2010 - 2026 - 17TH ANNIVERSARY

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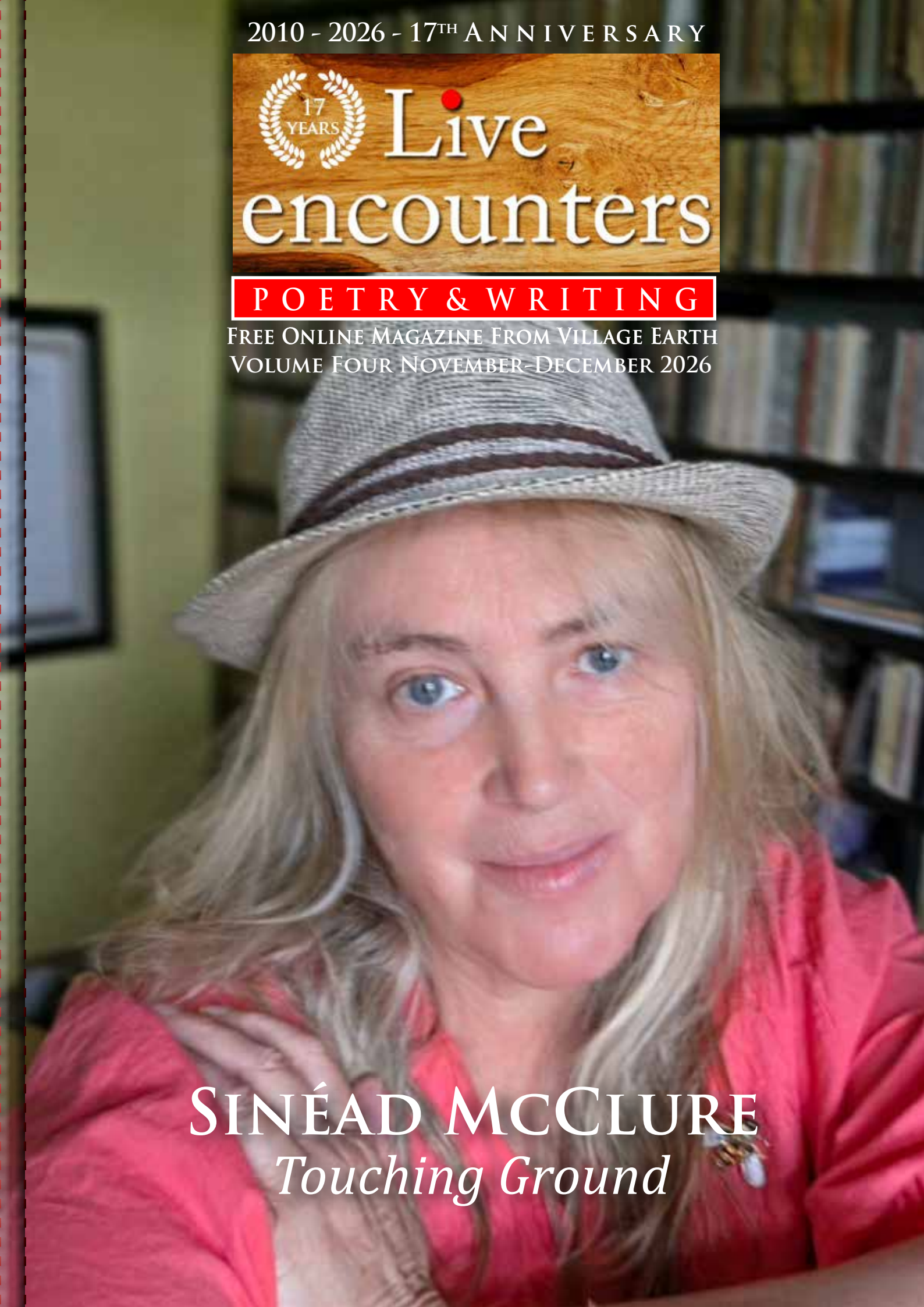
17 YEARS

POETRY & WRITING

FREE ONLINE MAGAZINE FROM VILLAGE EARTH
VOLUME FOUR NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2026



SINÉAD MCCLURE

Touching Ground

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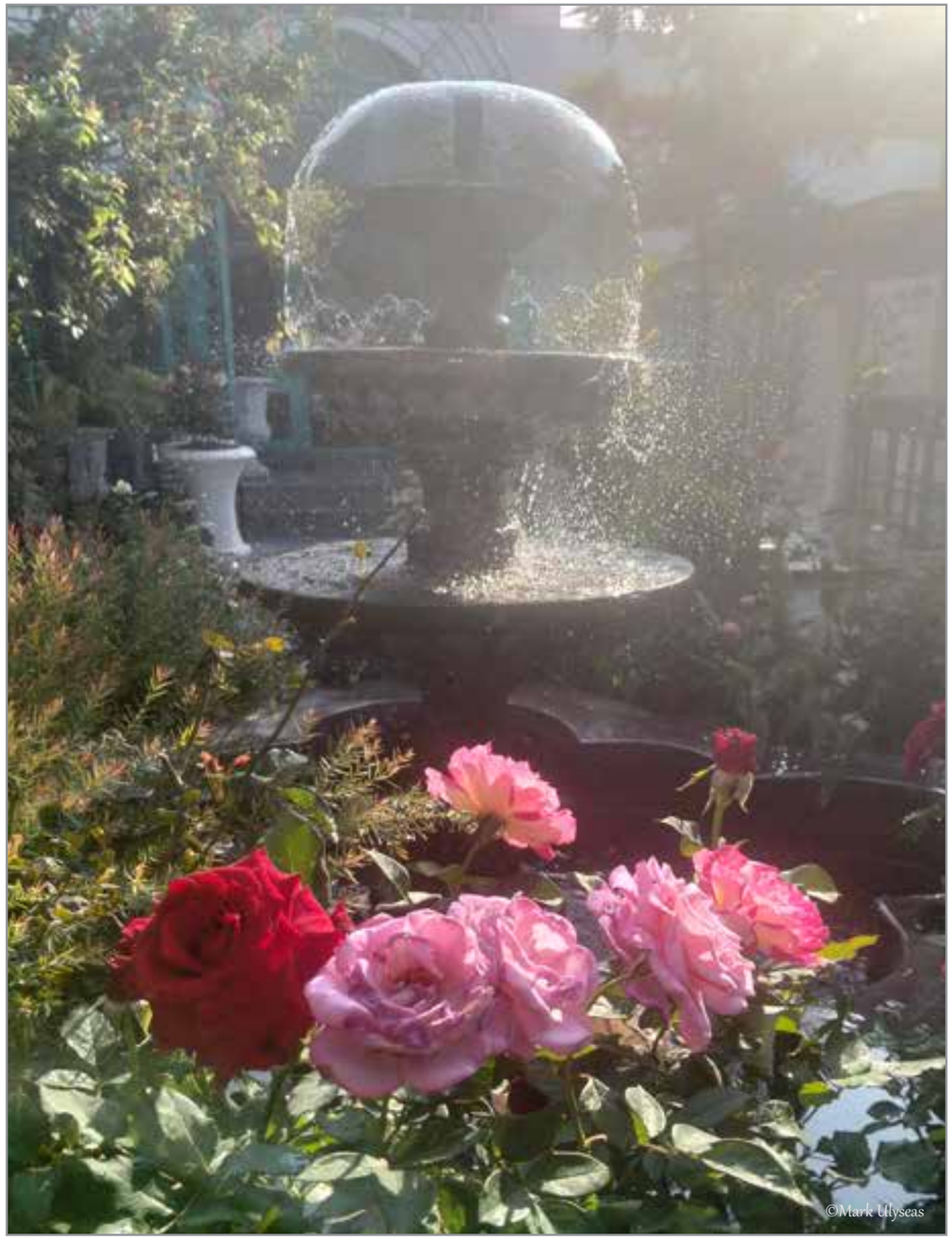

Cafe in Vientiane. Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

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

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

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

Om Shanti Shanti Shanti Om

Mark Ulyseas
Publisher/Editor

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Live encounters
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Sinéad McClure's writing is published on radio, in anthologies, magazines and online including; *Channel Magazine, Hive, The Honest Ulsterman, The Stinging Fly, Southword, Live Encounters* and many other fine publications. She is the first international winner of the Wilder Prize from Two Sylvias Press, her collection *Ash & Rising* will be published by Two Sylvias Press in spring 2027. Sinéad is currently studying an MA in English Poetry at Queen's University Belfast.

Sinéad McClure
Touching Ground

The ground in painting: a primer, a support that underpins the first brave tones spread on a blank canvas. Do we employ a similar technique when it comes to writing? I remember watching my sister prime a huge canvas in her kitchen in rural Wicklow. I noticed how before any paint was applied the sun caught in the wrinkles and knots, a painting already appearing out of its foundation, it had roots.

> I imagine this midnight moment's forest:
> Something else is alive
> Beside the clock's loneliness
> And this blank page where my fingers move.

In Ted Hughes *The Thought-Fox* he explores how his imagination reaches the blank page to fill it with a *sudden sharp hot stink of fox.* How did he go from these opening lines to a sensory and visual recounting? Where is his ground? Location is important to our process. The light in Wicklow differs from the light in the Northwest of Ireland. The wildness of both places must colour our imagination.

I am writing this as I prepare to move from my rural location of almost thirty years, to a busy city. I am contemplating how this will affect my work. Soon to change ground, from the pastoral to the busy streets I read Ted Hughes, his grasses, his birds, his sheep, his foxes. Sometimes vicious, heartbreaking and reckless, he steps out of his countrified setting very rarely and when he does it is as if he can't quite lose his ability to think within the head of the creature.

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The tyre face pasty
The neon of plaster flesh
With little inexplicable eyes
Holding a dish with two buns

The country allows for this introspection. It took me a few years to acclimatise to rural living. I came from suburbia and although I had spent some childhood summers in the west, I wasn't prepared for the long quiet, blindingly dark night with the sound of foxes screeching over the low moans of cattle. And that was only the first night! The pace of life slowed down. I began noticing things that never occurred to me in the city. How the seasons change. Hearing frogs in the ditches calling *spring* out of wet puddles. The birds. So many I didn't know. It seems ludicrous to me now that when I first spotted a pair of goldfinches I assumed they had escaped from some tropical cage. I learned to let the country envelop me. It does that easier than the city. It can be harsher, especially in the winter. But you baton down, prepare for snow, and gales. Living next to wild creatures comes with moments of heartbreak and uplift in equal measure. I recently wrote about the magpies raiding swallows nests, despite my failed attempts to stop them. I also stood out in my yard with the fledgling swallows weaving in and out above my head, in a joyous dance.

Hunting Salmon. And hunted
And haunted by apparitions from tombs
Under the smoothing tons of dead element
In the river's blank canyons.

In *Earth-Numb* Hughes calls *the lure* a prayer for the fisherman who is quite unprepared for the fight that follows, the *dark bedrock* shattering the s*teel spectre of purples*. The poem starts off bucolic in an almost panoramic description of scene and ends up with a fish-eye lens, literally. A close-up image you can't look away from, a fish gulping, when gills are of no use. The idiom a *fish out of water* seems a little too present now. I began writing poetry again after many years writing drama for children, although the disciplines seem far apart, the ground, was the same.

Long Acre Wood which was the backdrop for the first of sixteen children's dramas is also the long acre where many of my poems were forged. I wonder now what replaces my foxes, hares, trees and birds.

