piano Lessons,” the collection’s second story:

*Well, where did you go?* thought Ray, sitting ten years later in the same place he had met, loved, danced and lost Pilar. It was three weeks after his anniversary with Katherine, when he had passed by Dolores’ bar—which was no longer Dolores’ bar— and had shown casually to his wife where he once frequented.

*Tango in Blue Nights* available at: [https://www.liotrivibooks.gr/index.php?page=vivlia\\_tango\\_in\\_blue\\_nights](https://www.liotrivibooks.gr/index.php?page=vivlia_tango_in_blue_nights)

We get the desire, the names, the haunting—that crazy salad the consciousness conjures when it settles for a substitute of what it wants. What was Ray thinking, showing his wife the location of his romantic haunting? What did Katherine think? And where is the lost Pilar?

*Tango in Blue Nights* is a collection of many trips. One is the New York City trip. Here, the Manousakis imagination is uncanny, as it invents a New York City of smoke and wet streets and salsa pulsing from open windows that actual New Yorkers will remember. It's a place of carnal hijinks and after-hours dance cultures, where the streets and bedrooms and imaginations are haunted by the fallout of past romances. Another trip is Paris, where glasses of wine are shared over views of cemeteries, where pasts are erased, everything seems familiar, and no event is undetermined. The book's pavement is cobblestone, its atmosphere mist at night, and its plot noir without the dead bodies (most of the time). Another trip is Dublin, where, in an effort to experience variety, the protagonist does exactly the same thing, day after day. Many of the trips are to unnamed locations. And some trips aren't trips at all, unless journeys to the center of the self can be considered a form of travel.

One such story is the aptly named "Numb," whose narrator composes a letter to someone while slowly freezing in an aircraft forced to land in some uncharted Antarctic tundra. "My dear," it begins, and what follows at first resembles a Pam Houston travel story of a flight gone wrong. Then we're in Hemingway country, "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," which envisions the places the mind traverses when death is imminent. Other evocations emerge in its three compact pages. The Beatles' "I Am the Walrus" with its echo of the Upanishads, the movie *Shark Tale*, and Derek Walcott's beautiful poem, "Love After Love."

Perhaps the most frequently evoked literary source is Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, in which imaginary urban landscapes are organized around themes of desire, memory, names, and signs. Manousakis does not organize *Tango in Blue Nights* quite as literally, yet voices, narrative strategies, and thematic motifs recur throughout. Letters sent or not sent, opportunities missed, desires suppressed, stories dead-ended—these drive the irregular routes of the narratives.

Some of the stories work playful reimaginings of earlier work that occupies what we might call the Manousakis canon. Hemingway's "A Clean Well-Lighted Place," Beckett's *Godot*, a hit song by The Clash. "Insomnia" evokes the scenario of Krzysztof Kieślowski's *The Double Life of Veronique*. Three urban dwellers, living in close proximity, pass each other every day as complete strangers, yet connect at night through furtive acts of voyeurism.

The action of "What Harm Could There Be?," set to a soundtrack featuring The Cure and the Sisters of Mercy, is something of a dating-app reenactment of the old chestnut from Johnny Guitar Watson: "I was looking back to see if she was looking back to see if I was looking back at her."

Often the story velocity is at maximum warp: a premise is announced, and ka-pow, conflict. Sometimes a premise is announced, and ... nothing. You turn the page, unfulfilled, bewildered. And you remember what Barthes once said: *Literature is the question minus the answer*. These stories raise questions, and move on.

Sometimes they masquerade as conventional narratives that promise satisfying resolutions. "Raisin Heart," for instance. Here, the reader is told that the twenty-year-old protagonist has enjoyed the experience of pain since the age of nine. He learns of an establishment that specializes in providing pain. What follows is as vivid and enigmatic as a song by the Velvet Underground. But "Raisin Heart" illuminates so much at the heart of other stories that present unfulfilled protagonists engaged in a hamster-wheel of futility and psychological torment.

*Tango in Blue Nights* is a translation of stories written originally in Greek. A preface describes the translation process. Manousakis himself was deeply involved, as was his most significant collaborator, the scholar/translator Vilelmini Sosoni. I defer to the preface for the rest of the translation's process—it's worth a look.

*Tango in Blue Nights* is a singular collection. It draws on so much you recognize, and it takes you to familiar places that feel, at first, strange. Its peculiar effect is best articulated by these lines from "You're Far Away":

*That's what happens with words. We do not know their impact, but we feel it later, deep inside.*

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