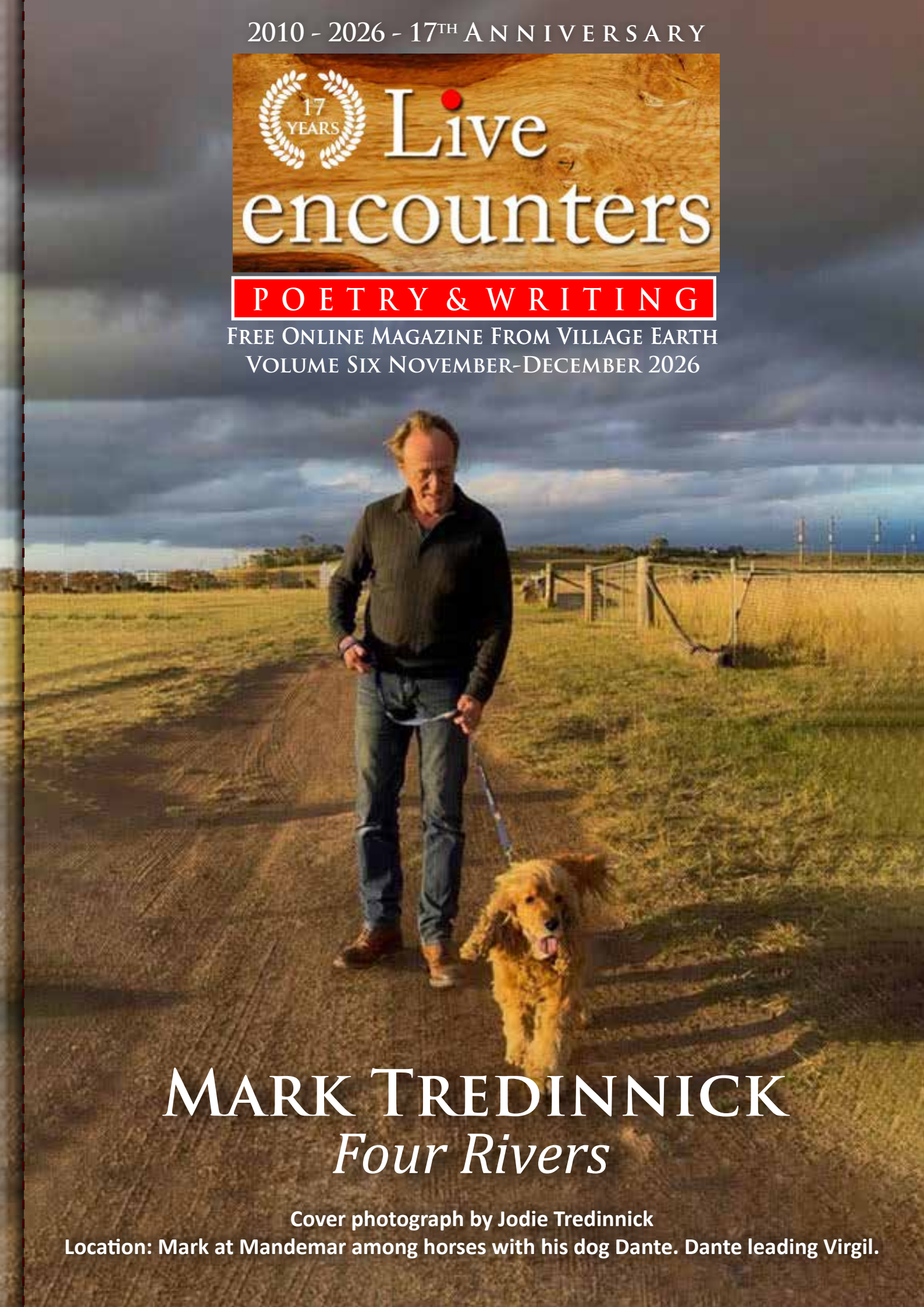
2010 - 2026 - 17TH ANNIVERSARY

Live encounters

17 YEARS

POETRY & WRITING

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



MARK TREDINNICK

Four Rivers

Cover photograph by Jodie Tredinnick
Location: Mark at Mandemar among horses with his dog Dante. Dante leading Virgil.

Live encounters
POETRY & WRITING
VOLUME SIX
17TH ANNIVERSARY
NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2026

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

SUPPORT LIVE ENCOUNTERS.
DONATE NOW AND KEEP THE MAGAZINE LIVE IN 2027

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

Donate

All articles and photographs are the copyright of www.liveencounters.net and its contributors. No part of this publication may be reproduced without the explicit written permission of www.liveencounters.net. Offenders will be criminally prosecuted to the full extent of the law prevailing in their home country and/or elsewhere.

Live encounters
POETRY & WRITING
VOLUME SIX
17TH ANNIVERSARY
NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2025

CONTRIBUTORS

MARK TREDINNICK – GUEST EDITORIAL
AUDREY MOLLOY
GERALDINE MILLS
JANE FRANK
ALEX SKOVRON
ANITA ARLOV
LINDA ADAIR
PETER BOYLE
ROBYN ROWLAND
RICHARD W HALPERIN
ANNE ELVEY
ELLEN MILLER-MACK
TRICIA DEARBORN
LES WICKS
HEMAT MALAK
GARY FINCKE
STEPHEN HOUSE
JOE KIDD
ALINA-LAVINIA GRIGORAȘ
MARK LAURENT
PATRICK BURKE
PAUL PROTHEROE
ANJU JHA

Mark Tredinnick

Dr Mark Tredinnick,one of Australia's most distinguished poets, essayists and scholars, is the managing editor of 5 Islands Press. The father of five children and the keeper of four horses, Mark lives with his wife Jodie on Gundungurra Country southwest of Sydney. His books include *The Blue Plateau, The Little Red Writing Book, Fire Diary, Bluewren Cantos, Walking Underwater, House of Thieves,* and *Bright Crockery Days.* His new and selected poems, *Chain of Ponds*, appears in March 2027 and a collection of his prose (*The Six Gifts*) on place, poetry and politics, in 202. He is at work on a mixed media work, *The Divide*, and on *Reading Slowly at the End of Time*. Mark's poetry and prose have won many Australian and international prizes (including two Premier's Awards and the Blake, Newcastle, Montreal, and Cardiff Prizes). He was honoured in 2020 with an Order of Australia Medal; in 2023 he received the Golden Tibetan Antelope International Poetry Award in China. Mark has taught poetry and prose for thirty years at the University of Sydney and, more recently, online at marktredinnick.com. In 2026 Dr Tredinnick is teaching creative writing at the University of Western Sydney, Parramatta. In September he was a guest of the Great Rivers International Poetry Festival in Chongqing; in October, he was a guest of the Tasmanian Poetry Festival; and in November, he's talking poetry and resistance and the ethics of reading at the Berry Writers' Festival.

Mark Tredinnick
Four Rivers

Thin grass bends on the breezy shore,
and the tall mast seems lonely in my boat.

Stars ride low across the wide plain,
And the moon is tossed by the Yangtze.

What is fame and literary status—
the old and infirm should leave office.

Adrift, drifting: what is left for the lone gull
adrift between earth and heaven.

—"Night Thoughts While Travelling," Du Fu; tr. Sam Hamill

continued overleaf...

© liveencounters.net POETRY & WRITING Volume Six November-December 2026 *Celebrating 17th Anniversary*

© Mark Tredinnick
2026 November-December POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

1. The Jialing

In the evening of my first day, spent alone walking the outskirts of Chongqing, a we-chat message arrived from the organisers of the festival I'd come for. A reminder we'd be expected to dress up for the opening ceremony and for the plenary on day two. I'd brought two suits; I like to wear a jacket for an occasion, and this was an occasion. But I worried for my fellow "foreign poets." Dressing down has come to be the uniform of Western poetry.

Chongqing has been a city since before there were cities. It rose, it fell, it rose, it defeated Ghengis Khan, it prospered, it sank under Western commerce, it has risen again. You'll find it all around the confluence of two rivers, the Yangtze and the Jialing. It's a massive conurbation these days: thirty million people now. But because of the writhing of the rivers—the Jialing and the Yangtze and their many smaller tributaries—all round (and through) it; because of the rising of the mountains it sit among, you don't experience the city as vast or hectic. It is old and new and fast and slow and steep with trees and memories and towers. It's a masterclass in bridges. And it was still a little humid for me so deep in September.

~

It's rare these days to spend so long alone and silent. First the twelve-hour flight from Sydney—up and over the Channel Country and the Arafura Sea, over West Papua and the Banda Sea, Mindanao and the Philippines, the South China Sea, Taiwan to the starboard side and down into Xiamen and thence west to Chongqing, spent mostly in a novel set in the Victoria High Country—and then my first day on the ground, the first of us to arrive from the seven continents, and no deadlines that I knew of. So, I walked. And asked the place to get around me. And it did in roads and bridges and sculptures and trees along a river and a scattered company of birds.

When, after a day on my feet, I sat in my room with tea and the we-chat message came in from Yuhang, I found myself writing a poem in reply. One of the uses of poetry, that elevated kind of email.

Dress Code

After Li Bai

A DAY spent outside walking gardens and streets
in humid weather. For company, passing cars,
distant mountains, and among the few trees
and grasses left in a city that has made and remade
itself a thousand times after flood and war and fire,
the small white-hooded birds, whose name
I do not know, but who are well turned-out
and cheeky. My day has cost no one much,
though my travel here yesterday over oceans
and hours put earth deeper in debt.
The room where I sit now, resting
old legs, looks out at air-conditioning
towers tucked under the roof of perhaps the longest
building (a convention centre) in the world; it's been
dressed up, this building, in gargantuan
imitation of the forest it likely supplanted.
But so it is, quite often, with cities, jealous
of the places they consumed as they subsumed them—those older,
wilder, freer realms, which the city now memorialises
in gardens and sculptures and sometimes poems.
I am settled here
in an easy chair, and quieter thoughts arrive
with late afternoon. In an email, our host reminds us—
for we are guests at a poetry festival
in this city where two rivers met long before anyone
thought up cities and still, like poets, they meet—our host reminds us
to put on our best clothes for the opening tomorrow night.
Happily, I have packed my suit, and even a tie,
and, as long as this cool and elegant weather holds,
I won't mind wearing them.

continued overleaf...

© Mark Tredinnick

A poet neither young nor old on a new-old bridge near the Jialing. Photo Credit: Senadin Musabegovic

© Mark Tredinnick

For it is good now and again
to dress up for poetry, which always dresses up for us.
Like a groom for his bride, like the lotus flower
for the small blue bird, whose name I do not know,
and whom I watched on the pond today as I walked about,
casually, in the quiet and humid weather.

I had been reading translations of some of the classical Chinese poets—Du Fu, Wang Wei, Li Bai—and I hoped that by riffing on Li Bai, his "Quiet Night Thought," I might buy some tolerance for a few thoughts ungenerous toward the city. Or any city. The high price nature pays for modernity.

Poetry wants to call it the way it is, neither to flatter nor to hurt.

Silence and solitude are hard to find often enough, for many of us, and it was always thus. But once found, and even touched with loneliness, poetry often wells. Poetry is a place, I think, a reservoir of lyric frequencies, and walking by yourself along a river is one of the ways to find it. Reading poetry is another way. And I'd had the blessing of both.

That night I ate by myself on the footpath high above the Jialing, watching families walk past, some of them buying food, like me from the assembled trucks and carts, others cooking on their own small cooktops, others again, taking the air above the river in early autumn. Between mouthfuls of Sichuan noodle, I was scrawling my day into my journal in red ink and reading from David Hawkes's *A Little Primer of Tu Fu*, which explores and explicates twenty or so of the great poet's poems, offering them up in the old Chinese, then pid-yin (to let you hear the sound of each character as the poet organises them into his range of forms), then in an economical prose translation (in English) to give you the sense of the poems, without purporting to translate them.

The walking and the silence, the evening and the river and the reading all got me into a mood. After ten years of coming to China on poetry business, after seeing a book (*House of Thieves*) of a hundred of my poems published in translation here, I'm slowly getting a feel for Mandarin (and its predecessors), for Chinese poetry and poets.

And I sense at last, inside the many translations and in my halting understanding of his original letters, the loveliness, the loneliness and kindness, the elegant mastery and wisdom of Du Fu's work. "There is Shakespeare, and there is Dante, and there is Du Fu," wrote Professor Stephen Owen, Harvard Sinologist.