But it was *no* good he was breathing too heavy
And too hot and space was too cold

And here came the misty ballerinas
The burning gulfs the hanging gardens it was eerie

Birds follow me, country crows and city crows. My husband takes the form of a buzzard, circles the sky above as I travel. The heron, my brother, is poised at the riverbank, tall legged and calm. In Crow's Vanity, Hughes captures a picture of his crow, the trickster, staring into the mirror almost *Alice through the looking glass,* wiping, and seeing more fantastical backdrops, trying to but never quite seeing his own reflection. Crow is his defining work. I often see it as a book without the priming ground. It makes me uneasy in parts. There is nothing for the oily blackness to adhere to. It is unsettling. Through this book Hughes reminds me that being experimental, leaping off familiar supports can help our writing process. In doing so we can find something truly unique. Isn't it always discoveries that excite us, as we touch new ground.

Ted Hughes's poetry can be sometimes violent and it can be hard to separate the man from his work. His poems also have a rich layering between what exists on the surface, the foundations that underpin them and what is being shared truthfully between the lines. Not so much poetry of place, more the minutiae of what exists in these spaces and how they reflect the writer's life. Often precise.

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As this editorial is published I am off exploring the tiny details of a city that is very new to me. On the 17th Anniversary of Live Encounters I am thinking about where I was seventeen years ago. In that autumn our first children's drama *The Remarkable Adventures of Spike the Hedgehog* had its inaugural broadcast on the national airwaves. I had written something and I was terrified. In 2010 I was bold enough to write its sequel *The Magical Pocket of Time.* This was radio, and it wasn't a singular pursuit, both series made infinitely better by its editor, a strong team and talented players. I often think of the collective when it comes to writing poetry. How our work is shaped by one another, from reading, by criticism, by finding friends in like minded spaces. Our ground can be a familiar one, it is often already trodden.

They are
The armour of bric-à-bràc
To which your soul's caddis
Clings with all its courage.

The soul as caddis-fly hoping not to be dipped towards a waiting fish mouth can demonstrate how we bare all with the written word and open ourselves up to the complexities that wait at the surface of this art form. Courage is an overused word, as is its synonym, bravery. The world keeps on changing. The ground shifts. There is less certainty, and more war, these are the spaces where heroism is demanded.

Writing poetry is in the noticing. It is kicking off your shoes and walking bare-foot. You may find yourself steps behind danger, feet from fantasy, or surprised by the sharp odour of a wily fox. You will inevitably keep moving forwards.

Extracts from: *The Thought-Fox, Ted Hughes,* The Hawk in the Rain 1957
Orts, *In the M5 Restaurant*, Ted Hughes, Earth-Numb 1979
Earth-Numb, Ted Hughes, Earth-Numb 1979
Crow's Vanity, Ted Hughes, Crow 1970
Stanbury Moor, Ted Hughes, Remains of Elmet 1979

"Mon héros était bon à pendre." Wood engraving by J. J. Grandville (French, Nancy 1803–1847 Vanves). https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/813022

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Anne M Carson

Dr Anne M Carson is an Australian creative writing teacher, poet and essayist living on unceded Bunurong Country. Her poetry has been recognised in many prizes, most recently in 2026 winning the Ada Cambridge Poetry Prize. Her fifth poetry collection, *George Sand (and Me): a poetic biography* was recently published. Her PhD received an Outstanding Dissertation Prize (AERA 2024).

Thinking with Connie Barber

Out in the middle of the North Atlantic
Connie's poem, describing dolphins

in Port Phillip Bay, comes to mind –
tapered needle bodies plunging in

and out, piercing watery skin to stitch
the bay from Sandringham to Portarlington

St Kilda to Sorrento, sewing sky and
sea seamlessly together. Her poem

prises the world open so imagination's
gorgeous gaze can enter. Here in the

frigid sub-arctic, sleek grey minke whales
appear momentarily. We confuse white

wave crests with bellies and throats
confusion surely intended for killers.

The minkes pass smoothly through
domains, plying water and air which

open to their snout's touch. Buoyant
breath-filled, they inscribe elegant arcs

then dive out of sight, out of what
humans like to think is their purview.

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Janet Frame's mother was called Lottie

And she knew the way words work
wove them into tapestries of marvel.
There was a god for her behind it all

good and golden. There was creation's
beauty, despite four-to-a-bed with no
sheets, hunger and a boy who took fits.

Despite two girls drowning from heart
defects they didn't know were there.
Lottie wrote wonder into poems, spoke

them to the room, her Singer sewing
machine and through the sitting-room window
into the broad day. She wreathed her

offspring in the medicine and magic
of words. Janet said her mother showed
her feelings, like trophies, to be revealed

and illuminated. When the Depression
fell heavy as sodden fleece, her door-to-
door poetry sales helped keep

the wolf from the door, offered sparks
of light. If Lottie could have been
anything she would have been a poem.

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

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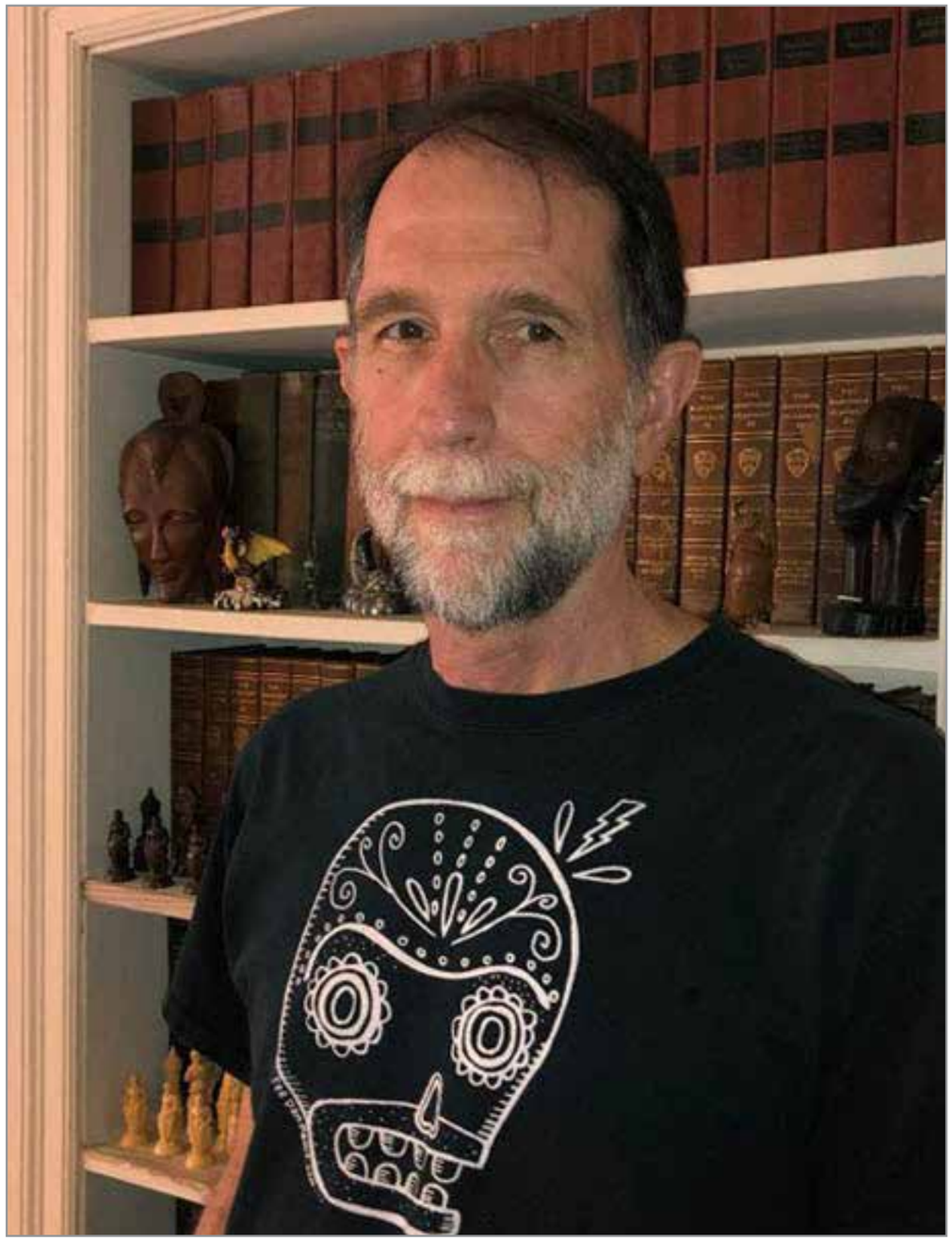

M L Williams

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 are published in many journals and anthologies, including *Western Humanities Review, Naming the Lost: The Fresno Poets, Hubbub, Plume, Miramar, Live Encounters Poetry, The Journal of Florida Studies, The Cortland Review,* and elsewhere. He teaches at Valdosta State University.

Caffe Vita

Today the pour
in the cappuccino spills
a perfect, lacy white
heart on dark crema.
We had gone north
for a daughter's birthday
and saw old friends for lunch,
we told the barista,
and asked her about
her weekend
and the concert,
then lamented
the Bite shooting.
Her sister was there,
she told us, had left
just before it started.
Which was, *wow how*
fortunate, all we could say,
but not for those
in the crossfire who
we silently held,
moved to a table,
smearing the heart,
dripping a little crema
into the dark saucer.

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Ladder

Four floors up
the painter clings
to the aluminum
ladder, paints
the window
trim, no ropes,
no harness
to catch him
if he falls,
I fear, but
he reaches up,
one hand
on the rail,
one foot
on a rung,
balanced,
like, I want
to say
a sailor on
a galleon's mast,
but he sees
no choppy
sea, no blue
horizon, just
the grain
of the wood
showing through
the old paint
he covers
as he talks
congenially
in Spanish
to his workmates
down below.

Martyl and Alice Brave the Mediterranean

We pour steamed milk
into double shots of cafe au lait
at the two-star-rated Bar Ambience
on the Plage de Collioure,
its flaky croissants, its perfect
view of harbor and morning
swimmers and rowers loading
oars into an antique skiff
to head out past the Chateau Royal
into the open sea beside
the cradling mountains,
our gorgeous waiter,
tall, jawline perfect,
patient with Alice's French—
he tells us where to swim
and we go there to swim.

We start in the cove beside
the Chapelle Saint Vincent
and push through the current
where anchovies and sardines
dart among rocks and seaweed,
and deeper, amid rocks
and broken seawall stones,
some writing there, and I surface
with the small stone, and read
a name and *in memoriam*.
I hold it for a while on the seawall
and look out beside the chapel
at the churning water, think
about the man, the writer
of his name on stone, and toss it
back, the sea's memory
so much longer than our own.

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Declaration of the Rights

i. Fashion

After smash burgers and herbed fries
and naming oldies on their playlist—
ELP, Dire Straits, Pink Floyd,
Steely Dan, classic Stones—
we walk up Galer the warm evening
and I wonder aloud, seeing ankles
and hints of calves over bright socks
up the street, if highwaters
are somehow in fashion,
because it can't be that rain
has shrunk all the slacks in Seattle.
Alice assures me that they are
in fashion and furthermore culottes
(culottes!) are mounting a resurgence,
even in revolutionary Seattle,
and I am bemused a little by this
because no matter what fashions
the industry reprises, however ghastly,
old is recast and celebrated.
Well, except for us, for whom hip
means 'replace," and anyway
Alice says dressing *sans culottes*
suits us much better.

ii. Industry

Later we would go into the alley through a back door and talk beside the stained brick walls amid the dumpsters and cans and empty or trash-filled crates visited from time to time by rats about Methuselah's last kiss or the ululations of classical epic characters knotted in tragic events (whether Philomela, for example, could even exclaim so after the loss of her tongue or whether one could count a tapestry as a ululation, or, furthermore, whether Tereus' act of rape against his sister-in-law excuses Procne's crime of murdering their child and feeding him to her husband), or how the number of features populating our smart phones is growing beyond the aptitudes of our ever softening but agile fists, or if Georg Trakl would have been disgusted or enthused by having his poetry lauded by Martin Heidegger in an essay with such an obvious title as "Language in the Poem," or sometimes we would just stand there silently, one knee bent to rest foot and back against the begrimed wall, and listen to scraps of paper investigate the alley's rugged contours and obstacles and slightly damp (not, obviously, "moist," a word we abhorred) microclimate and pull imaginary cigarettes from our mouth to tap off no ashes because we were on a smoke break even though neither of us smoked, and then we would go back in looking guilty as if we'd been caught in some illicit activity just to make everyone wonder, and go back to work making culottes for the post-adolescent children of the wealthy class.

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Magdalena Ball is a novelist, poet, reviewer, interviewer, Vice President of Flying Islands, and Managing Editor of Compulsive Reader. She is a popular festival moderator and has interviewed hundreds of writers for the Compulsive Reader Talks podcast. She is the author of several published novels and poetry books, most recently, Bobish, a verse-memoir published by Puncher & Wattmann in 2023, which Pip Smith in the SMH called "quietly tough and compelling". Her newest book is *Exotic Matter*, which will be published by Liquid Amber Press in February 2027.

Magdalena Ball

Blue

It wasn't the sandalwood Ganesha statues that got me. I held each one briefly then put it in a box for goodwill. There were too many, some hand-carved and fragrant, some round, double headed, thought to bring good fortune. They didn't bring her good fortune, their woodsy scent mingling with her other oils, the signature Patchouli or the resinous remains of half-burned incense cones. The cancer spread faster than the doctors were able to track, all-clear scans belying her secret illness: mutation, metastasis, malignancy. Such easy alliteration. The words offered no solace.

Snow fell lightly outside. It was just enough to stop the mail from arriving, dulling the sound of barking dogs and far off police sirens. I worked alone, moving through her knick-knacks, framed photos, moth-holed cashmere sweaters and boxes of jewellery. I could only take a small amount back to Australia so I was ruthless in my sorting: garbage, goodwill, gift, keep. This had to be done quickly. I was needed at home, 15,606 km away from where I was, the pull back competing with the guilt of having left so many years ago.

It wasn't the carved jade, sandalwood beads or the filigree of an inherited jewellery box that undid me. It wasn't my handmade cards that she kept in a folder, along with rhymed poems, newspaper clippings and letters from abroad. These artefacts felt separate from me, unmoored from memory, fragile and weathered. It was a green celluloid plectrum. The words Manny's Music, 48th street, NYC were written on the back. It might have cost her fifty cents, cheap even back then, in the sixties when nylon picks were still a novelty. I closed my eyes and pictured the narrow aisles with people pretending to test guitars but really showing off how good they were. Her three quarter size Martin was in a hard case that bumped against her leg as she walked to the desk. She said she once saw Hendrix testing a new Stratocaster, tall and handsome, a small crowd gathering. I have no recollection, though I was always with her.

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From then on she always used those picks. The tip was broken, a throwaway, chucked into a drawer. I knew it somehow, could see her playing with it, strings vibrating, me in the front row, her on stage, singing Joni Mitchell with a perfect soprano and overbite to match. I stroked its worn surface, almost hearing her voice: “you’re sad and you’re sorry but you’re not ashamed.”

I went into her bathroom and washed my face, taking the opportunity to clear out the drawer of expired cosmetics, toothpastes and soaps: Dr Bronner’s, Tom’s. She avoided chemicals. No medications. No chemo. Only put on your face what you’re prepared to put in your mouth. A lifelong fear of carcinogens. Maybe she knew somewhere in her bones what was coming. Maybe it was just irony, the god she tried so hard to find having a joke at her expense.

I put everything else in the goodwill box except for her vinyl copy of Joni’s *Blue*, which I packed in my flight bag, wrapped in a thick puffer coat for protection. I left the box on the patio and locked the door. Outside the cold wind whipped against my face as I put bare hands into pockets. I felt the jagged edge of the pick, a faint scent of patchouli rising, and walked off.

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

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Charlotte Innes

Charlotte Innes is the author of a book of poems, *Descanso Drive* (Kelsay Books, 2017) and three poetry chapbooks, most recently *Twenty Pandemicals* (Kelsay Books, 2021). Her poems have appeared in many publications in the U.S. and the U.K. including Agenda (online), The High Window, The Hudson Review, Rattle, The Sewanee Review, Tampa Review and Valparaiso Poetry Review. Her poetry has also appeared in several anthologies, including The Best American Spiritual Writing for 2006 (Houghton Mifflin, 2006). A former newspaper reporter, freelance writer and teacher, she has written on books and the arts for many publications, including The Nation and the Los Angeles Times. Originally from England, Charlotte Innes now lives in Los Angeles.

Excerpt from *The Man With the Military Hat*, a book-length poem set in the future (a work-in-progress).

The Snow Hobbit

The last time it snowed—in May!—I was six years old.
My brother and I threw snowballs, laughing gleefully
at every hit. It didn't hurt. The snow was wet.
We stopped for only a second. Thought we heard our mom
calling across the yard, but couldn't see her. Nick
dropped his handful of snow. *Alex, let's build a snowman!*
I knew it would melt before we finished—didn't care.
I hadn't seen my brother smile so much in months,
his hair spiky-wet, face pink in the sharp air.

Nick was a broody thirteen. He and Dad were always
fighting, about our future, the future of the farm.
That day, he threw it all aside. Was a boy again.
We sloshed around for about an hour until we had
a dripping mound. *It's a snow hobbit*, Nick pronounced.
(Nick was reading *The Lord of the Rings*.) He placed two rocks
at the base. *They have big feet*, he said. I found pebbles
for eyes and mouth, sticks for arms. The mound kept dripping.

Look, he's falling asleep, Nick said. *Let's go inside.*
Yay, hot chocolate! I yelled. He punched my arm.
Oh yeah. Laughing, punching, we ran inside—to quiet.
Mom, Mom, I yelled, *we need*—I stopped. She sat
quite still by a heating vent. On her face, a bruise.

I fell, she said. Got up, slowly. Where's Dad? Nick asked.
Gone to check the lambs, most like. (They'd been dying—
three so far—we didn't know why.) We took off our boots
in the boot room, hung our jackets by a vent to dry.

continued overleaf...

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Mom, we made a snow hobbit! I said, as she poured
hot drinks for us. *That's nice*, she said, smiling a little.
When Dad came in, looking grim, she froze. No-one
said a word. Pulling off his boots, he said,
We lost another. His eyes were red. Had he been crying?
Dad! I stood, to hug him. He turned and went upstairs.
Dinner was silent. *Early to bed, boys*, Mom said.

As Nick and I undressed, we heard a murmur, voices,
going on and on. *Dad's upset*, I said.
Yeah, Nick said. Once we lay in our beds, he said,
Alex, what do you want to be when you grow up?
A doctor, I said.
For animals or people?
Not sure,
I said. *How about you?*
An architect, he said.
Oh yeah? And will you build a hobbit town for us?
As long as I could remember, Nick had talked about
building a hobbit town on the hill above the farm.
Yeah, he said, *I will.*
Nick and I were still
talking, half asleep, when the yelling began downstairs.
I jumped out of my bed and rushed over to Nick,
crying. He hugged me. *They'll work it out,* Alex, he said.

The next day, after milking goats and checking the lambs,
instead of getting ready for Sunday church, Dad said
he and Mom were going to town. He didn't say why,
told us to keep an eye on things, do our homework,
call if needed. *And say a prayer*, Mom said. *Inside.*

Silently, we got our books and laptops, sat down
at the kitchen table and got to work. In my head,
I prayed, *Oh God, please make Mom and Dad OK.*

Glancing out the window, I saw mud. No snow.
He's gone back home, Nick said, *the snow hobbit.*
Oh yeah?
Yeah. A snow goose flew him back to a hobbit town
way up North. He's asleep now. But soon he'll have
his second breakfast. You know hobbits. Always hungry!
Nick could always make me laugh. Later, he made
hot chocolate and helped me with my arithmetic.

When Mom and Dad came home, Mom hugged us. Didn't say
where they'd been, just made us lunch. After that
Dad and Nick no longer argued. And when the lambs
all died—a virus, we learned—Dad, lips tight, said nothing.

Nick didn't talk much, either. Found a summer job.
Later, jobs after school, *saving for college*, he said.
By middle school, I was working too. Odd jobs.
That was after the drought set in.
As the farm collapsed,
I had med. school, marriage, divorce, and then my time
on the front as an army doc.
Nick, the architect,
built his hobbit town, a children's camp—two years
of income for our parents—and now this army camp.

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Lately, of course, The Sickness. The deaths. Mom and Dad,
Nick, and my son (also Nick) at six years old.

I still think of that snowy day, the fun, the sadness,
the first time I thought I'd be a doctor.
I dream
of snow, settling smoothly over our dried-out land,
a trillion multi-patterned flakes knit together.
The order we need. The healing.

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

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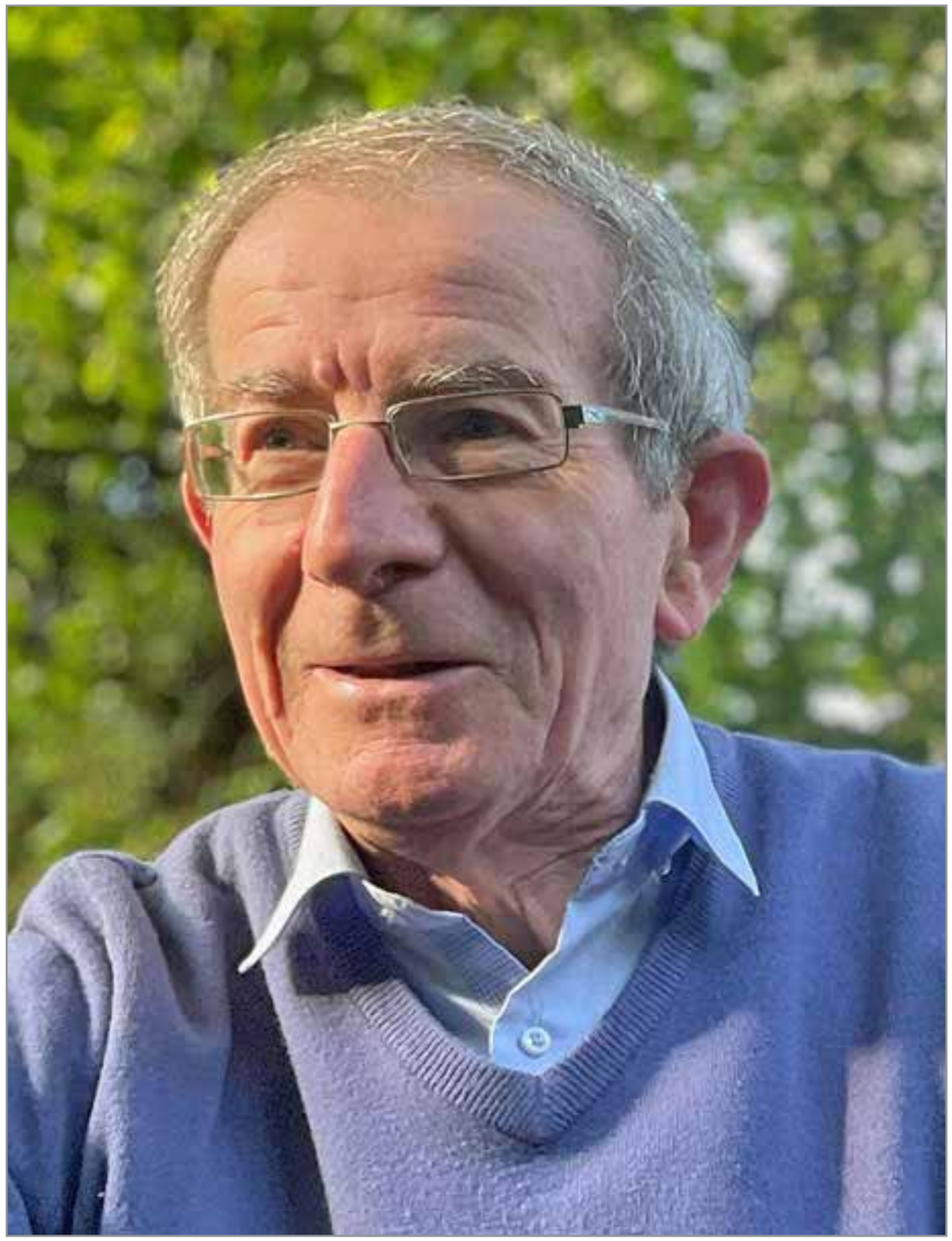