At breakfast downstairs in the hotel, beginning to fill now with guests of the larger conference in which our festival was nested, I set myself the task of making a poem following the same scheme as Du Fu's most famous poem, "Spring Scene." For his five sound-units per line I would allow myself eight, because English uses more sounds (articles, prepositions, agency, gender, tense) to make the same poetic sense as Chinese does, and because eight lines of eight syllables struck me as having about it a proportion Du Fu aspired to in his work. I would not achieve, I knew, his resonance, his rhyming of sentiment and philosophy, of political commentary and personal plaint, but I'd attempt it. As a homage and as a gift to our hosts. I felt something of his exile, his farness from home, if none at all of his privation or personal danger. I hoped, though, that attending to a moment or two closely, through the same frame Du Fu had employed, I might overhear, like him, the sorrow and the delight entailed in existence; I might discover in my own experience something of the eternal business of being alive in dread and fear and hope and despair that was his life's work, his gift to us.

Here's Du Fu's poem ("Spring Scene") in his Chinese (and a literal, character-by-character transliteration):

作者：杜甫	
国破山河在	nation ruined mountain river exist
城春草木深	city springtime grass tree deep
感时花溅泪	feel time flower splash tear
恨别鸟惊心	hate goodbye bird startle heart
烽火连三月	beacon fire last three months
家书抵万金	home letter worth 10000 gold
白头搔更短	white hair scratch more short
浑欲不胜簪	hardly can hold hairpin

continued overleaf...

© Mark Tredinnick

Here's a translation I've attempted—or a "version," since I take some small poetic liberties.

The nation in ruins: only mountains and rivers remain.
It's spring, and grasses and trees overrun the city.

As if they cared, flowers weep for what's lost
and birds wail the grief of all parting.

Beacon fires have burned on the hills three months straight;
a letter from home would make a man rich.

I scratch my head. My grey hair so thin these days,
it will barely hold a hairpin.

And here's the poem I wrote at breakfast in the manner of spirit of Du Fu, fished from the river in which his and much great poetry ran.

Autumn Scene by the Jialing River

After Du Fu's "Spring Scene"

Back home spring starts; here autumn falls
On summer's close. Along the banks

The last red fruits on the lychees;
The first brown pheasants, among reeds,

Feed on fallen fruit. Far mountains
Breathe out a soft rain. Close, a bridge,

Grown old while still young, spans morning;
Like the blue barge, I push upstream.

Apart from the regular syllable count (the eight-syllable lines, start to finish, my homage to the poet's steady five phonemes), you might notice that, as in Du Fu's poem, the syntax of the two lines of the second and third couplets is precisely (or as near as damnit) parallel, each line structured identically with its twin; and also in each of those couplets, there is some counterpoint of sense: last v first; far v close. Not to mention the coexistence of opposites in the seasonality of the first line: spring back home; autumn here. Make what you will of the last line: an image of resistance, of the persistence of life, the struggle, the insistence of life upon itself (which is what love is); or simply a striking moment of world—blue barge, silty river.

Because I'd been working away at this poem overnight, without knowing I was; because I happened to have the right material in my journal and on my phone from my solitary walk along the Jialing the day before (the pheasants, the lychees, the river, the barge, the bridge, the set up); because I'd been studying the form; because I had been not only seeing and hearing and thinking, but being, in this tight but lyric, humble mode; and because grace favoured me this once, I had my poem, easy I hope within its finely tailored attire, written in half an hour. A poem that took sixty years and one night, six visits to China, ten years of work in translation, many years of teaching and editing, more years than that of reading and living and loving and losing and loving on. And fifteen minutes over breakfast.

~

At breakfast the following day, an Englishman, elegant and modest and friendly, approaches and says "I think I recognise you from the program." I didn't know there was a program. "I'm Mark," I say. "I'm here with the poets." "Martin," he says.

"And what brings you here, Martin?"

"I've written some books. About China." He's being modest, not evasive.

"What would I read if I wanted to know you?"

continued overleaf...

© liveencounters.net POETRY & WRITING Volume Six November-December 2026 *Celebrating 17th Anniversary*

© Mark Tredinnick
2026 November-December POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

Like the blue barge, I push upstream. Photo Credit. Mark Tredinnick.

© Mark Tredinnick

"Maybe *When China Rules the World*."

One of the more influential works on China, the rise of the global East and the decline of the West. He's Martin Jacques. The very best are often the most quiet about it.

I'm with Mario Bojorquez and Senadin Musabegovic this morning, poets from two of the languages represented at this festival of poetry. They come back with second breakfasts, and I introduce everyone.

We poets have been invited by the *China Minority Writers Society* to a new festival, the World Great Rivers Poetry Festival. We're from Egypt, Latvia, Turkiye, India, Germany, the USA, Great Britain, Hungary, Switzerland, Russia, Korea, Mexico, Columbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Vietnam, and Australia, along with many of the provinces of China. There must be twenty-five languages between us.

And it's just dawning on us that our event is a small part of an enormous geo-political symposium, at which Martin is a keynote speaker. His insight has been that China's sense of itself, its value set, its capacity to endure through six thousand years and to rise again to global power after spending a hundred years on its knees, has much more to do with civilisation and its markers (civility, learning, literacy, a robust and adaptable, far-flung language, literature, food, artistic accomplishment, social order, manners and protocols, engineering, good comms and health and roads and safety) than with nationalism, that very Western notion. That the nature and success of China in our times have little to do with Communism and much more to do with Confucianism—and to do with the Chineseness (stoicism and romanticism in balance, love of family, love of landscape, love of language and of beauty and of poetry) articulated, I would add, in the poems of Li Bai and Du Fu and the crew. Much more to do with rivers and mountains and ingenuity and confidence than with ideology. Much more to do with an idea of the state as provider and protector than with authoritarianism.

Though China's internal history has known chaos and battle—Du Fu's times were one of the most chaotic and war-torn—and although its many nations of first peoples have been variously, and not always peaceably, brought inside the Chinese tent, Chinese unity through thousands of years has been more a function of culture than force or terror (excepting, of course, the madness of Mao's Cultural Revolution); China has not been a coloniser; China has not, like Japan, been a military aggressor. If this changed now, as many in the West fear, it would be out of step with six thousand years of Chinese history.

But without doubt, Chinese modernity, as it is now taking shape, will not be some imitation of the West. China will not grow more Western, as has mostly been imagined (in the West); but one way and another, the world will be more Chinese.

In the West we tend to fear the rise of China. But very largely, it seems to me, the fear of China, couched as fear of control and authoritarianism, misunderstands Chinese-ness and the Chinese way of governance. Western Sinophobia is largely just old-fashioned fear of the other. It mistakes Western norms (political and social) for universal truths; it imagines power largely as force, and it throws forward from the Western experience, in which prosperity and dominance have been premised on the rape of the earth and the colonisation of the planet. But in Chinese history, morality has been a brake on state power, a guiding hand; art has been and has been allowed to be the conscience of the polity. And chief among the arts, the literary art: poetry. There was always a role kept by the state and much love felt by the people for poets, the literati, as they are often termed.

As a poet, you are respected, in China, even today. It is a strange experience for a Western poet to have. The honour extended and the expectation that your work will have something of moral weight and beauty to say. But I have felt that honour—not for me but for the art that it is thought I inhabit and perform with a kind of craft they understand that poets practise—on my many journeys to China, and I felt it again strongly this time.

continued overleaf...

© liveencounters.net POETRY & WRITING Volume Six November-December 2026 *Celebrating 17th Anniversary*

© Mark Tredinnick
2026 November-December POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

We poets (some of us wearing our suits and finest frocks) took seats—armchairs— near the front of a room of perhaps two thousand guests at the opening session of the Great Civilisations Forum the following day. Traditionally dressed staff kept our tea cups filled. One of the opening speakers was one of us poets, Gregory Pardlo. He spoke about the Hudson and the way a poem works like a river; he spoke warmly and lyrically and briefly. Martin spoke about much of what I've said above. The governor and various ministers and officials, academic and economic, spoke briefly, too, and many of them spoke like officials. But there was not one of them, and this is how it always is in China, nor was there one among the scholars who gave papers on Chinese cultural history, the Yangtze in particular, and the great rivers of the world, who did not quote a poem. Can we begin to imagine in the West politicians and administrators to whom it even occurs to quote poetry in any such setting? In any setting?

There are places in the world, and China above all, where poetry has never stopped steering those who steer the ship of state (sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse); has not stopped educating reminding the powerful and the powerless what beauty and justice and a life of merit looks like and how to overcome adversity. Meanwhile it seems to me, poetry is shunted farther to the margins in many parts of the West (the Anglo-Saxon parts, especially), where, exiled from the role that Du Fu knew it had, it grows more chaotic and overtly and often shrilly political by the moment, while those who need it go wanting for what it tells, and the democratic and economic and cultural powers that ignore it.

In China poetry is in the conversation; it is part of how the conversation is conducted. China is still a culture that looks to poetry for wisdom and the right kind of intoxication, the re-enchantment of everyday life and times. For a fit way to reframe a debate. That is a change I could do with seeing in back here on the driest continent of earth, where civilisation predates civilisation anywhere on the planet, but on which poetry has become angry at how little it is heeded, the case it has tended to make for beauty and freedom and justice and dignity and cool languishes, and all manner of freedom grows increasingly less free.

~

What has struck me over the years in China is how power has more to do with governance than politics, and the politics in a sense is poetic; while here in the West, especially here in Australia, poets compete each to make their poetry more political than the other. While the politicians ignore it more and more utterly, and the punters go wanting for what it is that poetry is supposed to do. The deep need to which poetry continues to correspond in the East goes in the West very largely unmet. (More on this below.)

~

~

"When do I get to hear you poets"? Martin asked as we stood for photographs with him after the opening: Gregory and Dulcie and Ibrahim and I. We didn't know, and sadly he never did. But his, too, is an intelligence that knows that life is culture, and culture is rich when poetry is at its heart.

~

Four rivers were the particular focus of the Great Rivers/Great Civilisations Forum, whose narrative seemed to be that great civilisations advance the world, and that great civilisations emerge on great rivers. This line of thought, these four rivers and their deltas, serves China well. The Yangtze is indubitably one of those rivers, which is why were there at Chongqing. The Yellow would have a case to make for its place, too. But everyone was speaking also of the Amazon (the river, not the company), the Nile and the Tigris and Euphrates. The Danube got a few mentions. The Mississippi-Missouri, North America's great river was mentioned, as well it might be, given its scale; but the implication was that other rivers had spawned greater civilisations.

No one mentioned the Murray-Darling or "my" local, the Wingecarribee.

continued overleaf...

© liveencounters.net POETRY & WRITING Volume Six November-December 2026 *Celebrating 17th Anniversary*

© Mark Tredinnick
2026 November-December POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

Front row seats for poets at the civilisation conversation. Credit Mark Tredinnick

© Mark Tredinnick

The forum, we realised, was part of a play by China to redraw the geopolotical map; to speak of power in ecological and cultural terms; to include the global south, some of the old cultures of the earth, pre-Western, the colonised cultures the West has liked to think it had surpassed; and to marginalise, or at least contextualise, the West—both Europe and the US. It is another way of seeing. The way poetry is, the way that you think differently when you think as if you were a river—neither here nor there, but always beginning and always becoming. Poetry, too, is another way of seeing, a way deeper than politics, a human way, a way that gives standing to that which prevailing discourses have trouble recognising. China has kept its poets closer than the West has. Perhaps to have access, under stress—when the ruler felt at risk of losing the support of the people, the "Mandate of Heaven"—to that other way of seeing and acting, that attentiveness to deeper human need, which is poetry's way, its counterpoint to the music of state, which otherwise tends, as everywhere, toward the expedient, the trendy, the venal or banal.

Where Australia lies in the conversation of the great river civilisations no one was saying. What about cultures that evolve profoundly sophisticated, if small, civilisations along ephemeral streams? I wondered. What about the driest inhabited continent on the earth? No one spoke to those issues.

But at least that continent was represented, and at least I had the chance to ask.

And poetry was at the table.

And the table was interested in a conversation between civilisations, the older the better, not between powers.

And rivers had standing. Birthing culture, as they do, and carrying the past into the present. Carrying also blue barges and cruisers up and downstream.

2. The Yangtze

The Jialing River rises in the Qinling Mountains in Shaanxi Province and flows sinuously south, famously green, through Sichuan Province. Over 1100 kilometres, it drains 160 000 square kilometres, fed by hundreds of tributary streams. A fair journey and a decent workload. About thirty Ks south of where my blue barge was making its way upriver, the Jialing meets the Yangtze, the great mother, at the Heavenly Gate, Chaotianmen. The Yangtze, the third longest river in the world, is always some tone of orange from the silt it carries down from the Tibetan Plateau and across Qinghai, Tibet, Sichuan, Yunnan, and Sichuan (to this point). The meeting of the waters is marked by a kind of scar tissue and a clear delineation between the green and the orange.

Rivers don't always want to rhyme.
  At the confluence of the Jialing

  and the Yangtze, for example,
there is some holding out,

some orange-brown insistence, some
  truculence of turquoise. Turbidity

  makes a scar that never wants to
fade but quickly heals. Agreement,

among rivers, will always be
  reached, but time must be

  allowed for some falling out
first. The child cannot be the parent;

the lover, the beloved. You see
  how this plays, if you look out from

continued overleaf...

© liveencounters.net POETRY & WRITING Volume Six November-December 2026 *Celebrating 17th Anniversary*

© Mark Tredinnick
2026 November-December POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

the dock of the gate that faces heaven.
For a good while the greater is the lesser.

There is a rocking of boats, a warring
of states, until, inevitably, the two

become the one, and the one
becomes the many.

—From “Seventeen Gates: A Poem along the Yangtze”

At that confluence on the night of the Great Rivers Forum’s first day, we listened to the Chongqing Symphony Orchestra play the music of the many rivers of the world—the Volga, the Danube, the Yangtze. Afterwards, local television cornered me and the Russian poet Anna Ganin, who is also a concert violinist, and wanted to know our responses, which we gave without gushing too stupidly. Then they wanted to know which lines of poetry from the great poets came to mind to catch that moment on the river or our experience of the great river so far.

See what I mean? In China poetry is wanted, and it is wanted from poets, sometimes on demand; it is supposed, among other things, to improve the occasion. Had we been Chinese poets, had we been Chinese officials, we’d have come back with an apt line from Chu Yuan or Wang Wei. But we let them down. We had no poetic lines to hand: our bad. I said, the camera rolling, that we ourselves would be asked in upcoming days to write some lines to swim with those of the hundreds of great poets who had made the river sacred in Chinese life over six thousand years. I offered them the little Jialing River poem I had made. But they were disappointed in us. The moment wanted poetry, and we had none to share.

After a drone show, which wrote and painted the great rivers across the night sky above the skyscrapers at the gate of heaven, and which made no smoke but also made the buzz and whine of wars of the present moment, we found our craft and boarded for three days floating down one of the four great rivers of the world, where thousands of poets and countless lives and wars and trades and floods have run: the Yangtze.

~

Two nights earlier we foreign poets and a number of the esteemed Chinese poets and scholars had read in the library at Chongqing University. As we took the bus back to the hotel by the Jialing, our organisers let us know that we would be expected, before we flew home, to deliver three poems witnessing our time in the city and on the river. Oh, and could we refrain please from mentioning certain controversial geopolitical matters.

Great was the consternation. Poets, especially western poets, do not like being told what not to write about. What to write about, for that matter. And we don’t like our art to be hurried.

Later, on the boat, when a rebellion almost broke out, I proposed that we all be given a month to get the poems in, and everyone was more or less content with that. What everyone else has done with the other edicts, I don’t know. But it has often seemed to me that the politics of poetry (that is, its power and influence and capacity to change minds and hearts) happens more through how it speaks, how it turns moments into myths, than in what it names. Look at Du Fu’s poem. Think of Yeats’s gyre.

Poetry is, in part, the refusal and refutation of all speech and thought that diminish life and practise violence. A poem is all a war is not; it is an enactment of kinship, a recognition of suffering, a kindness. Its explosions of speech ought to engender not take life. What it destroys is cant and destruction, hate and cruelty and fear and deathliness.

As I wrote once in a poem “maybe beauty is the best riposte to dread.”

My poems are written now, anyway; readers can make their own judgments. There’s some war there, some dying, some mourning for the flight of wildness, the diminishing of birds and their song. I had already written two of my quota of poems (“Dress Code” and “Autumn Scene”) before they asked us for any, and I figured three days on the Great Mother would likely induce a third. What I did with forbidden subjects would remain to be seen.

continued overleaf...

© liveencounters.net POETRY & WRITING Volume Six November-December 2026 *Celebrating 17th Anniversary*

© Mark Tredinnick
2026 November-December POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

Sometimes a poem is a bridge; sometimes, a river. Credit Mark Tredinnick

© Mark Tredinnick

But surely poetry is how one finds a way to say what is not ordinarily said, or easy to say—to say what one is not allowed to say. Poetry is how you write the truth notwithstanding. How you write the deeper politics of living.

Cancel war and defy orders by writing the life inside the moments, the life inside the dying, the dying inside the living.

~

Before the evening at the Gate of Heaven, the place where the rivers meet and don't get on (before they do); before the water music and the drones—we'd learned that in the old walled city that stood on that peninsular, Chaotian-men, there were seventeen gates. Seventeen: a poetic number (with a strange magic) determined by superstition and feng shui. Nine gates in; eight out. Or maybe the other way round. And when I woke the first grey morning on the Yangtze, I remembered the number, and I sat on the little deck of my cabin as we steamed downstream and began the poems that would become my third poem, much longer than the other two: "Seventeen Gates."

I can't share that poem here. It is promised elsewhere first. It would be the best way to tell you how we went and what we saw: the new town reassembled ninety-nine steps above the river and the bright new city of three million, remade upriver, when they dammed the river at the Three Gorges. I'll have to leave it to the poem, when it appears, to speak of the forgetting trees and the nesting white egrets, the woman fishing under a red umbrella and the scarlet dragonflies, the ten thousand bridges and the wild garden of what looked like windflowers (in a dozen shades of orange and red) into which we disembarked one morning, the shipyards on the banks and the fortifications above the river built in the defence of China before Europe had fallen into its dark ages. You'll have to wait, too, to hear about the walk we made on the peaks above the Three Gorges, where the signage celebrated, you guessed it, a poet: Li Bai, and his visit here around 756, when he wrote a poem that records the same vivid clouds we walked among and anticipates his rapid journey downstream through the Three Gorges to Jiangling ("a thousand li to Jiangling in a day"). The waters through the gorges have lost their turbulence and velocity since the dam was finished in 2006, but the mountains, where we walked, and the river where we journeyed, remain. And the poetry.

Just to dwell on this a moment. One of China's most scenic and most visited places has been designed to celebrate a poet. Almost as if poetry mattered. To everyone. Speaking as it does of longing and leaving and arriving and wondering and passing through life, reluctant ever to leave it, notwithstanding one's travails.

So much I can't tell you here, without the poems I wrote, about this great river in the world, now dammed and rather domesticated and somewhat constrained in its middle reaches, on account of its damming (the biggest in the world, flooding fourteen cities), necessary, admittedly, to save the lives and livelihoods of those who live by a vast river prone to flooding the whole zone every other year.

But I can share this one small poem—a study, really, for a longer poem in my sequence of seventeen.

On the Yangtze in Autumn

For Gao Xing and the Minority Writers

On the Yangtze this morning early.
A landscape shot in black and white,

a slower take on everything. To steam
like this downstream is to pass like a hand

over silk, the place asleep beneath
the fabric. Barges—yellow, red, then

blue—push sullenly upstream; little
egrets like a fishing net thrown low

across the water. The day starts up.
A soft wind from the river. Grey rain.

continued overleaf...

© liveencounters.net POETRY & WRITING Volume Six November-December 2026 *Celebrating 17th Anniversary*

© Mark Tredinnick
2026 November-December POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

On the final day on board, when the journalists asked me two questions on the upper deck and filmed my response, I was ready. My friend Gao Xing tipped me off. They would want to know what value was served by bringing poets from around the regions and the languages and the world to a place such as the Yangtze; and they would want me to recite some poetry. To the first I said the world manifests its true self in poetry. Reality, deeper down than the stories know how to tell, is lyric. What we call poems are how we catch it in the act of being its true self, and sometimes ourselves within those moments, coming true. When we do this together, being and saying and writing poetically, we learn again how many languages truth speaks in, and the world understands. Gao Xing, who had to translate that for them, looked at me dismayed and amused, and said, that was very poetic. To the second question I replied: at the risk of self-indulgence, I want to share some lines of my own. Many poets have written about how they felt about this river and on this river, and they have done more justice to that than I can, I'm sure, but these lines have occurred to me here, and perhaps they catch a little of how travelling this river has felt and what it has felt like, how they world spoke to me here. And then I recited as much of that little poem as I could remember.

Gao Xing, who publishes an influential poetry journal in Beijing, featuring mostly the work of foreign poets in translation, was the reason I received my first invitation to China, and he is the reason, I think, I was on this journey, too. This poem is dedicated to him.

And I dedicate my poem to the poets who had read the night before on board our boat, as we left for Fengjie (Baidicheng, the "White Emperor City" Li Bai refers to in his poem of the gorges). The reading that night as the boat steamed again downriver was mostly performed by Chinese poets whose first language is not Mandarin and by other representatives of minority languages and cultures: Tibetan, Zhuang, Haixin, Manchu, Gelao, and Bayingolin, I think. Others read, from among us foreign poets, who felt they had some claim to minority status: Senadin Musabegovic (Bosnia-Heregovina), Krisztina Toth (Hungary), Ibrahim Yassin (Arabic/Egypt), Madara Gruntmane-Dujana (Latvia), Mario Bojorquez (Mexico/ an Incan language whose name I did not catch), Efe Duyan (Turkiye), Gregory Pardlo (USA).

Some poets sang. Poems seem closer to incantations the older their languages are. Senadin asked me to read his poem in English, one of the two languages in which the evening was transacted. And I did not, therefore, read my own work. Later I spoke as a representative of a land of few rivers, very often dry or in flood; I read for the driest inhabited continent on earth; I spoke up for the greatness of civilisations evolved in small numbers and deep wisdom from the long-sustained relationship very often with the scarcity, not the abundance of water. But that night, as a writer in English, the great colonising tongue, it was right mostly to listen to the great diversity of languages in which poetry has forever been dreamed and sung.

Every poet belongs to a minority really: poetry. Poetry is another cast of mind, a small band of holy (and often ageing) fools. Poetry speaks the language inside the languages of the commonplace. It is the idiom of love and the slantwise glance. Of the otherwise, the overlooked, the counterpoint. Poetry is the tributary stream, the billabong; it is the old river inside the great river, the wildness biding its time inside the captured waters.

But the organisers of the festival, the China Minority Writers' Society, were giving voice at this event to less trafficked languages than those behemoths English and Mandarin, to languages that those great rivers have on occasion tried to drown, so this night was for the resilience of smaller tongues, those blue barges pushing against the tide, and it sat at the heart of our time together. In its intimacy and humanity and diversity of sounds and shapes and voices and tonalities, it was as fine as anything we saw or said.

~

Some poets sang. Poems seem closer to incantations the older their languages are. Senadin asked me to read his poem in English, one of the two languages in which the evening was transacted. And I did not, therefore, read my own work. Later I spoke as a representative of a land of few rivers, very often dry or in flood; I read for the driest inhabited continent on earth; I spoke up for the greatness of civilisations evolved in small numbers and deep wisdom from the long-sustained relationship very often with the scarcity, not the abundance of water.

continued overleaf...

© liveencounters.net POETRY & WRITING Volume Six November-December 2026 *Celebrating 17th Anniversary*

© Mark Tredinnick

2026 November-December POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

Wildflower meadow by the Yangtze at Shibaozhai. Credit Mark Tredinnick

© Mark Tredinnick

But that night, as a writer in English, the great colonising tongue, it was right mostly to listen to the great diversity of languages in which poetry has forever been dreamed and sung.

Every poet belongs to a minority really: poetry. Poetry is another cast of mind, a small band of holy (and often ageing) fools. Poetry speaks the language inside the languages of the commonplace. It is the idiom of love and the slantwise glance. Of the otherwise, the overlooked, the counterpoint. Poetry is the tributary stream, the billabong; it is the old river inside the great river, the wildness biding its time inside the captured waters.

But the organisers of the festival, the China Minority Writers' Society, were giving voice at this event to less trafficked languages than those behemoths English and Mandarin, to languages that those great rivers have on occasion tried to drown, so this night was for the resilience of smaller tongues, those blue barges pushing against the tide, and it sat at the heart of our time together. In its intimacy and humanity and diversity of sounds and shapes and voices and tonalities, it was as fine as anything we saw or said.

~

Chongqing, before it outgrew its name, was one of the two big cities of Sichuan Province (the other is Chengdu), and it still sits islanded there, a self-administered municipality, within the main. The Yangtze rises to the north of Sichuan, in Qinghai Province on the Tibetan Plateau. (I have, among my great blessings, seen the river near its source; I have read poetry in Qinghai, where, on that Roof of the World, the Yellow River also rises.)

The Yangtze is one of four rivers (among the thousands of others) from which Sichuan is thought by some to have found its name: *Si* (four) *chuan* (rivers); four rivers.

Chinese being Chinese, though, *chuan* has other meanings. Among them "plains." And it is thought now that Sichuan is more likely named for the four geographical units (metaphorically "plains," since the area is profound with mountains) into which it was, in the Three Kingdoms, divided.

"Four Plains" is good. But "Four Rivers" seems an altogether better name for this part of the world whose spicey foods we ate all journey as we steamed a few hundred li east and north through greater Chongqing, river country, mountains and plains and a hundred tributary streams, that until 1997 was the bottom righthand corner of Sichuan, the Four Rivers.