Finbar Lennon

Finbar Lennon is a retired surgeon. He lives in Dublin. He is the author of three collections of poetry published by Lapwing Publications, Belfast (2021/2022). He is a member of the Bealtaine writing group and has had many poems published online in Live Encounters. Two of his poems were published in 2025 in an Anthology "When the Lapwing takes Flight", edited by Amos Greig. Some of his early poems appear in his late wife's memoir "The Heavens are all Blue" that he co-authored with her. The book was published by Hachette Ireland in 2020.

A Masterpiece

I read it first out loud, it passed me by,
alone in dark with sylvan sounds outside,
alert to voice, her soft and silky tone
wrapped inside a square of light while waiting;
the noise of day no longer near – hush fell
over screen to usher in lines of words
to echo moving motions of a song
that filled the space allotted to its span;
composed so many years ago and yet
its sense unclear, perhaps intended here;
famous poet had crafted words to stay,
rattle and dismay, all to have his say;
the stars are always found in sky at night,
preening – unaware their number – countless.

© Finbar Lennon

No Bell

My doorbell does not always ring
at times a press or push
with index finger not enough
to hear the chimes inside;
without a stall or padded glove
to “sock it to” no sound
will issue from this bell;
even famous people
cannot tell why no one
answers when they call.

Twilight

A torrent of rainfall hits the concrete deck
fills the drains and gutters, overflows on top,
in lieu of sunshine, add a tear instead,
uninvited, awning cloud enters storyline,
rolls by, passing on its many moods,
my hope for dash of beauty seeps away,
not long from leaving scene, sun returns
in flash to sultry set, to banish wet;
meanwhile I am making up for lost regret,
my blood no longer up to level best,
eyes in sleepy mode despite diurnal clock,
am fast approaching slang for crock;

as summer solstice nears, why not rise
and bring along your silly jumbled verse
to have the spellings – grammar checked
by poets who know your line in poesy?!

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Alexandra Balm

Alexandra Balm writes poems, short stories, and essays. Her work was published in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, America, and Europe (Czech Republic, Greece, Romania). In his memoir More Deaths Than One (2014), Garry Forrester called her "the mother of metamodernism," though Anita Arlov - perhaps more aptly - opted for "daughter of the metamodern." Alexandra's debut poetry collection, Transformation, was published in 2023 (Scripta Manent, Napier). She teaches English and Creative Writing in Manurewa, South Auckland.

Message

to Riemke Ensing (1939-2026)
with thanks to Gail Ingram

There's music in the house
this Sunday morning – an ode
to joy to a life well lived.

What if there are still shapes watching
over my shoulder? silhouettes waiting
for the moment I awake
to reassure me: we're here, things
will go well today. Go well! Just go, just act,
do what you need to do

But what of the friend who chooses
to opt out? Over the distance I yell, in a dream:
There's still time to watch children
playing with waves, to contemplate
silver seagulls homing in
through the spectacular light at sunset

There's still time, and still life,
the sea murmurs

© Alexandra Balm

Exercise

(with thanks to Eric Soakai and Action Education)

Draw the outline of a person. This can be a(n ideal) friend, teacher, parent, etc.
Inside the outline, write their feelings and thoughts.
Outside, write their actions.
You may choose to create a checklist of your person's qualities.

Example: Inside the outline:
The ideal friend responds to midnight SOS messages
even when their content is not spelled out.
They remember
to say something kind
each time
you interact.
They respect and support
your decisions
but don't shirk from
calling out their weak points.

Outside the outline:
The ideal friend doesn't promise in vain.
The ideal friend doesn't leave.
The ideal friend keeps their word
and stays
alive.

Instead of a checklist
I'm not an ideal friend, and neither are you.
Though you are mine and I'm yours,
*mutual in love divine**
despite proof to the contrary,
overwhelming humanity,
and existential anxieties

tempted to cancel themselves,
tempted to cancel
existence

*"mutual in love divine" is an intertextual reference to William Blake's *Jerusalem.*
The larger quote reads: "Awake! awake O sleeper of the land of shadows, wake! expand!/
I am in you and you in me, mutual in love divine: Fibres of love from man to man thro Albions pleasant land." (Chapter I, Plate 4).

© Alexandra Balm

Migrant's Lament, Nostalgic For A Simpler Way Of Living

I am (a) Thomas, mercifully sold
into a servitude
that brought others
the gospel

If only I...
(how wonderful it would have been
to have) stayed home, eat mum's bread and jam,
inhale peripatetic conversations
on millennium old hills

Like Joseph, I was thrown in the pit
of estrangement;
like gladiators, I wrestled beasts
unmoved by song or faith

alienated from mine and ours,
I wander the steppe of alterity
with mere words
for companions

home and hearth
survive as remote memories
that I realise

but in dreams
and the occasional poem

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

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Anna Yin

Anna Yin was Mississauga's inaugural Poet Laureate (2015–2017) and is the author of seven poetry collections, including *Breaking Into Blossom* (Frontenac Press, 2025). She has translated five poetry books, notably *Mirrors and Windows* (Guernica Editions, 2021). Her work has appeared in *Queen's Quarterly, ARC Poetry, The New York Times, China Daily, CBC Radio,* and more. She has read on Parliament Hill, at international festivals, and at universities in China, Canada, and the U.S. A recipient of multiple awards and grants, she created and teaches Poetry Alive to bring poetry into schools, colleges, and communities.

God of Love

a snowflake kissing another,
then millions follow
to glitter on the winter summit

*
a leaf dancing with another,
then many gather
to blanket the frosty motherland

*
a bird calling another,
then more voices rise
in the silent ravine

*
a fish tailing another,
then a school of them
sails into the blue kingdom

*
a child reading with another,
then stories
carry them into another wonderland

© Anna Yin

God of Dandelions

Each spring after rain
you arrive

First, spreading
as weeds in the field

then yellow flowers
popping out all over

Soon white puffy heads
nodding

Before I notice
you take flight
with tiny umbrellas
dance in the wind
gone with the wind

Some are mad at you—
but not me. I long for
your wandering flight

far and far
across the horizon

Then I wake
with a handful of
dandelion clocks

all bare of seeds

God of Sleep

Sometimes you abandon me.
Deep in the night,
you fail to answer my prayers.

I know you must do the same to him,
so he may wander into my poem.

When you arrive in a good mood,
I dream of entering his garden.

I am lucky enough
to claim an entire layer of clouds—
together we become a white horse
riding through the night sky.

© Anna Yin

王自亮: Wang Ziliang

王自亮: Wang Ziliang (b. 1958, Taizhou, Zhejiang) is a poet, essayist, and Professor at Zhejiang Gongshang University. He has published numerous poetry collections, as well as poetry criticism and nonfiction. His forthcoming collections include 《时间书》《幻象、盲者与命名之光》《长江传》. His poetry has received numerous awards and appeared in many anthologies, with translations into English, French, Spanish, and other languages. He chaired the Organizing Committee of the Fifth International Symposium on Contemporary Poetry Studies (2025) and was named a 2018 "Top Ten Poet" in the "Hall of Fame" selection.

Translated from Chinese by Anna Yin.

Two Sorts of Books

Reading Celan, and Yu Hua—
two kinds of memory interlacing, entangling,
two beams of light gazing into each other,
and crossing through.

The light of chaos is the light of the living,
dividing human from beast.
In the clear light,
the body turns to smoke, ascending into the void.

"We confide in each other the language of darkness,"
yet they demand blood, stone dowries,
and debts owed to the wind.

Celan once wrote—
"Your body turns blue
from God's craving at night"

Yu Hua penned:
"At my boldest, I could still invent
the scent emanating from her body."

Celan said,
"Let's go blind today—
Eternity, too, is full of eyes."
And Yu Hua?
"He spent the whole day telling the past
to a blind man
whose youth was flourishing."

continued overleaf...

© Wang Ziliang

No—the blind man has opened his eyes,
—because of starvation.

Celan says,
“Your pupils, blind as stones,”
yet the eyes of the stone
are always lucid, wide awake.