3. The Kanamaluka /Tamar

Something came to me on the great river. And it came to mind again on Bass Strait, as, a fortnight after returning from China, I took the ferry with Jodie to Tasmania for the Poetry Festival in Launceston. I sat in the bow, reading, as the swell picked up, Martin Jacques's book When China Rules the World.

Here's how the thought starts. Unlike the West, China, six thousand years old as a civilisation unified (often fractiously) by language and values, has no religion. No organised religion, as we know it in Europe and America and Australia, the wider West. Loads of superstition and ritual observances, sure, and some organising spiritual philosophy and moral codes, but nothing that resembles the Church of Rome of the Anglican or Episcopalian Churches. China has resisted all missionary endeavours; it has no state church or churches of dissent. There is no equivalent of Sunday worship or its opposite. Without theism, it has no atheism. Without belief, no unbelief. Confucianism and Daoism and strands of Chinese Buddhism operate as social systems, as philosophies, as epistemology and aesthetics and ethics and ontology.

In China there is no godhead and there is no heaven, not in a Christian sense. Instead of eternity, what continues is China, and China, Martin Jacques helps one understand, is not a nation or a state. It is a way of being on the earth: it is language, rivers and mountains and what they ask of one, a set of values, a culture. And poetry is its idiom.

continued overleaf...

© liveencounters.net POETRY & WRITING Volume Six November-December 2026 *Celebrating 17th Anniversary*

© Mark Tredinnick
2026 November-December POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

(This also sounds like Indigenous cultures to me. No pantheon, no nation-state; instead, Country.)

And here's the second leg of the thought. There is a deep and universal human need, innate to us, to which poetry corresponds. To which religion also speaks.

What this deep human yearning is hard to define but impossible to deny. Profound sense-making perhaps. Poetry, this deeper speaking, the original literature, bears witness and it does justice to what it feels like and what it means to live a short while in delight and pain on this good earth. To live in the knowledge that, though the earth will continue, one's own life will end and all that one loved will be lost. Poetry speak to that; that is its role.

"None of us will last," I write in a poem, "but something will. Let's be that from now on." Speaking for that something else that lasts, and helping us be that something else: this is what poetry is for, this is the need it meets.

Poetry's work has been metaphysical: ontological guidance (what is, what counts, what lasts, and how to participate in that kind of being), aesthetics (what is beautiful and how to be that), ethics (what is good and right and how to live that way; whom to help and how to serve), and epistemological (how to learn, what to learn, how to think and decide, how to know what's trued). Deeper than identity, its work has been what I'd call Selving, too: rewilding of being. Helping each reader (and writer, if one also wrote) consider what one's life is, uniquely and as a member of kinship groups and places, and how to live in that self, free somehow of categories that societies and theologies and states want to put one in. In this last area, poetry has been at odds with states and societies, and where there is religion, with the church.

Religion, as I say, corresponds to those needs, too (though it is usually stronger on conformities that freedoms). And here's the very centre of my thought: in a culture without Church it is poetry that serves this need, and in China this has been how poetry has worked.

It has been tolerated (not always well) even when it speaks against the hubris of states, the wars that bad governance yields ("the state in ruins; only rivers and mountains remain"); it has been loved even when it sings the need for each life to be its own, each love to have its day (and night), because poetry has been understood to serve the moral, philosophical, liturgical purposes the state and the people need to be performed—so that life has purpose and beauty and society functions and unites.

Poetry has been cultivated and revered because, and to the extent that, it enchants lives and reconnects them with places and reminds them what counts beyond the self as well as in the self.

For six thousand years in China, in other words, poetry has been what Western societies have expected Church to be.

Not an entertainment or a protest or even a story-telling. Poetry has been for beauty and for truth. A wisdom discourse, a kind of hymning to places and people and what it is that survives when the state or one's village lies in ruins, when news from home refuses to come and one's hair begins to fall.

Hence the regard one feels in China for poetry, their own and the calling they feel one embodies. Hence the expectation that one will have wise and improving things to say, not the usual platitudes or complaints.

Maybe one reason poetry has steadily declined in the West for a century is that it's stepped away from its work. It's lost its religion. It's left the work of reconnection and soul-making, as Keats calls it, to the Church, and the Church has fallen well short and in a secular society has ceased to seem relevant. If poetry will not do this work, who will? And what then will poetry do?

The topic of our panel to close the Tasmanian Poetry Festival was "Why Do People Hate Poetry?" Not so much a hatred, most of us agreed, but a widespread disregard. Some trauma from schooling, and a resulting mistrust.

continued overleaf...

© liveencounters.net POETRY & WRITING Volume Six November-December 2026 *Celebrating 17th Anniversary*

© Mark Tredinnick
2026 November-December POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

Some of the best rivers, like poems, are short. The Tamar west of Launceston, October. Credit Mark Tredinnick

© Mark Tredinnick

The topic of our panel to close the Tasmanian Poetry Festival was "Why Do People Hate Poetry?" Not so much a hatred, most of us agreed, but a widespread disregard. Some trauma from schooling, and a resulting mistrust. The problem as I construed it, when I spoke, is poetry's marginalisation, its disappearance form people's daily lives and decision-making and from the formation of policy and the practice of governance, and all that suffers in our daily lives and societies and discourses because poetry has gone missing.

The problem as I construed it, when I spoke, is poetry's marginalisation, its disappearance form people's daily lives and decision-making and from the formation of policy and the practice of governance, and all that suffers in our daily lives and societies and discourses because poetry has gone missing. What one would like is that poetry might claim its place again in how we speak and govern and teach and learn. One doesn't need more politics in the poetry, I concluded; one needs more poetry in our politics. In the transaction of daily life and policy and commerce and social welfare and education …

When we wonder at our festivals what has happened to poetry, we seem not to realise we're speaking of an Australian problem, and more broadly an Anglo-Saxon problem, not a universal one. Poetry is disappearing into the margins of literature and society in settler cultures like ours. But this is not nearly so much the case in the Spanish-speaking world, in central Europe, in Africa, and much of Asia. In China.

Is the crisis of poetry a Western crisis? Is it in particular a (post)colonial crisis. In a complex settler culture like ours, in a period of post-colonial angst and revision, perhaps the great humane poetic tradition is on the nose because the occupiers' cultures (and language) are on the nose. We are, perhaps, losing confidence in the profoundly humane project poetry has advanced, and losing sight of the values that underscored it (which stand in stark opposition to the values that characterised the colonising)? Poetry that had any merit, lyric poetry at least, was always anti-colonial. Its territories, each human heart, each human life.

There are parts of the world where poetry is still loved as it always was—is honoured and shared and asked for its opinions. China is such a place. The gift of travel is that it helps one see one's home place and one's concerns in a wider context. But I do wish more of us here on this dry land would throw our imaginations wider than our borders sometimes. There is a wider world at work.

~

In 1971, in his introduction to One Hundred Chinese Poems, Kenneth Rexroth, a poet I have always loved, a pioneer translator, interpreter and advocate in the West of Chinese classical poetry in the West, had this to say about Du Fu (and poetry and religion):

> In my opinion, and in the opinion of a majority of those qualified to speak, Du Fu is the greatest non-epic, non-dramatic poet who has survived in any language. For me, his response to the human situation is the only kind of religion likely to outlast the century.

The trick of Du Fu's longevity, the reason his work still speaks and is so loved, beyond his mastery of craft, lay in his humility and empathy, in his focus on small moments of "the human situation," in the lives and hearts and fields and villages of everyday folk, including himself. How it feels to be human—loving, vulnerable, sensate and sensual, suffering and revelling, desiring and mourning —in a turbulent and dangerous and magnificent world. He had the gift for knowing what counted; he knew how to sidestep grandiosity and coarseness and sentimentality and declamation. He had an eye for the world in the moments, for the eternity in each hour. He wrote the big story small. He kept his metaphysics calm and short.

~

Some of the best rivers, like poems, are short.

continued overleaf...

© liveencounters.net POETRY & WRITING Volume Six November-December 2026 *Celebrating 17th Anniversary*

© Mark Tredinnick
2026 November-December POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

The Tamar, for instance. Wide and shallow and slow-moving, the Tamar runs only seventy kilometres from where the North and South Esk start it up on the site where Launceston grew. Listen to these names, all references, like so much else in colonial Tasmania to other instances of the same sort of thing back home in that other small island, England. Let's call it what it by its older, longer, truer name: Kanamaluka. Brackish and tidal from start to finish, where it runs into Bass Strait at Low Head, Kanamaluka is an estuary, always at risk of silting up completely. Better for the egrets and herons than the boats that have largely stopped travelling it now. We saw about a dozen, mostly tinnies, from the deck of the house where we stayed four days in West Launceston for the festival. But loads of sea-birds and waders. One or two fishing boats.

I'm trying to resist figuring the river as a metaphor for the state of poetry in this land of ours. Poetry—the thing that lasts, when we do not, and even when we are not worthy of it—will survive us and prosper. But for now, it is widely neglected, little trafficked; I'd have to say, despite the love of those who perform and celebrate and tend it, like Lisa and the organisers of the forty-second Tasmanian Poetry Festival, poetry is struggling like the Kalamaluka. It is losing its crowd. If I were running an audit, I'd say there's a navigable channel still running strong and clear within slothful, silty shallows. There are still a few who know their craft and how to sail it. And a few is all it ever takes, of course. But I hear a lot of loud poetry, a lot of crude and violent, self-concerned and unbeautiful poetry, and not much that floats many of us much good. I hear a lot of grievance, plaint, outrage; I only hear a little love and even less kindness. I read a lot of dense and turbid verse that gets no one very far very fast. All this is bound to happen, I guess, when no one much seems very interested anymore, when the value of your currency is so debased, when other (faster, cruder) frequencies prevail.

Poetry will recharge itself; I think it will happen through the hundred poetries of immigrant cultures that are redefining Australia, and through the music of Indigenous languages. Poetry will be good; it will grow navigable again. I worry mostly that for now, in shrill and violent times, that so few of my countrymen and women seem to realise how debased their worlds are for want of what it is that good poetry can do. In a time of violent disgruntlement and viciousness of view, we could do with more poetry now, some speech in lyric modes, some kind cadences.

But out the big window looking north, during our stay on the banks of the Kanamaluka, the estuarial stream went on being what it long has been. Down on its wide and dry and reedy flats the river kept on writing its one letter: S.

Between gigs, I sat and read and wrote with the estuary in sight, running through its many selves. I loved it especially first thing, the light of day grey on it yet, and in late rain, the sky pacing the river's patience.

In its wide, slow brown way, the Tamar was every moment exactly what poetry is and why it counts.

Scatter Song

Waking, the shy
    river makes eyes
at the morning. Wrens
    in the garden scatter song
like heirloom seeds.

4. The Delitate

The crossing was rough. Bass Strait is notorious, and we'd escaped its notoriety on the way down, but it showed up truculently the Monday night when we took the ferry back to the mainland.

Four-Metre Swell Haiku

Riding a new horse
  on an old rollercoaster:
Bass Straight, car ferry.

continued overleaf...

© Mark Tredinnick

Some poets finding a lot to love about poetry at the Tasmanian Poetry Festival (Cameron Muir, Mark Tredinnick, Laurie May, Tim Loveday, David Stavenger, Ben Walter.) Photo Credit: Alice

© Mark Tredinnick

Morning on the volcanic plains north of Geelong was cool, and no ground ever felt so flat or sturdy as those plains, when we drove the truck off the ferry and onto the Princes Highway north. We were on our way to Delitate Station near Mansfield, as far north as we felt we could get in time to teach my Tuesday class (on Zoom).

I've heard that stretch from Geelong to Melbourne described as the dullest road in Victoria, but it looked like heaven to me. Could be the horseman in me, loving the prairie, prospering where horses do best; could be a poet's wakefulness to the recollection that humans came down from the trees and onto their feet and into their singing selves on land like this: savannah. If I were designing distance, I'd put the You Yangs in it, just as they appear to your left, a saddle-back ridge on a hazy horizon, and these grasslands (some of them native (heirloom grasses being shepherded back to health) running back toward those hills, a volcanic plain enacting its gratitude toward its source.

Soon enough outer-Melbourne ring-road traffic ruined the moment, but it led us in the end to Kaede, the Japanese café in Abbotsford, another Jodie find, another kind of poetry, a gathered distance. Exposed brick walls, friendliness, great coffee, fabulous fusion breakfast wrap. Mansfield, which we made by early afternoon, has the best bookshop, Ink Books, I've been in for a while; they could do with some carrying some poetry, but where is that not the case these days? The novel I bought there, Etna, by Paul Yoon, was pretty much a poem, as it turns out, a dog's Odyssey, a coming home to nothing, a carrying on in hope, notwithstanding, and I read it by the river at Delatite on Wednesday afternoon and evening.

Today is All

At Delatite in mid-October
I take the track below the house

down to tell the river among its birds,
between its woody banks,

to hold some of itself back
for summer. The spinebills

in the larches round the house
won't let me hear the end

of their dismay at that idea;
the river in all its silver voices

laughs a little breeze
among the stones and weeds

and sheoaks: let tomorrow
take care of itself. Today is all

we've taught ourselves to do.

The Delatite rises between Mount Buller and Mount Stirling, both of those peaks in view of the cottage where we stayed. This is the southeastern quarter of the Central Highlands of Vic, the belly of the Great Divide. I never heard a prettier river under stars at night; it is the template from which all small rivers might well be cut. Water running clear, these few kilometres from source, over rocks and under sheoaks and river gums for the most part.

continued overleaf...

© liveencounters.net POETRY & WRITING Volume Six November-December 2026 *Celebrating 17th Anniversary*

© Mark Tredinnick
2026 November-December POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

The station whose workers hut we stayed in two nights, has farmed the land—unceded Taungurung land—since 1861, and I guess they cut fair tracts of their gorgeous paddocks from the open woodlands that abounded till then (and still hang on in pockets).

The Taungurung called the river other names (Wappang, Callathera, Kalylatherer) and must have loved it—who could not?—and love it still. Delatite is said to have been the name of the wife of a Taungurung leader, at the time the country was taken. Nice of the settlers to remember her, who knows why: out of fondness or shame or mirth or reverence. Delatite, wife of Beolite.

What I can tell you is that the moment we turned the small circle of the drive and pulled up in front of the cottage, I saw a flash of azure make from the flats to the branches of a sheoak standing dead on the banks. With the binoculars, I spotted her and intermittently watched her, as I unpacked the truck, sitting her hungry meditation above the falling water. Until I saw her dart for the trees of the southern bank. Though I looked out for her and for her mate, most likely holding steady on the far bank, and though I encountered the many other birds of the river and the field (eastern robin, bowerbird, wren, shrikethrush, woodswallow, fantail, butcherbird, firetail, magpie), I didn't spot her again during her star. But her presence never wavered.

The sacred kingfisher. I think I know whom I really met. Who welcomed us austerely and dazzlingly to country. And what Delatite really means.

On the cover of Etna, Hernan Diaz has glossed the book as "gorgeous, a sublimely quiet depiction of loneliness and disorientation," and that almost describes the kingfisher and the long moment we shared at the river, the sorrow and the accomplishment, the stillness, the brilliancy, the patience and the sureness.

Once

One small stream, falling over rocks,
floods a night sheer with stars. Passage

becomes a constancy of sound.

We live once. Each kingfisher once.
But life is a river, love its

spate, which slows, but won't ever stop.

Awake tonight, weary of roads,
we hear her climb the bank and slip

through the door, which we've left ajar,

in case night like a child loses
interest in starlight and turns home.

continued overleaf...

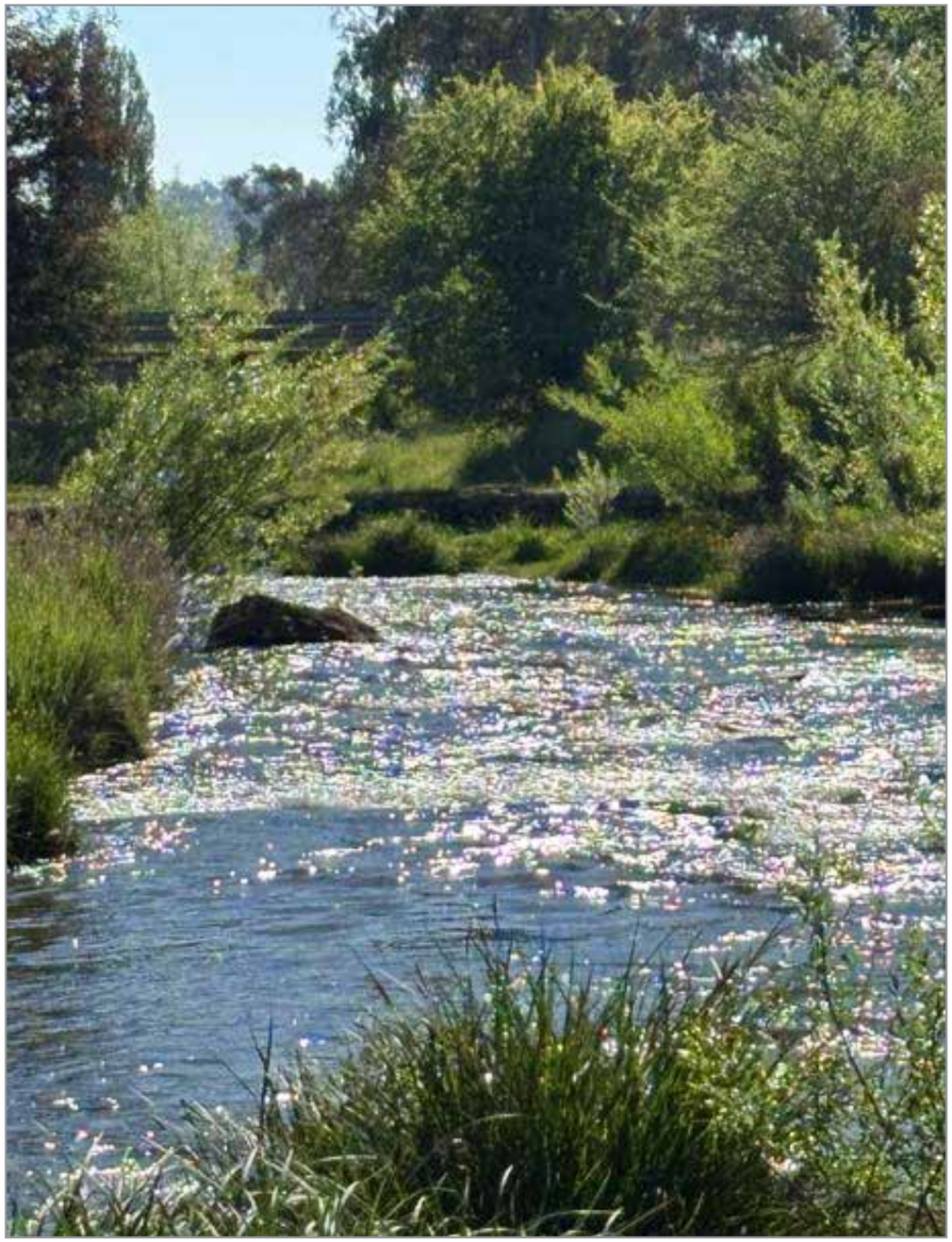
© Mark Tredinnick

5. Four Rivers

Back home, walking the dog along the Wingecarribee in light rain, dodging new families of black ducks, I walked up some lines, some braids of stream, and I tapped them on my phone, to turn into the last entry in this travel log, this water log, this catchment, when I got in. Poetry is a way of being free, of shaking free and shaking worlds free from cant and catch-cries and name-calls and orthodoxies, of carrying us peaceably out of the violence of lives that are otherwise unwise and too small for our hearts and for the histories they carry like silt in rivers.

A New Religion

If you wanted to rewrite
  a world; if you wanted
to raise a new religion, say,
  or found a new republic,
you could do worse
  than ask these four rivers
what they know, and there
  you'd have it:
                the wisdom
of waters, shallow and deep,
  fast and slow, orange and blue,
turbid or clear; the memory
  of mountains in them; the birds
on their banks; the ten thousand
  mornings, the bodies, the silt,
the stillness, the flow.
                Four
  good rivers and all they rhyme
with might be enough being
  to begin all belonging again.



Today is all we've taught ourselves to do. The Delatite River below the worker's cottage.
Photo Credit. Mark Tredinnick.

© Mark Tredinnick

Audrey Molloy

Audrey Molloy is a poet, editor and mentor who grew up in Ireland and has lived in Sydney since 1998. Her debut collection, *The Important Things* (The Gallery Press, 2021) received the Anne Elder Award and was shortlisted for the Seamus Heaney First Collection Poetry Prize. Her latest collection *Fallen* is published by The Gallery Press and Pitt Street Poetry and was longlisted for the Forward Prize. Audrey has an MA in Creative Writing (Poetry) from Manchester Metropolitan University. She is co-founder and editor of The Marrow International Poetry.

The dangers of taking up

We sail the little ship along the coast
of the moon's empty seas, the lunar maria.
Mona's trying me; *MAH-ria*, she says,
more often than necessary.
We pass the man-in-the-moon's tearful eye—
the Sea of Showers; *Mare Imbrium*, she tells me.
The escarpment, sheer and white as Dover,
a steppe devoid of wolf and horse,
a treeless place where nothing grows.
On the moon's back-face, no maria.
Here are the ghost birds—
pale gannets that could shred a sail,
clownish puffins with disapproving eyes.
The other residents are all on edge—sad
beautiful people—restless,
wishing they were elsewhere,
with others for company.

Gratitude is unknown in this place.
Mona is loath to moor here
lest our vessel take up this ennui.
The absence of weather is a blessing—
so much of civilised life, when you boil it down,
is really just waterproofing.
A wide bird appears ahead of us.
A couple of suckerfish
latch onto the belly of the ship.
They escort us through the emptiness.

continued overleaf...

© Audrey Molloy

Departing, we pass close enough
to almost brush the moon.
We half expect the scent of cheese—
perhaps feta—or chalk at the very least,
but there is just a sudden whiff
of orange blossom and patchouli.
It stirs the memory, as scent is known to do,
as though we passed through here another time.
How often do we die?
There is nothing for it
but to fill the mainsail, unfurl the jib
and goose-wing out towards the asteroids.

Photograph by Audrey Molloy.

© Audrey Molloy

Geraldine Mills

Geraldine Mills is an award-winning poet and short story writer who lives in the west of Ireland. She is the author of six collections of poetry, four of short stories and two children's novels. She is the recipient of many awards including the Hennessy New Irish Writer Award, three Arts Council Bursaries and a Patrick and Katherine Kavanagh Fellowship.

Her fiction and poetry have been on curricula of contemporary literature courses in a number of US universities and the USA summer programme at the Burren College of Art. Her fourth short story collection, *Survival Games*, was published by Arlen House in 2025. She was recently awarded a Heinrich Böll Residency in Achill, Co. Mayo, Ireland to work on her next novel.

Tightrope

The modern magic of video link
lets us see you there
at the microphone, poised, assured,

holding the tune in your perfect mouth
until you set it free and the melody comes
sparkling the air around us.

You who have known only song
from the time you were carried
safe within amnion

drinking it in from first breath,
then carried in your mother's arms,
growing to step and tap and cadence.

Barely four when you learned this song
and we all sat around the screen in your living room
watching the *Greatest Showman,*

lemons brightening in the sun outside
your father still on shore duty
you repeating to yourself every word and line

of 'Tightrope', that you now bring to us,
balancing each note and half-note
along the high wire act of the song

your voice lifting us way above
the ground until hand in hand,
we walk the tightrope with you.

© Geraldine Mills

With Those Special Owl Ears of Yours

You can hear:
the kale seed split open under earth
burst through to the light.

You can hear:
wrasse dancing in the lake,
reel them in with a juicy worm.

You can hear:
blueberries ripen on the twig,
steal them before the blackbirds do.

You can hear:
the moon creep along the sky
and take a bite out of the sun.

You can hear:
in your deepest sleep, your mom and dad
whisper: our precious son, our darling boy.

Photograph by Tang A Pau.

© Geraldine Mills

Jane Frank

Jane Frank is a prize-winning Australian poet, editor and academic. Her most recent collection is *Gardening on Mars* (Shearsman Books, 2025) and her previous poetry collections *Ghosts Struggle to Swim* (2023) and *Wide River* (2020) were published by Calanthe Press. Her work is widely published in journals and anthologies in Australia and internationally, most recently with *Ink, Sweat and Tears*; *The Ekphrastic Review*; *Noon*; *Wigtown Writers Festival 'Writers' Walks* project; the *Liquid Amber Prize Anthology*: *Poetry on Fire* and *Other Terrain Journal*. Her poems were shortlisted in the Rose Spencer Poetry Prize 2026 and Poetry d'Amour 2026. In 2026, she has read poetry at the Sunshine Coast Hinterland Writers Festival, Brisbane Writers Festival, at Small Room (Griffith University, Gold Coast) and as part of the Poets@Stones Boutique Poetry Series. She is Reviews Editor at *StylusLit* literary journal and lectures in the School of Business and Creative Industries at the University of the Sunshine Coast in south-east Queensland, Australia.