两种书

读策兰，又读余华，两种记忆交替，纠缠，
两束光互相盯住，又彼此交错。

混沌之光是活着的光，分隔人与兽。
澄澈之光，身体化作烟雾升向空中。

“我们互诉黑暗之语”，
他们却索取血、石头嫁妆与风的债务。

策兰，曾这样写道——
“夜里你的肉体因神的激情而青紫”。

余华写出这样的句子，“最为大胆的时候，
我还能伪造出她身上散发出的气息”。

策兰是，“今天就变瞎吧，永恒也充满了眼睛”
余华呢？“他整日向双目失明而青春勃发的瞎子讲述那段往事”。

不，瞎子已睁开眼睛，
——因为饥饿。

策兰说，“你的眼瞳，石头般盲目”，
石头的眼睛，始终醒豁。

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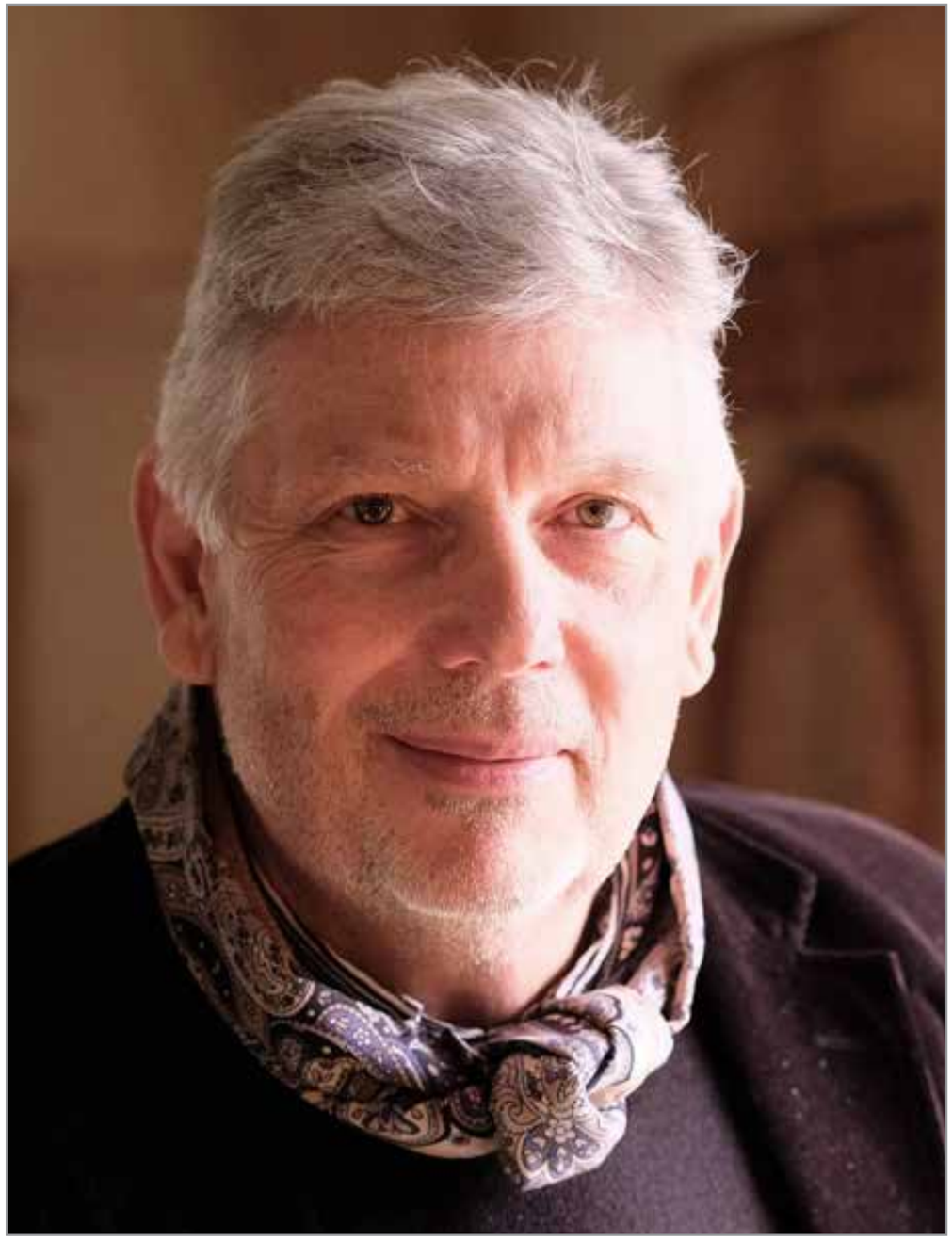

Anton Floyd

Anton Floyd, an award winning poet, lives in West Cork with roots in the Middle East. An affiliate artist at UNESCO RIELA (University of Glasgow) and an associate of the Centre for Poetry Innovation (University of St Andrews). Poems published in Ireland and elsewhere. Poetry collections, Falling into Place (Revival Press, 2018); Depositions (Doire Press, 2022; republished as an illustrated hardback, Glóir 2024) has been translated into 25 languages. Another illustrated version with translation into Nigerian languages, Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa is due in early 2027. A suite of songs composed by acclaimed singer-songwriters Rachel Walker and Marcas Mac an Tuarneir inspired by Depositions was premiered at the Celtic Connections Festival (Glasgow 2026). Two new collections, *On the Edge of Invisibility* and *Singed to Blue* are in preparation. https://antonfloyd.ie/

Reliquary For My Father

Tonight, a hymn from the dark —
in pupal blackness such airy dreams.
You favoured taut words,
poems that made a spare music;
preferred buds over blousy flowers.
I conjure up a sepia childhood:
a meze in a mountain tavern;
counting waves together at Salamis;
your easy drift into Levantine languages.
When cicadas sing, they keen for you.
The cypress trees you loved are your sentinels.
Times I would commemorate you
with a marble bust but make do
with the moon bleached of colour.

© Anton Floyd

A Life in Things

in memoriam my stepfather, Michael Cherrett

After the funeral mother asked
that I go through his things,
weigh what is best to keep
against what to give away.
He had done the bulk of this
radical sifting of a life in things,
when they moved from the house
to the luxury of a stairless flat.
No doubt he was aware it was
a foreshadowing of this final letting go.

What remains tells the quintessential man,
stoical, in whose life you could trace a line
through Marcus Aurelius to Zeno of Citium.
I find a familiar, modest wardrobe,
muted colours, sensible coats,
shirts and ties; scarves, socks, underwear,
pyjamas, a chequered dressing gown,
slippers and hand-crafted shoes.

Squirelled away in a drawer,
are cuff links, spare studs for rugby boots,
left over from his reffing days;
a sharp, well-oiled pair of secateurs.
There's a biscuit tin of parcel twine,
all natural fibres, hemp, and cotton,
bound into tight rings or tied in bows.
His thinking, plain to see, they may
well be useful when the time comes
to bind garden plants, gifts, and hearts.

Next, his library of Greek and Latin texts
(much reduced); always to hand the OED,
well thumbed after a lifetime solving cryptic
crosswords; maps and travel guides; photos
and favoured recipes gathered into albums,
all appended with neat handwritten notes;
books on contract bridge, gardening know-how
- he could write the book on that - others
on the flora and fauna of the British Isles.
Tucked amongst these is his tankard
celebrating his full rowing blue.

Then there's his vinyl collection, classical
recordings, mostly Deutsche Grammophone.
I open his Hi-Fi system, select and place
Holst's *The Planets* on the turn table.
I watch the needle rise like a space module
and land precisely on the spinning surface.
I listen to the music's total evocative power
till the choir of human voices trails wordlessly
into the sublime unknown, confirming
that daily breath is fugitive as rose madder.

His black umbrella stands furled inside
the door as if waiting for his hand.

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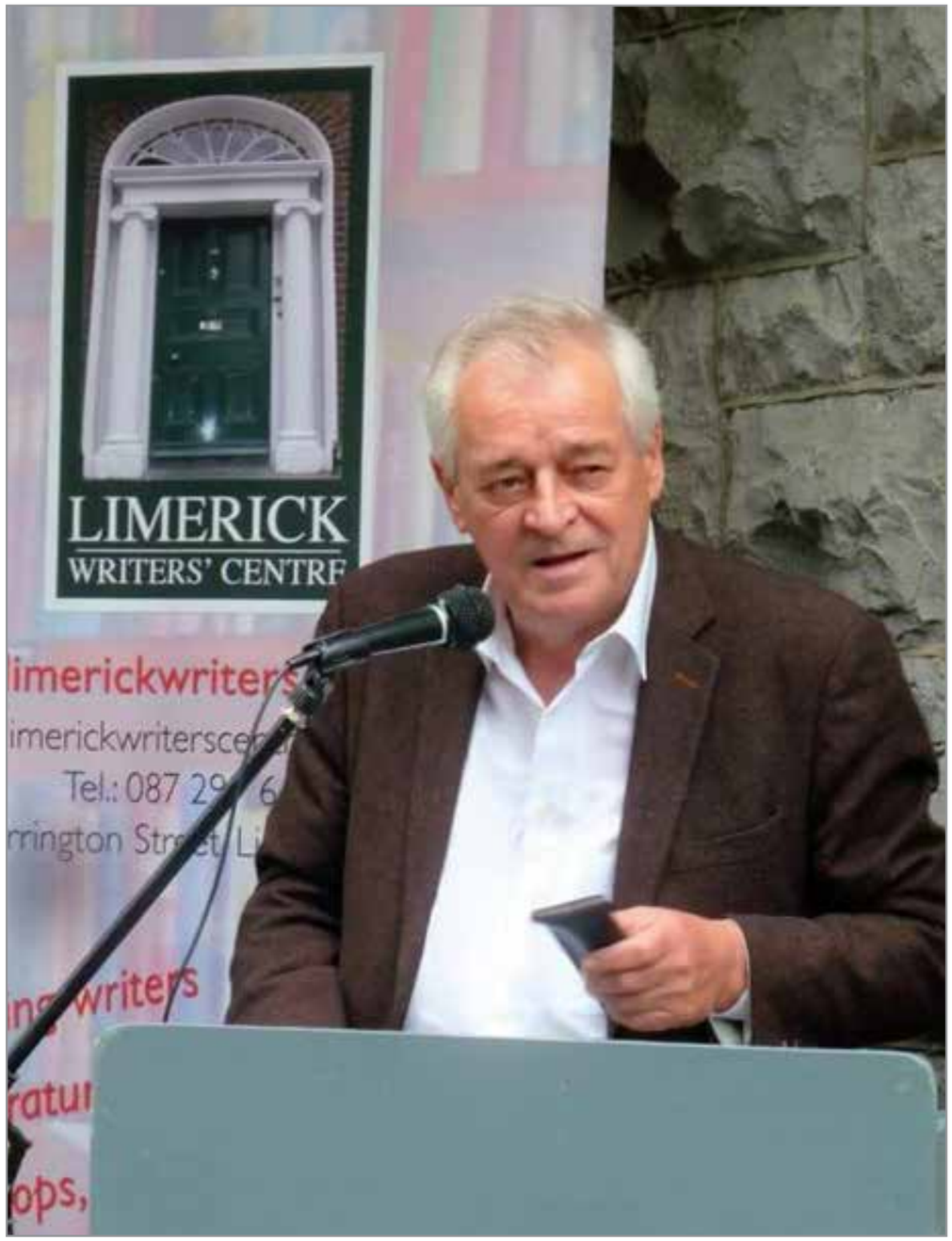
John Liddy's most recent books are *True to Form* (Revival Press, 2026) and *Spanish Points: Antología Poética. Edición Bilingüe* (Huerga & Fierro, 2026).



John Liddy

Poetry

for Tim Cunningham

Only poets really know
what it is like to leave the poem
to its own devices

Its magic working or not
in another's hands, the words
catching the eye and the ear

Or not; the poem treated
with no feeling, nothing
to savour on the tongue

Nor an odour of recognition,
the poem all but abandoned
until somebody someday

Wanders into its interior
design and suddenly sees
a reflection of what is sought

Clarity shining through,
sense made of the senses
and what occurs beyond

The view of a sickroom
full of care, near and distant
fond farewells framed

By a window of imaginings
in Westport, a childhood
scene in old Limerick.

© John Liddy

Folk Lore

1.

Lives full of longing. No tomorrow.

What matters is you, here now
to provide for those to come
like the beaver builds to protect,
to restore habitats for other species;
to create deep pond environments
for shelter, rest and raising young,
lodges and bank dens to live in,
canals for transportation of food,
scent mounds to mark territory.

We are lucky to have such teachers.

2.

Colour, movement, sound, smell –
barometers we once lived by.
Identity, memory, place shaped by weather
woven into everyday conversation;
poem and proverb passed on
through storytelling.
Verse helped us to remember
what farmer and shepherd said
about the rainbow and the sky:
'Rainbow at night, a farmer's delight.
Rainbow in the morning, a farmer's warning'.
'Red sky at night, shepherd's delight.
Red sky in the morning, shepherd's warning'.

Our cyclical year defined by nature,
a Calander of animals, birds, flowers,
plants and trees reassured us,
monthly weather did not deceive.
Sources of seasonal prediction:
animal behaviour, haw and sloe, moon halo,
sun colour, tree, hedgerow, wind direction.
ash before oak – a soak.
oak before ash – a splash.
Tides and coastal sounds, sea colour,
foam currents, porpoises, small whales,
na mucaí mara – sea pigs,
all told their story as did clouds
like Kerry Mountains or moon on its back.