Toowong Cemetery

Wending the perimeter with Euan & the dog
the unmarked graves are shining oblongs
on mown lawn and in places, marble
& cement are birthing saplings

or making beds for wildflowers.
Winter is pulling gently but urgently
at the shadows but I won't let death
interfere with our afternoon—

the first for a week without rain—
won't let myself visualise a single soul-face
though I know there are one hundred
& nineteen thousand, & we read

scripts on the headstones with interest,
admire the Celtic crosses stacked high
& the stone angels waving
against lumps of pink-grey cloud

& the contour of Mount Coot-tha.
Over east, the untouched city is a mural
on a pale wall: all we really have are pictures
& words, the way the carved-out letters

feel when you stroke their absence
with your fingers, the steps we've taken
together, the beautiful exertion
of walking in leftover sun.

© Jane Frank
2026 November-December POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

We all need moonlight

The dog woke me but I don't mind.
I sit on a bench in our winter garden
& my capillaries fill with silver

I know that in shady places
foliage is richer than flowers,
& every purple-edged leaf
is stencilled, at this moment,
on the ballroom of the sky

All nights join together

I am still thinking about nights of travel,
times when my torn heart flew
& I never wanted the plane to land,
a death to promises
in rusty letterboxes
& dreams hatched
in the shade of peanut butter trees

Under night skies sewn
with countless unruly galaxies
I can sense the sting rays
circling in a patient slow ballet
around the boat
in its silent stretch of water
lit by harbour lights

Eyes adjusting to the dark,
I saw you in the kitchen just now.
The night is kinder you told me,
you feel less judged,
even by the trees,
when the day is over—
no garish lines to read between

With this moonlight swimming in my veins
and torches of silver in the magnolia
helping you is something
that feels possible tonight

© Jane Frank

Lilac Sundown

Regatta Hotel, November 1986

before seeking
iron lace shelter,
we caught falling blossoms,

celebrating our good
fortune — we knew the story
of course, had crouched

on the terrazzo floor
that first time
in the exact place

those two other women —
forever captured in grainy
film — had rattled

their chains & the whole
civic cage // a level up,
& thoughts swimming

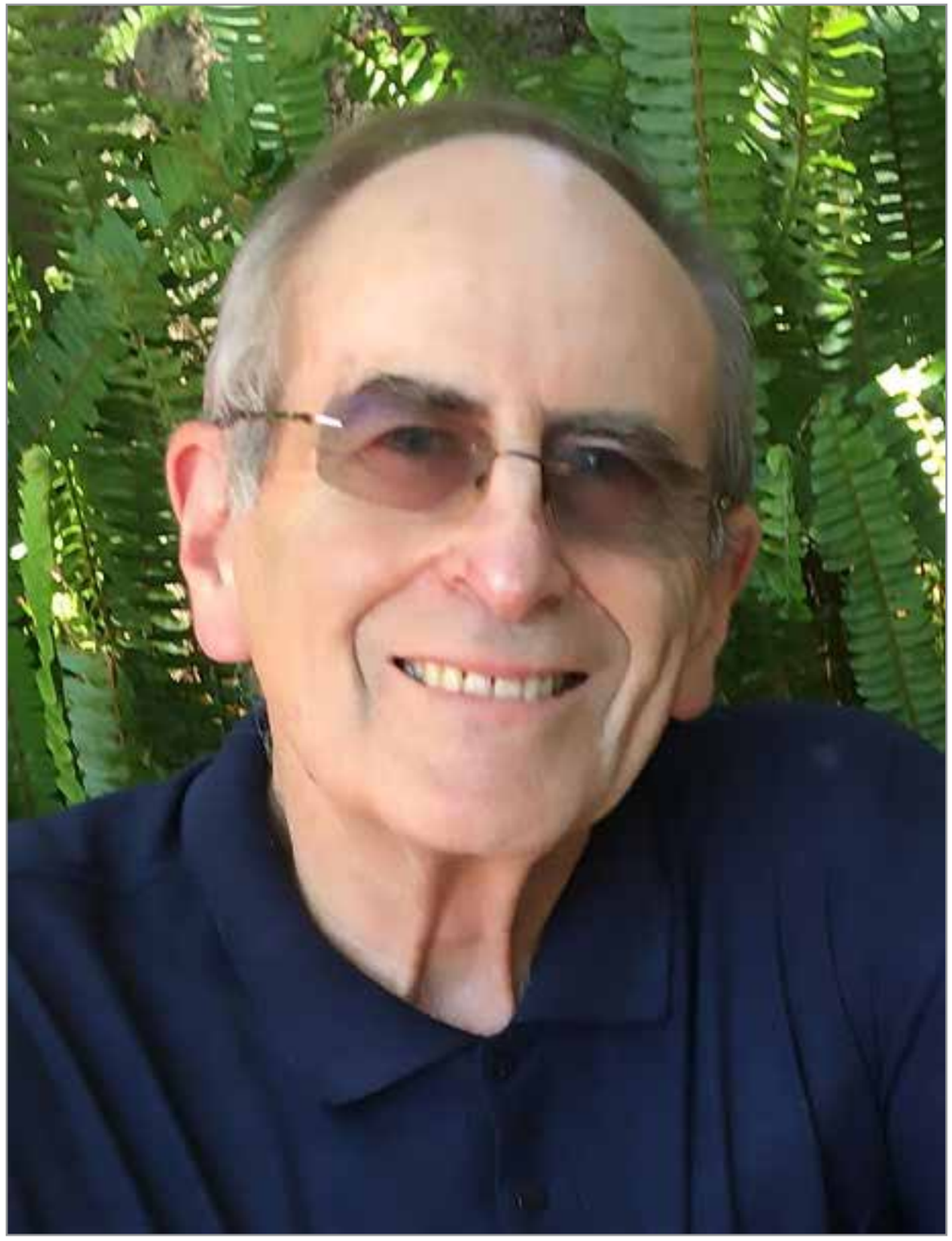
in tepid river air
we sipped our beers
as last fours & eights moved

in stealth across
the still surface — nothing else now
between us

and the beckoning high-rises
with their promises
and lights,

the circle of moon over the water
a bolt hole through
darkening plaid

© Jane Frank



Alex Skovron

Alex Skovron was born in Poland, lived briefly in Israel, and emigrated to Australia as a boy. His family settled in Sydney, where he grew up and completed his studies. From the early 1970s he worked as an editor for book publishers in Sydney and (after 1980) Melbourne. His poetry has appeared widely in Australia and overseas, and he has received a number of major awards for his work. His most recent collection is *Switchpoints: One hundred narratives in prose and verse* (2026); his new and selected poems, *Towards the Equator* (2014), was shortlisted in the Prime Minister's Literary Awards. Skovron's collection of short stories *The Man who Took to his Bed* (2017), and his novella *The Poet* (2005), have been published in Czech translations; *The Attic*, a selection of his poetry translated into French, was published in 2013, and a bilingual volume of Chinese translations, *Water Music*, in 2017. His work has also appeared in Dutch, Macedonian, Polish and Spanish. The numerous public readings he has given have included appearances in China, Serbia, India, Ireland and Portugal. In 2023 he was honoured with the Patrick White Literary Award for his contribution to Australian literature.

Rain

after Kevin Hart

Distracted by the rain, we roam the streets
that lineate our multiple desires,

uncertain at each sizzling roundabout
what any given turn could take us through:

an avenue of pines, a boulevard
dotted with coloured lights and twinkling signs,

a lane that tapers then flares out again,
a cul-de-sac where urchins taunt us with

outrageous charges, or an alleyway
that never slows or stops to catch its breath

but serpentinely weaves us to and fro
like a wild ride in some amusement park

we fear we're locked into yet are disposed
from sheer exhilaration and a vague

erotic glee to relish. Even so,
the rain persuades us to be circumspect

as we dispute which turnings to believe,
which to ignore; till in the end we don't

know where we are, what destination has
elected us—that is our paradox:

the rain of our desires drenches us
while we, distracted, scan the sky and dream.

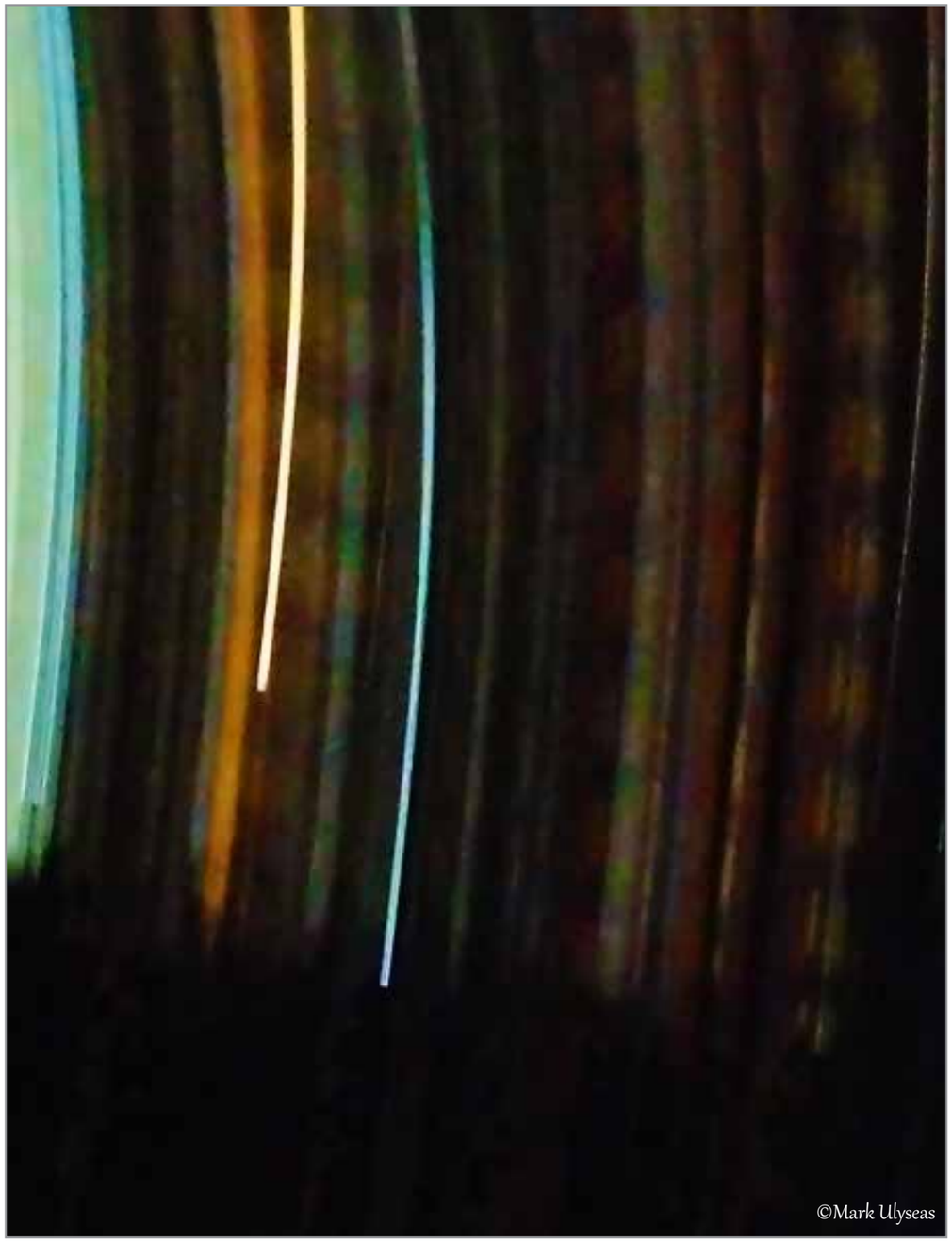
© Alex Skovron
2026 November-December POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

Predicate

There are moments the planet turns
prophetic, the world recalibrates
as the eye blinks—the sun burns
no less intensely, the globe rotates
on its customary spool, the stars align
as they will do, there is no sign
of anything altered, amiss in the way
the weeks walk, sequential, or the day
surfaces, sets, or night descends
at the appointed hour, its allotted time,
or the manner a dream portends
the morning's poem, a slanted rhyme.

Yet something differs, a doubt that turns
on a spark arises—before it abates,
its ember will wink, ignite, and burns,
as the planet, prophetically, rotates—
while we, untouched, resume the scuffle
with our oracles, shuffle, reshuffle
our colour-coded cue-sheets, the map
of our shifting selves; and by night, borne
along on soundings we fail to trap,
we fossick for whatever truth might dawn.

An earlier, shorter version of this poem first appeared in *Gesher* (vol. 5, no. 3, 2017).



Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

© Alex Skovron

Anita Arlov. Photo credit: Ockham Collective.

Anita Arlov is the child of Croatian parents displaced after WW2. She lives in Tamaki Makaurau/Auckland. She writes poems and very short prose, hosts workshops and occasionally judges short form fiction. Anita grew up enjoying the cadence of language but didn't begin writing till mid-life in response to the Canterbury earthquake in 2011. Anita has won the Divine Muses Poetry Competition, the NZ Flash Fiction Competition and has placed second in the Bath Flash Fiction Competition. She is widely anthologised, including Bonsai: Best small stories from Aotearoa/New Zealand; Broadsheet; New Flash Fiction Review; takahē magazine; Best Small Fictions and Best Microfiction. She convened a team that ran the NZ Poetry Conference & Festival, a successful three-day celebration of all things poetry including vispo, wordcore, sung poems, cine-poetics and workshops, involving 200 poets and arts activists. For ten years she managed popular spoken word event Inside Out Open Mic for Writers. In 2022 she was selected an Ockham Collective Arts Resident. *"I like to conflate arresting facts with fiction, memory and emotion. Once I get a fix on a tone, I dive in and commit to getting out alive."* – Anita

Any City Dawn

barefoot in a dripping metropolis
anyone is their own ghost

underlit trees and power poles
are kabuki drama

roads glisten like dead lava trails

the CBD hums soft as phantom bloodbeat

but this world isn't quiet
isn't still isn't gentle
we're tornadoing
through the Anthropocene

people: are we stained the same
with blame?
the Nuu-chah-nulth people
of the Pacific north west?
the Massaco River people
of the Amazon?
te Henua 'Enana
of the Marquesas Islands?

any sparrow opens its throat
as the sky hinges lighter

dawn is the singer who sings
eyes shut
to seal out all that is not-song

© Anita Arlov

Mimic Octopus

there's a mimic octopus
amusing itself on Youtube

it knows your mind
knows your reaction
to its imitation

arms out
zipping flat and straight:
it's a stingray

arms close
skimming the seabed:
it's a flounder

arms spiked
striped black and white:
it's a lionfish

arms fore and aft
engraving esses in the sand:
it's a seasnake

arms in unison
puffing in and out:
it's a jellyfish

arms bright green
wafting in the current:
it's a seaweed

then it's a mimic octopus again
amusing itself on Youtube

Two Degrees Of Separation

Observations at The Plane Table, Port Hills, Christchurch

Fly your fingertip from an etched line. Follow with your eye.

City grid & foothills fan out north to south – Kaikoura to Mt Hutt.

Faraway mountains jostle; each one's name and height etched into the plane table's steel rim as if pencilled by determined siblings into their kitchen door jamb.

A hobby geologist kickstarted this table. Ivan Pugh worked all week in a foundry. Saturdays he'd cycle with telephoto lens, theodolite & notebook to this vantage point high on Cashmere Hill. In 1967 Ivan plotted 863 peaks that weren't yet in geology books. Under lamplight he hand-drew a point-perfect panorama of these mountains.

It's castles in the sky, our too-busy mindset – waiting for the day that never comes to do what makes our heart sing.

A plane thrums overhead drawing a message banner through the frisbee blue. *Will you marry me, Jean?*

© Anita Arlov

Linda Adair

Co-editor of *Rochford Street Review*, Adair is a writer, artist, and activist descended from several Irish refugees, most of whom came from Counties Roscommon and Galway. Two of her great-great-grandmothers were sent to Australia as teenage orphan girls on the Earl Grey Scheme in the wake of *An Gorta Mor*. Their overlooked stories have inspired many of her poems, and she was honoured to feature in September at *Poetry Plus* in County Tipperary and to participate in Ireland's National Culture Night reading at Charlie Byrnes Bookshop in Galway. She was privileged to be a guest poet at the launch in Glasgow of the collection *She's Some Woman* by The Wonderlust Women Glasgow. Adair's poems have been anthologised in *OysterCatcher One; To End All Wars; Messages from The Embers; Poetry for the Planet;* and published in international journals including *Live Encounters Poetry & Writing; FemAsia; The Blue Nib* as well as various independent Australian journals. She has been interviewed for 3CR's *Spoken Word* program, and has exhibited her poems together with her paintings in both solo and group shows in Sydney, Australia.

While you were here

Too weak to feed yourself
I offer pureed spoonfuls
help you hold the cup
of water to parched lips

soon you must muster
all your strength to consume
'thick' water or juice
swallowing an act of will

still you hover here
at this thin place between
the living and the dead
your spirit stronger each day

than the corporeal reality
that still binds me to
those binary categories
at least for now

until the twilight dims
certainty's glare
my heart pounds selfishly
not wanting to let you go

because I know you need
to go and be at peace
not struggling for every breath
you take so I force myself

continued overleaf...

© liveencounters.net POETRY & WRITING Volume Six November-December 2026 *Celebrating 17th Anniversary*

© Linda Adair
2026 November-December POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

to whisper in your ear
'do what you must do for yourself'
assure you we will be okay
repeat we'll love you always

I promise to be
at that last checkpoint
the semipermeable membrane
where living entails dying

behind my clenched jaw
a roar rushes up my throat
but I push it down
it is not a sound for your ears.

I recall 'helping Mum'
feeding you my curly headed
baby sister giggling in
that old chrome highchair

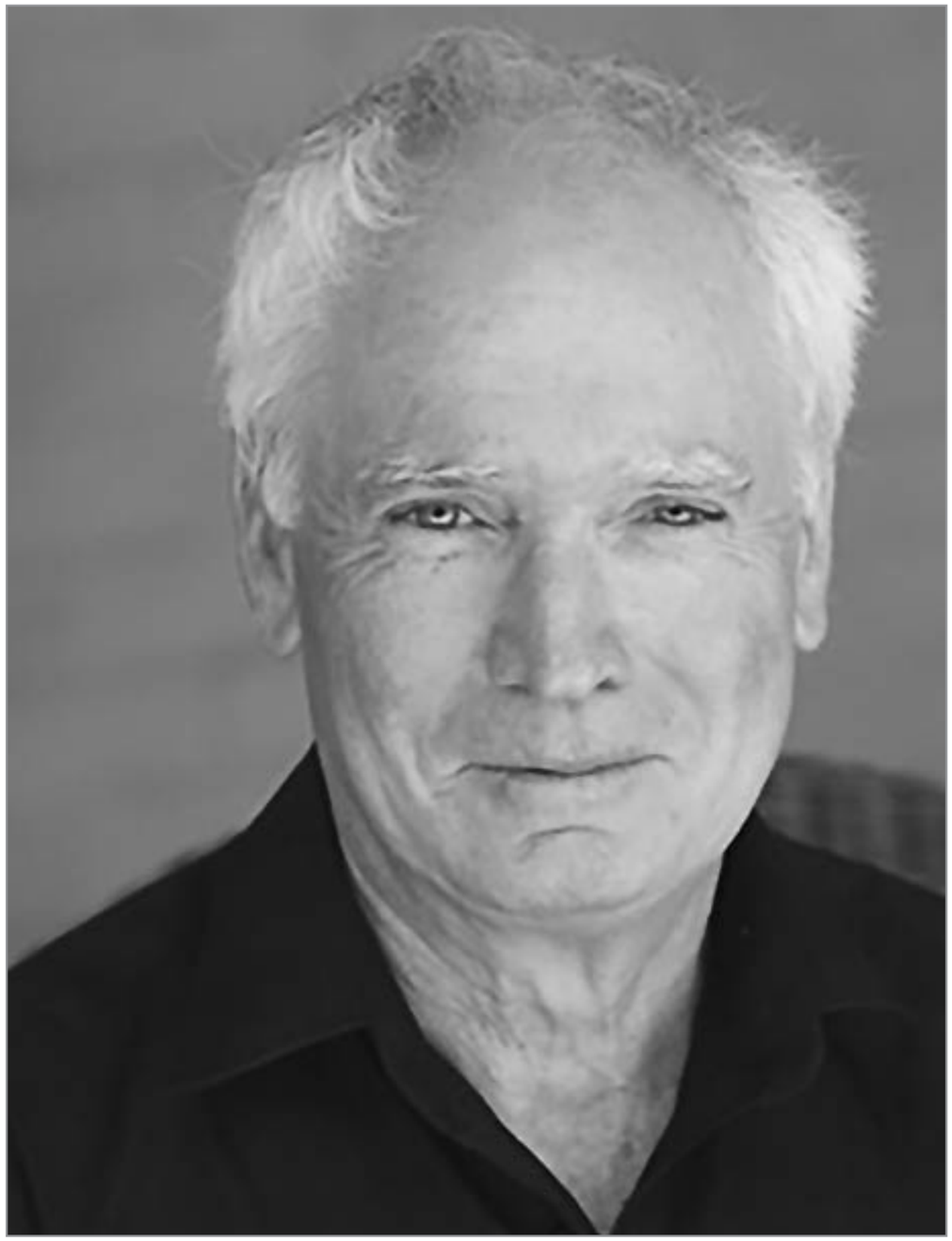
now my quiet warrior sister
you decline Samson-like
your thick dark mane finally falls
after 11-months of brutal treatments

this disease and pain relief
have silenced speech
still you signal us yes or no
with sounds, nod or eye roll

to make you comfortable I adjust the bed
place my arm around you
to lift and you reach your arm up
brush my cheek with your lips
with your last strength say 'I love you'.

This moment your final gift to me.

© Linda Adair



Peter Boyle

Peter Boyle is a poet and translator of poetry from Spanish and French who lives and works on Dharug land in Sydney. He has published twelve books of poetry, most recently *The Wide Starless Silence* (2026) and *Companions, Ancestors, Inscriptions* (2024), both from Vagabond Press. *Companions, Ancestors, Inscriptions* was shortlisted for the Prime Minister's Award. His most recent book as a translator is *The Baker's Son: Selected Poems of Juan Carlos Mestre* (2026) from Shearsman Press.

Self Portrait

After John Ashbery

See less. A mirror's green-tinged gaze
almost encourages you and you step
faintly sideways into it: am I this single damaged eye?
Did the walls notice me, this time, as I will be,
or is it just the presence of the past again? The parents' voices
still at their evening ping-pong, a chill cloudscape assembling
in the afternoon sky, only to freeze into night's
vast, suddenly irrefutable black banner. Is it so late already?
Am I to enter the makeshift ballroom, to descend
the glass spiral into the laid out garden
with its dance floor and nonchalantly scattered
tables? Down there, I thought, even the expensive boulders
marking the party's edges can't halt the plunge
to the roadway's finality. The great, formal rite of passage
was beginning without me, orchestrated
into one more ceremony of farewell.
The view from the rotunda takes in the whole world, now,
but smudged with a whiff of out of season
BBQs and sadness, that ghost in the closet
scraping its fingernails on flaking varnish.
Still lightly, but with the cunning authority
of what has slipped beyond death.

continued overleaf...

© liveencounters.net POETRY & WRITING Volume Six November-December 2026 *Celebrating 17th Anniversary*

© Peter Boyle
2026 November-December POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

I had fallen asleep in the sun and thought a shadow
had stepped out of the side door, a small blunt
hammer tapping gently at my forehead,
but it was only an early cockatoo come to ask
if I was coming in, and not to forget some fresh grains
in case I wasn't. From the small residues of the breath
I was preparing evening's simple repast
to fortify myself for the long night ahead.
The books, the papers, the odd cucumbers and black olives
stored in cool white jars on the fridge's top shelf,
versions of a life flattened and compressed into edible portions.
Divided into two halves by a net under the equalizing light bulb,
the kitchen table gathered abandoned work
and the serious fatal tasks of reminiscence.
If you are asking to meet my opponent in this
eternal shadow game, I can only point you to the mirror.
It keeps, at least, its openness intact. Like women singing
by candlelight in a stone room, its moves, however simple,
are infinite. The night sky and an immense inexplicable
coolness offer for now what surpasses abundance.
A brittle patrimony.

Echoes keep arriving from places that know
neither of us. Our fingers sink simultaneously
through rich green textures of forgetting
while the sea takes up its quiet, commanding presence
underneath me.

All this was now and long ago
in that place where they were beginning to appear --
the White Eclogues.

The double portrait

To obliterate all that was learnt
in the long years of exile
I am reborn this morning
inside a patterned landscape --

the field laid out with gardens, with preformed holes left for lakes,
a single pathway lined with hedges
and where the palace stands
an impossible rise in the earth
as if it had lifted itself just slightly off the map.

Rows of elms interweave their frail golden canopies,
a hare and a fieldmouse tilt their faces skyward,
but the princess, where is the princess?
Has she already gone far beyond us, ferried aloft
into an ambivalent sainthood
while I remain below, caught on the fly
trying to construct a questionnaire for schoolchildren
on a famous landscape painting
that does not yet exist?

And through the crowd in the Chief Examiner's Exhibition Hall
an ageing man with pointed nose and troubled brows
slides his face beside mine, maintaining an absolute ability
to not know me.

continued overleaf...