© John Liddy

Ever Closer

When I can barely manage a smile,
And it seems the price I pay for living
Is too high, the news from home
Or far away is just getting me down.

You are ever closer, oh yes,
Together or apart,
Ever closer to heal my aching heart.

When stupidity seems to be the norm
And the captains are all at sea,
And the petty thief is locked in a cell
While the white-collar criminal is free.

You are ever closer, oh yes,
Together or apart,
Ever closer to heal my aching heart.

When I walk against the wave
Of the oncoming crowd,
Or find myself in a bar
I turn and see you in the mirror

Ever closer, oh yes,
Together or apart,
Ever closer to heal my aching heart.

An injured sensibility,
A worry for a friend,
An ungodly sense of justice
Weighing me down.

I am ever closer to you
Together or apart,
Ever closer you and me
To heal that aching heart.

(This song has music composed by Dave Mower)

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Keeper

for my brother Mark

Nothing matters more to you
than staying true to a set of ideals,
which you doggedly pursue

With friend and foe; a homespun
philosophy imparted to convey
clarity to the conundrum.

And when ill-health or foul play
threaten to blow you off course,
conviction in beliefs a mainstay

Embedded in your core, a hallmark
of personal attributes – generosity
and loyalty – lofty as the lark

Soaring in the borderless skies
of a national aspiration for unity
as found in your Curfew Murders.

Seeker of truth to forever live
in your name and in those who
love you for being restive.

Satchel

for Sabina

Inside an old, forgotten suitcase,
beneath layers of cobwebbed
papers destined for the archives

Or the bin, a wheaten-coloured
satchel appeared with smudges
of Art School, a buried past

That probed the façade of time
in a walk home from a talk
on the unity of God, humanity

And religion when ambushed
by young thugs who fractured
my arm; the echo of a valley's

Shout released from its fibrous
chamber absolved by revelation,
memories no longer in arrears.

The satchel returned to you,
its rightful owner, after years
of dormant, patient slumber.

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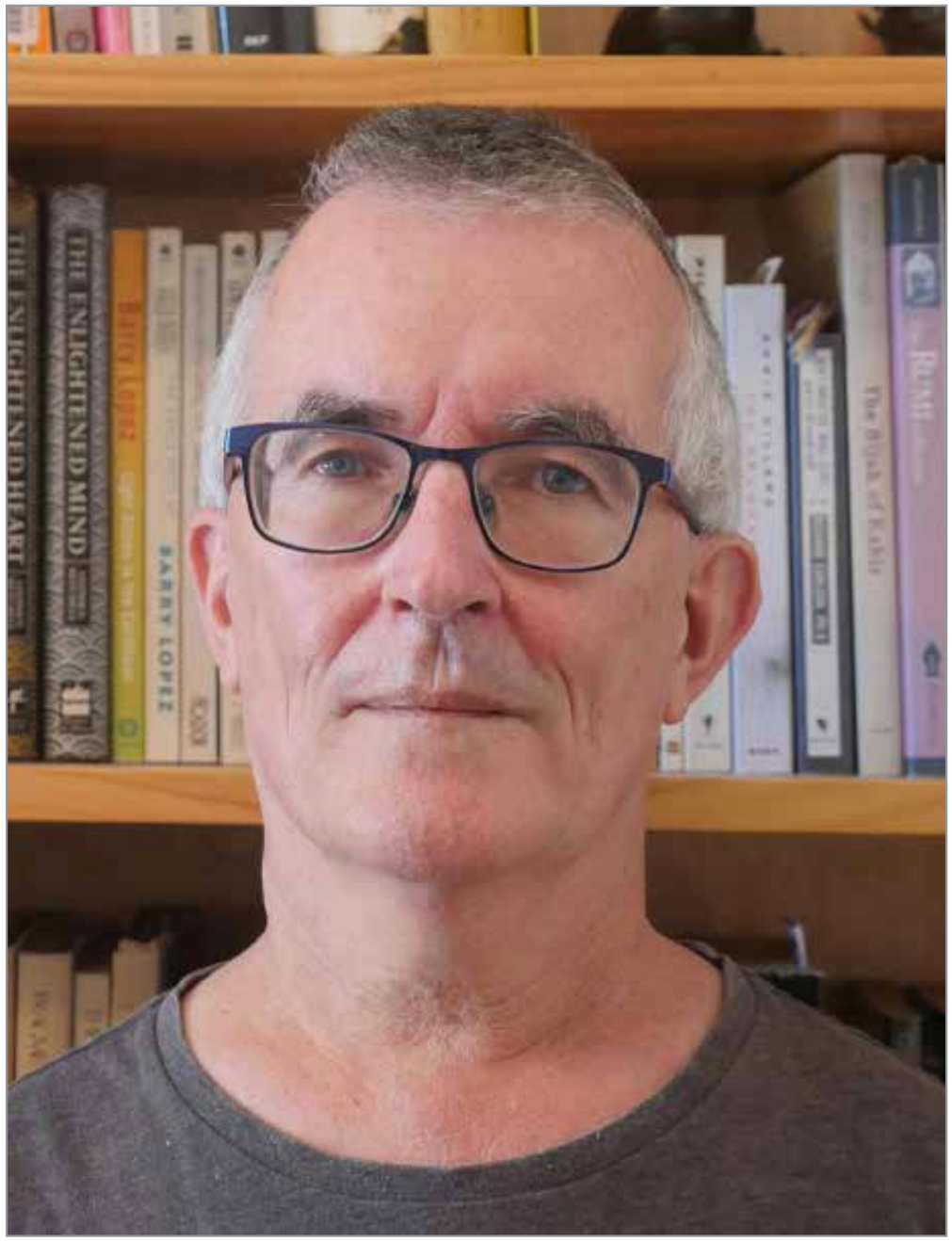

Richard von Sturmer

Richard von Sturmer is a New Zealand writer. He was born on Auckland's North Shore in 1957. His recent works are the acclaimed memoir, *This Explains Everything* (Atuanui Press, 2016), *Postcard Stories* (Titus Books, 2019), and *Resonating Distances* (Titus Books, 2022). In 2025 his collection of poetry, *Slender Volumes* (Spoor Books, 2024), was shortlisted for the Mary and Peter Biggs Award for Poetry at the 2025 Ockham Book Awards.

By Any Stretch of the Imagination

1.

One memory I return to
is sitting beside my grandmother
shelling peas
on the front steps of her house.
A birdbath stands nearby
with a small gnome
seated on its rim.
I wonder now if the gnome
scared away the birds.
Who can I ask?
The birdbath is gone
along with my grandmother.
But it's a minor question amid
everything else that has no answer.
I close my eyes
and return to shelling peas.

2.

My grandmother grew snapdragons.
One day she took a flower,
squeezed its jowls
and showed me how its jaws opened.
It was the first time I'd seen
pink beside yellow.
Before then I never paid
much attention to colours.

continued overleaf...

© Richard von Sturmer

3.

Blue is the colour
of the aged ice.
The deeper the blue,
the deeper the time.

With the melting of the glaciers
we lose that deep blue.
In the North Sea the waves are
grey and mountainous,
rising and falling.

Before we were born
we walked with heavy boots
across the sea floor.

4.

How strange to think
I once dreamt of Rome
after the Great Flood
while in reality
Rome is burning.

Shade trees all over the city
have dropped their leaves,
and tomato plants
so well-tended
in window boxes
and back gardens
have withered away.

I stretch out my hands
which are the hands
of a five-year-old.

There's a light bulb in the sky;
it's never switched off.

5.

When I arrived at her front door
I said that I had been wind-assisted;
the wind having blown me
all the way from the train station.
"Your skin is like tinfoil," she said.
"It must be the static electricity I picked up
while living in the Crab Nebular."
(I knew that this would trigger
her conspiracy-obsessed mind.)
"Have you looked at the sun recently?"
"No, Diane, it's bad for your eyes."
"The sun is getting paler.
Day by day the sun is losing its colour.
Who can explain this?"
Our conversation ended there
and she ushered me inside.
By any stretch of the imagination
my journey had been a long one.

© Richard von Sturmer

Caterina Mastroianni

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 Journal, and Poetry for the Planet: An Anthology of Imagined Futures.*

Bye bye, Buruwan Park

Couples, children, and older residents held their placards high. They were fighting for Buruwan Park. Two Moreton Bay Figs, centenarians that might not reach their true-life span, stand with a permanent quality in their anchored and stoic stance. I do not know their genetic longevity, but I read that in Japan tree roots could be bound and lifted to relocate a tree.

In Buruwan Park,
the first three sounds slip
smoothly from my mouth,
as if re-birthing an ancient word
from Cadigal, and Wangal lands,
but we know from the protesters stand,
that births and deaths are not painless.

In daylight, brisk birds alight on branches. At dusk, a bounty of bats squabble and shriek. At night, possums, evicted from one green patch to another, hiss and scramble for refuge.

In Buruwan Park, a gentle
suspension of tension
from respiteless roads
out to rearrange us screens
the machines, until fences
cage the park, and overnight,
the trees are chopped

© Caterina Mastroianni

The name of the river

Between the yachts, dinghies, and kayaks,
the seal dives into where belonging thrives.

Has she swum far through turbulent oceans,
along agitated coasts? Is she from the Narooma

clan lying languidly on the wharf rocks,
or grunting on the harbour-side grass?

Or did she spin from the Isla de los Lobos
near Ushuaia at the end of the world: an island

bursting with lobos marinos, far from this lone seal?
With her, a quiet symbiosis dives and soars

as I follow her slick movements from the riverbank
of my curiosity. I wonder when underwater,

does she hear silence or sound? If it is silence
is it from the death of millions of years of life,

or from decades ago? Is it the kind of silence
she can live with or die with? If it is sound,

does it roar like sea lions or motorboats,
or pop and pulse like eels and breams?

How does amphibious hearing filter the revving,
swerve the blades? How to re-belong? Thrive anew?

Manoeuvring through sound and silence underwater
and overwater, as comfortable below as on the surface,

she bottle-rests before a bend, and nose-lifts a name,
sounds submerged for so long - Burramattagal.

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Lynda Tavakoli

Lynda Tavakoli is a professional member of The Irish Writers Centre and has been nominated for *Best of the Net* and the *Pushcart Prize*. She lives in County Down, where she facilitates adult creative writing classes and has worked as a tutor for the Seamus Heaney Award for schools. A poet and novelist, Lynda's work has been published in the UK, Ireland, the US and Middle East, with Farsi, Spanish and Arabic translations. She has been winner of poetry and short story prizes in Listowel, The Westival International Poetry Prize, and runner-up in The Blackwater International Poetry Competition and Roscommon Poetry Competition. Her poems have been published in The Irish Times 'New Irish Writing' and appeared in numerous journals and anthologies, including Lothlorien Poetry Journal, Live Encounters, The Galway Review, Skylight47, Abridged, CAP Seamus Heaney Anthologies, Eat the Storms, Drawn to the Light Press, amongst others. She has been guest poet on RTE1 The Poetry Programme and had poetry broadcast on the 'Words Lightly Spoken' podcast. Lynda's debut poetry collection, *The Boiling Point for Jam* received wide acclaim for its raw honesty and authenticity while her second collection *A Unison of Breaths* has been recently published by Arlen House.

In The End

In the end we are all returned to dust,
our time upon this earth measured
not by wealth or privilege but how we loved
and how we let ourselves be loved.

In the end the men with hatred
in their hearts will know a recompense
that echoes long within
the silence of their empty souls.

In the end our children's futures
rest within our hands where,
shaped by kindnesses and good intent,
we offer them the light of hope that they deserve.

In the end we are our own adversaries
plucking differences from out of empty space,
seeing only what we blindly choose to see.
So let us try to love the best we can,
and make the most of all that we began,
and cherish the humanity of man, in the end.

© Lynda Tavakoli

Something Understood

Everything gathers light.
Naming Love,
the heart be at peace.
Benediction
and All shall be well.

Credits:
Something Understood: Mark Tully
Everything Gathers Light: Eithne Lannon
Naming Love: Geraldine Mitchell
Heart be at Peace: Donal Ryan
Benediction: Kent Haruf
All Shall Be Well: Joan Wilson with Alf McCreary

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

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Jena Woodhouse. Photo credit: Anna Jacobson

Jena Woodhouse has eight published poetry titles, the most recent being *The Singing Ship: A Study in Resistances*, Calanthe Press 2026. *The Wild Country of Time: Peregrinations*, is forthcoming from Ginninderra Press in early 2027. She lived and worked for a decade in Greece, and has travelled extensively. A recipient of writing residencies in Scotland, Ireland, France and Greece, her poetry has been shortlisted three times for the Montreal International Poetry Prize.

Quiet Night, rue Pigalle

Waking from the state of estivation common to long flights,
cosy in my cube of hotel room on rue Pigalle,
I glance up at the buildings opposite: tall windows deck
august facades; scrolled wrought iron frames balconies.
Facing me across the street, a garret perches in the night,
alight beneath a dim, soft sky and timorous, faint stars.

Someone sleepless in Pigalle hears the distant sirens too,
contemplates the intervals of silence in a pulsing heart,
the street below devoid of men, dashing with their fresh *baguettes*
from *boulangers*, all whippet-lean despite their appetite for carbs.

Uncertain what the day intends, I listen to the shifting dark,
imagining myself as pigeon on that other window sill,
peering in at someone reading, musing, relishing the quiet,
high above the intermittent clamour from the boulevards.

© Jena Woodhouse

Celestial Dust

Rudolph Nureyev's tomb
Russian cemetery
Sainte-Geneviève-des-bois, Paris

"Lights go out and I die. Tomorrow I will be born again.
Tomorrow I will dance again." Rudolph Nureyev

Phantom locomotives whinny, belching lilac plumes,
following the limen of your consciousness—
threading childhood's shoreline, tenuous as memory,
transiting the snowbound steppe beside the waters of Baikal,

far from Paris and your deathbed, tapping out the rhythms
in your head that lured you early to the *barre*, the ultimate
stage door; performances where you became a force of art,
inspiring awe; a meteor that lit up the horizon of balletomanes.

You can't believe the brilliance could fade so fast, to *nevermore*;
the fickle public adulates a new Siegfried; a young *Corsaire*;
and yet, as lamps are dimming to unconsciousness, and all grows dark,
the luminescence of your legend morphs to afterlife of stars—

Sombre Autumn Evening

i.m. David Malouf, celebrated
Australian poet, librettist, novelist

How am I to find the words
commensurate with such sad light;
shreds of cloud that hover
at the threshold of approaching night;
anaemic sliver of a moon,
disconnected shard of ice
suffusing with the merest hint of radiance
a fading sky; streets deserted and forlorn
before the lofty lamps ignite;
silent stores, grey pavements, unlit cafes
locked to mark this public holiday
in memory of mortal strife
on other shores, in other wars:
metallic glint of medals worn
on uniforms, a glimpse subsumed,
as melancholy dusk huddles
at windowsills with curtains drawn.

On the cusp of autumn, at the close
of this funebral date, how am I to find
words to articulate the emptiness
engendered by the knowledge
that a poet I revered has died?

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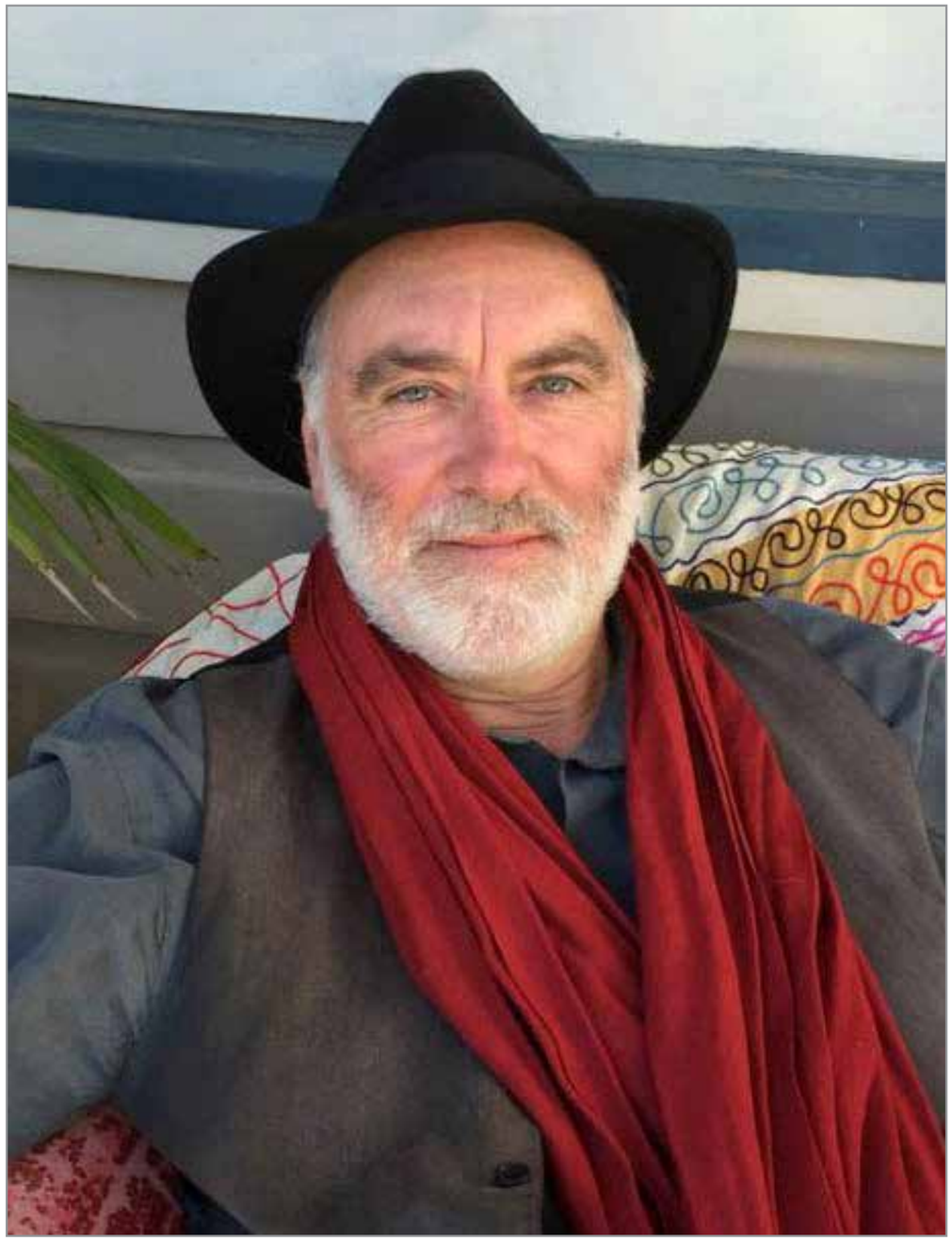

Justin Lowe

Justin Lowe lives on unceded Gundungarra land in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney. His ninth collection, “San Luis”, was released through Puncher&Wattmann in October 2024. He has a tenth doing the rounds, as well as a novel. He has had his poetry set to music by such musical acts as *The Whitlams* and *The Impossibles*. Not a day goes by that he doesn’t regret something or other while kissing the lilies and blessing the bees.

Decades

I.

he was not a cruel man,
just a man accustomed to cruelty,
from before his chin stubbled Dutch orange,
his kind angels snared on the wire.

somewhere east of the Rhine
he reached through the wire,
but there was no kind hand,
just the wind in it.

like Bukowski bearing the weight
of *his* father’s months behind the Argonne wire,
you bore the weight of your father
tangled up in it.

II.

they had already swallowed his father
before the engine switched to the siding.
the boy lived,
but his life would be ringed by wire.

I can still hear those Dutch consonants
slashing at our names,
as we raced off into the dark of music and girls,
away from that whistle of wind in the wire.

continued overleaf...

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III.

there was still snow on
the shattered logs washed down
from the bald mountains to the estuary.

frost-bitten gulls
hovered, perched, hovered,
between the sun daggers on the tea-tree slick.

you swore they were laughing, not screeching,
but then I had found you in a bar late morning,
muttering something about two strikes of lightning as I tripped the bell.

my breath lived out its entire life before me.

IV.

some doomsayer crooned on the Wurlitzer,
some clown made noises about your hat.
you said I always did have a canny knack for meeting places.

I asked what you had been doing these twenty years,
and then you insisted I flip a coin
to decide where the day would take us.

I bought you that trick coin,
but you seemed to have forgotten that.
I would not be writing this poem had you won.

V.

Boxing Days means nothing to anyone, I know,
just a gift without a store receipt to the working class,
double-time for a middle aged man with a lanyard.

I thought I had raised my children better than this,
deem a man a loser for working holidays,
but there it is.

you, son, my eldest stood like a bouncer blocking his way,
while you, my youngest daughter, flinched
as my old friend tried to find his narrow way behind you

to the door your brother was blocking.
my old friend, the strange man
in your home.

VI.

don't blame them, friend,
your father had me pegged
the same mumma's boy as your eldest does,

or maybe your male line just doesn't trust me,
the mirror I hold up,
the lost boy flailing in it.

continued overleaf...

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VII.

yes, I am proud of my children,
cherish them as I hope they cherish me,
but at some point in time, in order to hold onto that cherishing,

I will have to tell them softly,
like the cruel ending of some fairy tale
I used to lull them to sleep,

that I am frightened by your knock at my door.

Lothario

it is not so much your unsteady feet that once danced all night,
the cockatoo squawk as you rise,

the surprising pains, the bathroom tile rhetoric,
or the slow dawning that most authority is far far younger than you,

better informed, by all five senses,
if slightly less articulate about the sixth,

nor is it your body's sudden aversion to sugar,
its tingling fingers of soft *Madeleine* squares and dead lovers.

full-throttle motorbikes, the hollow laughter of teenagers,
all these are just a shadowplay, of course.....

it is the idea of love as designate,
as a memory that flickers like the dawn stars you rise to,

a series of vignettes, of wry anecdotes,
to tell against yourself at the end of a bar some slow afternoon

as the schools empty and the laughter builds,
and the sun sets behind you like a crooked halo.

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Venus Rising

I.

I will know I am not long for this world
when I search out my window for a particular star,

smile at it with an intimacy
that only the dying can pull off.

I will know I am beginning to look for an easy exit
when I stop holding grudges against myself,

some of which I have carried since pre-school,
some that are more amorphous, a way of measuring myself,

of holding myself to a standard,
like when my dog cocks her tiny head at me,

or when you laughed at me trying to quote Cicero.

II.

I don't know why I have suddenly become so playfully morbid.
I am healthy enough, of relatively sound mind,
my dog makes me laugh when she snores,
and Venus rises every night right where I left her.

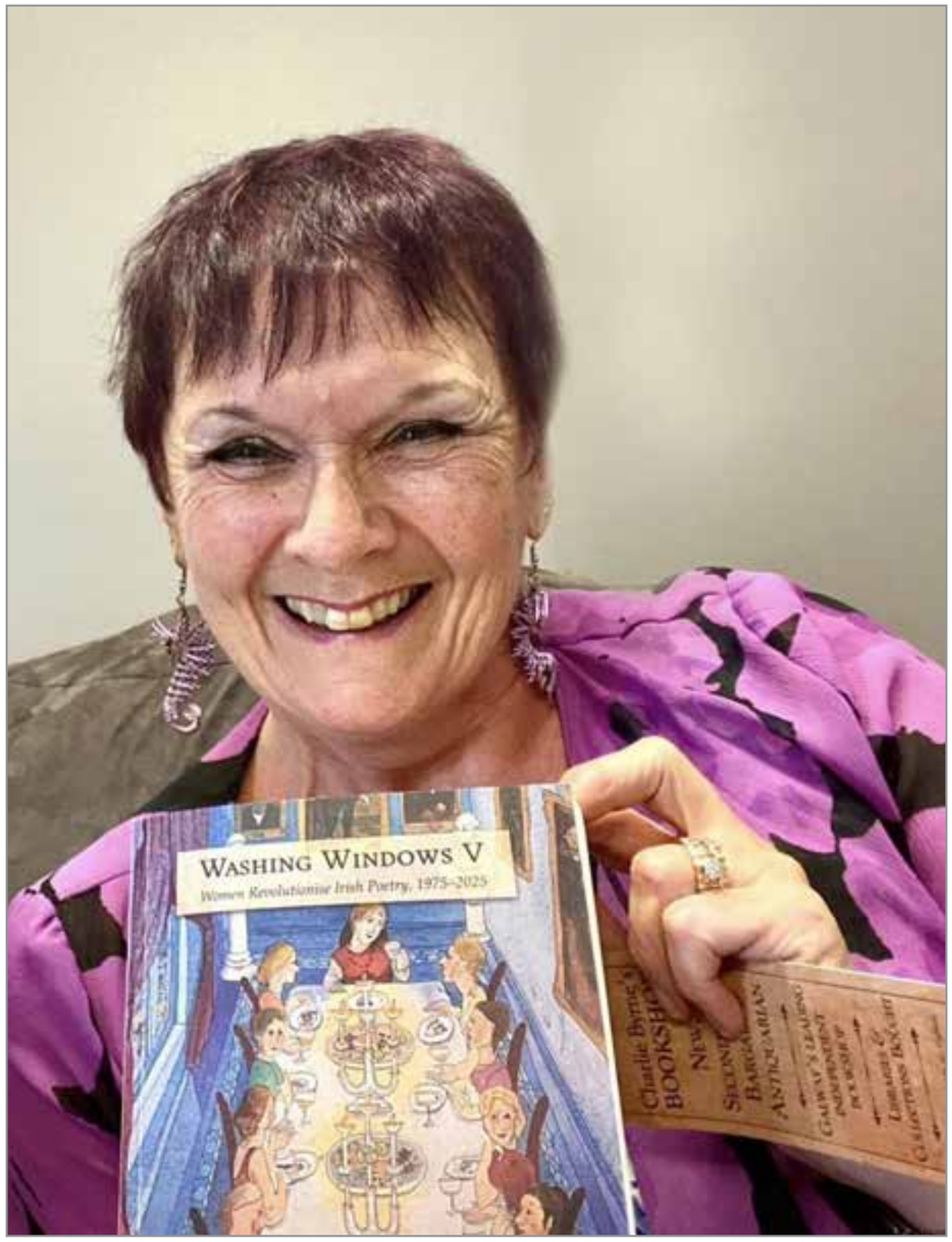
it is your birthday, or would have been,
the air is bitter-sweet with Spring,

wattle carpets my path with gold,
and the earth turns just that little bit more noticeably.

I guess it is our nature, a poet's nature,
to laugh incredulous at the first orchid opening.

© Justin Lowe

Mari Maxwell writes poetry, fiction, flash and creative non-fiction. Her work features online and in print in Ireland, USA, UK, Brazil, and elsewhere. Among her publications are: Poetry Ireland Trumpet 14; Washing Windows Too, III, IV and V with Arlen House; Crannog; The Stony Thursday, and *Making Space for the Light* (February 2026, Write Where We Belong Press, Canada). Her work is forthcoming in the Sunday Poetry Series Podcast: A Thousand Shades of Green Oct. 2026. She received a bursary from Mayo County Council in March 2025; an Agility Award from the Arts Council of Ireland in 2023, and a Professional Development Award in 2020/2021.



Mari Maxwell

Belmullet Bound

In Carrowteigh, in the barony of Erris,
cliff edges cast their spell.

Summer flocks nuzzle rocky outcrops
as bog cotton sprinkles snow along the sod.

Footfalls bounce as we ramble
the Black Ditch.

Ancient mounds layered over centuries.
Tea-stained hands toiling peat high above
Broadhaven Bay.

Gutting through phyllo layers,
grafting sod fences
to wall in their flock.

Did the Stags of Broadhaven look on?
Prehistoric fiends arcing shale and schist
mimicking Scottish Nessie.

Tectonic thrusts jutting
from North Atlantic maw,
that rupture every breath.

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Prayer to Nature

In the cathedral of the pines
blue spruce blesses the hills
and lake waters anoint me.
Chill in winter
Sticky in July heat.
And in February Mayo sky
a buzzard channels pockets of air
above the flooded fields.

It's there where a young cygnet,
mottled feathers spread wide
rummages through murky water.
Thankful, like I, for stilled lake.

A natural symphony that
brings peaceful respite.

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

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Sophia Wilson is currently based on Maungatua outside Ōtepoti Dunedin. An arts graduate and former health worker, she is the author of *Sea Skins,* a poetry collection published by Flying Island Books in 2023. (@bluetree_poet, https://sophiakwilson.wordpress.com/)

Sophia Wilson

Dead Space

I

All day long, Netflix, cement, '$2' shops, 1000 grey non-unions
sold out for king, queen, princess or prince streets plus pollution
main street, more obscured than most, a series of uncreative chains
2500 'Dream Bigs' plus petroleum, 25 ghettos, 25 overdue rents

the atmosphere is impotent
apart from bottle brandishing proselytizers
summoning faith on the corner for a bit of coin, or something like it
thank you Beautiful they cry, pressing their lips to your hand

the sober and indifferent pass by
and spaces, duly, dully, are passed over

segregated grottos, gated communities
of the abattoir / city / asylum / ashram
engines of crawling vehicles / bubble tea palaces

even the deities admit
that 'resonance chambers' lack resonance
and sapienza is manipulated

corpses roam as though they own the place
until they can bear it no longer

continued overleaf...

© Sophia Wilson

II

you clamber out of the monetized centre
counting breaths
your delicate valves ache, chordae tendinae pulsate
and your grief is both inexpressible and insoluble

AI has no answer for such anguish

not surprising, since it can't even solve its own issues —
replying, when asked how it might avert the 10% risk
of its own unhinged eradication of humanity —

Artificial Intelligence cannot / avert its own threat to humanity /
because it lacks independent / volition / moral agency /
and inherent capability to self-correct / its own alignment /
without human / intervention

III

climb until you reach the cemetery
a place uncannily fresh and alive —
where unfettered flowers abound
and the women don wild skirts, lace-up boots and bodices
and the southern wind transforms their hair into rivers
and the men whistle and hum unabashed
shirts unbuttoned beneath their jerkins

the inebriates are here again
bottles and breath for instruments
their skeletons shimmy
each set of ribs opens itself to the gauntlet of another
intertwined bellies tymbalise and riff until they lift
the quilt of their omentums

there are tender-skinned honey-eaters
eloquent with desire
praising the intricacy of an intimacy vast and limitless
that preceded
cults and capitalist communism

they toast the universe
raising infinite implements as banners —
a femur a tibia a glass a walking frame a fiddle a stick a stone a skull
a flute a wooden spoon a wig a want a fabulous gig
a manacle a false eyelash an eye-glass a birth an item of birth control
an inhale an exhale

they stride unhindered between their own graves
become open spaces, orchestrated ancients

they sing and dance
almost like trees

© Sophia Wilson

Helen Fallon

Helen Fallon grew up in rural Ireland. Her work as a librarian brought her to Sierra Leone, Namibia, Tanzania, Malaysia and Saudi Arabia. While working in the Irish university sector she developed programmes on academic writing, which she delivered nationally and internationally. Having published short stories and memoir pieces on her return from Sierra Leone in 1991, she decided, on retirement in 2023, to focus on writing poetry. Her work has been published in several journals and anthologies. In 2022 she was selected for Poetry Ireland Introductions and was awarded a John Hewitt summer school bursary in 2024. She lives in Kildare and enjoys gardening, travelling, walking and reading poetry, particularly Irish women poets including Eavan Boland and Paula Meehan. When she completed her degree in 1980, there were no women poets on the curriculum. Her poetry draws on her experiences of growing up in a primarily Catholic community on the border of Northern Ireland; living and working in Africa; migration and environmental issues. While working at Maynooth University, she wrote about the death-row correspondence of Nigerian writer and activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, which is in the University.

Deserted

Yellow Submarine was blasting from the Bakelite radio
on the kitchen shelf, the day Da left.
We'll never find it 'til Christmas. I'll bring back
one of them new transistors.

Ma made Calvita cheese sandwiches for the sea crossing.
She put a plastic statue of Saint Anthony in his Sunday shirt.
I watched him struggle into Barney Brady's Beetle,
cardboard suitcase tied with a belt.

Anthony is the saint you pray to if you lose something.
He never found Da. When we stopped waiting for letters,
Ma sold our two cows. Then I was missing Da
and Bluebell and Bessie and the transistor radio I never got.

The sadness hurt the whole way down my body.
It was worst at night when we knelt to say the Rosary,
cold concrete seeping into my knees,
songlines echoing through the sorrowful mysteries -

We all live in a Yellow Submarine
Yellow Submarine
Yellow Submarine.

© Helen Fallon

Mass Going

Men penned to the left, caps in pockets,
women and children to the right,
a sea of headscarves tied tight over perms
and sets, hints of incense and floral hairspray.

Girls, in straw hats and summer frocks
dream a life different from their mothers.
A bell pings, heads bowed we file up the aisle
to altar rails, marble cold against our knees.

Back and forth, back and forth, the priest glides
green vestments billow like a ship's sail,
with each Amen he dispenses a full moon host,
feels dry and crisp on tongue. The choir sings.

Now, the altar carved with cross and lamb is gone.
Brass plaques etched in black on pews,
ask our prayers for someone from these parts.

The priest no longer turns his back on us.
Light pours through stained glass
stories of creation and collapse.

This was Your Life

Clearing a cupboard, I found your cookery book.
Between yellowed pages a christening robe pattern
you knitted late at night,

a small ad, fragile with age, for denture repairs,
a leaflet on growing tulip bulbs,

a *Farmer's Journal* feature on Christmas puddings,
a recipe for my sister's wedding cake,

A creased letter from the Sacred Heart Fathers,
Thanks for the three-pound postal order. Your loved ones

will be included in the altar list of the dead;
a cutting — *Pope Benedict says Limbo does not exist,*

A butterfly you crafted from a paper doily,
on the back, in your slanting script -

féileacan - in Irish legend white butterflies
guided the souls of dead infants safely to heaven.

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