© liveencounters.net POETRY & WRITING Volume Six November-December 2026 *Celebrating 17th Anniversary*

© Peter Boyle
2026 November-December POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

Meanwhile the princess, no longer visible,
has preserved her presence --
floating close by, just above us,
and simultaneously having long since
penetrated the earth underneath us.
Despite the puffs of scandal
and the locked side alley to the vegetable patch
with its row of concealed bodies,
the sun of her borrowed majesty
beams down on the shrubs, the ornamental walkways,
the twin teardrop lakes and ramshackle palace
that are the double portrait
of the still undiscovered
face inside my face.

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

© Peter Boyle
2026 November-December POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

Robyn Rowland

Dr Robyn Rowland AO is an Irish Australian citizen. Living between Ireland and Victoria for over 40 years, and working in Turkey since 2009, Robyn now lives in regional Victoria. In December 2019 she moved back to Australia, as companion then carer for her father, who died at 102 in 2022. Her most recent book, *Steep Curve* (Five Islands Press, 2024), covers those years. She has 12 books of poetry, including 2 bilingual Turkish/English: *Under This Saffron Sun – Safran Güneşin Altında*, (Knocknarone Press, Ireland 2019) and *This Intimate War Gallipoli/Çanakkale 1915 – İçli Dışlı Bir Savaş: Gelibolu/Çanakkale 1915* (FIP, 2015; repub. Spinifex Press, Australia, 2018). She has won or been listed for various prizes e.g. *Myslexia*, ACU Poetry Prize, the Peter Porter Poetry Prize, Catalpa Poetry prize, *Antipodes: Journal of Australian and New Zealand Literature* International Poetry prize. Her poetry appears in national/international journals in 9 countries, 50 anthologies, eight editions of *Best Australian* Poems (Black Inc). She has read in India, Portugal, Ireland, UK, USA, Greece, Austria, Bosnia, Serbia, Turkey and Italy, and is published in translation. Robyn has 2 CD's with music. She is filmed reading in National Irish Poetry Reading Archive, Special Collections, James Joyce Library, UCD, Dublin.

Poems 'Hunger Weapon' and 'Cassandras, All ' are from the long sequence *Echoing Grief* by Robyn Rowland.

Hunger Weapon

I have always felt a certain horror of political economists since I heard one of them say he feared the famine of 1848 in Ireland would not kill more than a million people, and that would scarcely be enough to do any good. Benjamin Jowett, economic adviser, 1848

Gaza, August 2025

Bones of his legs are thinner than his kneecap,
the hollow topography of his torso eroded
concave by hunger. He is not a baby, underfed.
Once a sports champion, teenager Atef Abu Khater 17
has starved to death, malnutrition barely a word for this.
The process is not quick. Fog seeps into the brain,
the heart shrinks, the belly bloats, muscle and bone leached.
Despair feeds the soul, the last closing down.

Dress up the word, make it palatable: 'food insecurity'.
When focusing their desperation on walking to put
anything into the mouth, people stagger toward
trucks carrying lentils, fodder for IDF snipers.
Forced into narrow corridors by barbed wire
their struggle to win a bag, a bucket full
grows in intensity. By August 1, 2025
1400 have been killed by military 'crowd control'.

Each day his ribs dropped, the bird of breath caged.
Muscles shrivelled when they should have been taut.
You can't look too long as his parents embrace him,
bone visage too shocking for our full stomachs.
His father gently strokes his jutting ribs,
embraces the skeleton of his son, his dried and
lifeless face, wearing its death mask smile;
peace at last from this unnatural famine*.

continued overleaf...

© liveencounters.net POETRY & WRITING Volume Six November-December 2026 *Celebrating 17th Anniversary*

© Robyn Rowland
2026 November-December POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

*https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ckg4p90z1kxo
'How Israel's policies created famine in Gaza'
22 August 2025
Emir Nader *BBC News*, Jerusalem

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jul/31/the-mathematics-of-starvation-how-israel-caused-a-famine-in-gaza
'The mathematics of starvation: how Israel caused a famine in Gaza'
Emma Graham-Harrison *Chief Middle East correspondent,* Fri 1 Aug 2025

Cassandras, All

Nahal Oz Outpost, October 7, 2023

No one listened to them. No one took care of them …
These were nobody's soldiers. Eyal Esher, father of Roni

The seer sayers were all clear.
Their vision from intense four-hour stints
at their screens daily taught them everything.
Cameras, sensors, computer consoles.
Twenty-three young women 'eyes of the army'
'eyes of the state', were 18 to 20 years young.
Bright, alert, with elite training in
recognising patterns, creating intel,
the Nahal Oz Unit 414 filed their meticulous records,
warnings dismissed as 'panic' by their superiors.

Assumed as frivolous, their Tik Tok images weaponised,
they knew every leaf that fell, every herd of sheep and goats
that belonged or changed, the colour of clothing worn
by regular farmers. Their eyes watched dust rise as
explosives were dug in, aerial photos shot, bulldozers
practising fence demolition, the twice weekly
drills with Hamas fighters, and three days before the attack.
They watched them practice using paragliders, tanks.
They told their male commanders repeatedly.
No one was listening.

continued overleaf...

© Robyn Rowland

There was no subtlety. Attack plans were posted online.
A religious holiday, what better day? So many IDF soldiers
on leave. With two years of vigilant planning, now intimately
familiar with the base, thousands swarmed through the 'Iron Wall'.
Between the base and the kibbutz there was a lush park
where Roni with her neat braided hair, sat some days for lunch –
she loved pasta, salad. Beyond potato fields, watermelon,
fields might bloom in spring with buttercups of myriad colours.
Now perhaps the upright white star-flowers of Squill;
bulb poisonous, shafts marking boundaries.

It was a hot day for autumn, though she wouldn't know that
cloistered in the observation room from sunrise
with the *tatzpitaniyot* sisterhood of diligent observers.
Dust clouds were the rippling fur of vengeance, coming.
Coffee cup spilt, her hawk-sharp eyes concentrated,
meticulous, she continued reporting every
changing movement at the border, fear rising,
voice an urgent crescendo in the windowless room.
Breached Breached!!!! Where's the army? Where's the army!
The only response: *Good luck Nahal Oz. Good luck. Take care.*

Roni Eshel told her parents on September 27:
Listen, three days in a row, attempted infiltrations,
today there was an attack at Karni, explosive devices.
And when she turned 19 earlier in September,
a Hamas fighter held up a placard wishing her
'Happy Birthday' by name and date.
Dad, the terrorists know everything about us.
Parents forced to wait 34 days to know her fate.
All the young women in the control room now
only ash and 'pieces'. Roni was burned alive October 7th..

Hunted from bed to bomb shelter, then barracks, hiding
uselessly under tables, others were shot in their pyjamas,
once not enough, 17 of 22 dead. 7 were dragged away
hostage, slapped against a wall, hands zip-locked
behind them, garlands of blood, bracelets in blood,
anklets of blood. No uniforms. They had been sleeping.
Ori Megidish was rescued after 23 days.
Noa Marciano died in Gaza. 5 were 470 days captive.
For these 22 observers there was never a battle.
How could there be – they were all unarmed.

© liveencounters.net POETRY & WRITING Volume Six November-December 2026 *Celebrating 17th Anniversary*

© Robyn Rowland
2026 November-December POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

Nothing Ordinary

I think of poet Les Murray, and that one 'Absolutely Ordinary Rainbow',*
the special sadness of the man who weeps, as I weep.
But his eyes were raised towards the coloured sky, its vivid scratch.

Here, whales rise in their ecstatic breach, one huge white sail reaching.
Then bang onto the sea, serrated black wing, rush of force gripping.
How does that feel: the power of the roll, the slap on the vivid wet blue!

Now it arches backwards, pearly belly fat and strong
curling towards the sky, exposing its soft underside to the
sun as if in seduction; and then, again, flat-flipper percussion.

Calves birthed, they can only be singing to them now.
No need for long amorous tunes. Everything in its place.
On shore, we chatter to each other, this other mammal,

did you see, can you see? – eyes straining, waiting,
a learned patience in this moment, our breaths pacing theirs.
Some like me, sadness suspended, channelled away beneath,

feel the rush of their leap out and up, our own bodies arching,
Those with ingrown music buds passing, leads into their pockets,
miss the moment. But we are laughing into the wind, strangers

together, joined. The gift of joy is rare, harder to sustain than
the gift of grief. Wet whispers from those mighty spouts fly now
so light upon us, shivering in the wind on Warilla beach, grateful.

*Les Murray's poem: *An Absolutely Ordinary Rainbow*

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

© Robyn Rowland

Richard W Halperin. Photo credit: Raymond Keane

Richard W Halperin has seen five collections published by Salmon/Cliffs of Moher and twenty-one smaller collections published by Lapwing/Ballyhalbert. The most recent Salmon, November 2025, is *All the Tattered Stars: Selected & New Poems*, one of whose poems 'Now, Mother, What's the Matter?' was Poem of the Week in The Guardian, January 19. The twenty-first Lapwing, September 2026, is *Wherever It Pleases*; a poem in it, 'Waiting for the Piano,' will be part of the forthcoming *Montreal International Poetry Prize Anthology 2026.*

Deux mélodies hébraïques

A longtime friend, Irish, informed me
that his mother had died after a long illness.

In my flat, I immediately played
Ravel's 'Kaddisch,'
Suzanne Danco, Ernst Ansermet,
Orchestre de la Suisse Romande.

It seemed right.

'Kaddisch' is one of Ravel's *Deux melodies hébraïques.*

The other is 'L'énigme éternelle.'

They are not joined together for nothing.

© Richard W Halperin

End of the Carnation

Some people whom Jesus has just healed
tell him that they want to follow him.
He tells them, no, go back to your village.

I have come to think he says this
because it is a different kind of tough –
to live, changed, daily in one's village.

Our town.

The Third Annunciation

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

Scarves are not breaths, or are they?

© Richard W Halperin
2026 November-December POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

Wrinkles

A wind blew gently off the Corrib,
2014, Galway, bringing me
a lifelong friendship – more than
lifelong – with C.P. Stewart,
one of whose poetry collections
is entitled *Taking It In.*

A wind hit Chicago hard
just before my mother became
my mother, bringing her
Foujita and Moholy-Nagy.
I grew up with all three of them.

The wind wrinkles the face
of the sea which has no wrinkles.

Something to think about.

Something to take in.

Watch and Pray

I watch, not knowing
what I watch.
I pray, not knowing
what prayer is.

Even Vishnu – I think of
'The Bell Song' –
is lost in the forest,
Brahmaless.

A pariah saves him
from wild beasts
with her little bells.

When I write,
when I was with my wife,
when I die laughing
in conversation with pals,
little bells.

Higher and higher,
little bells.

© Richard W Halperin

Anne Elvey. Photo credit: Darren Gill 2026.

Anne Elvey lives on unceded Bunurong Country, as a settler descendent of Irish, Scottish and English ancestry. Her poetry collections include: *(C)loud: A poetic response to child sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic church* (Palaver, 2025), *Intents* (Liquid Amber Press, 2025), *Leaf* (Liquid Amber Press, 2022), *Obligations of voice* (Recent Work Press, 2021), *On arrivals of breath* (Poetica Christi, 2019), *White on White* (Cordite Books, 2018) and *Kin* (Five Islands, 2014). She is editor of *Cloud Climbers: Declarations through images and words for a just and ecologically sustainable peace,* with art work by William Kelly and Benjamin McKeown (Palaver, 2021). Her work spans ecological poetry and poetics, ecological feminist hermeneutics, environmental and social justice, critical biblical interpretation, and unsettling settlerdom. Anne was inaugural managing editor of *Plumwood Mountain* journal. Her website and occasional blog is at: https://sunglintdrift.com/

A WOMAN'S BODY, DARING

Her ears set their curves outwards. Each
is its own shivering cymbal. A boney canal.
An aging nerve. At night her lids close, eyes
open to a wild imagining where defying
time, she puts on the watch she lost yesterday.

Her hinged jaws work the coming day. She tastes
its sourness between the arcs of sleep and
turning sleep. She smells pollen, matter. The air
breathes her, with the scent of things. Should
she hold it on a dare as long as she can, as long

as she can, as long—Skin, the touch of skin,
skin as body clasps the other. Brush of flesh
against air. Trees in paradise have gods to
guard them. She is Eve, holding the fruit of
becoming in a hand, in a mouth, on a dare.

© Anne Elvey

On a dare

The first time I get the strap it's for talking.
I am telling my desk-mate *it's my birthday*.
The second week of school. Months later, I skip

a step on a dare (to all the preps, Sister in her
serge said: *don't skip a step*) at five climbing
skywards to the big kids' room, I get the strap

again. The next year, at another school I turn
the tap on a dare (teacher said: *don't turn
on the tap*). This time I say it wasn't me.

One lunchtime in grade six, the boys chase
the girls into a yard next-door where one
of the girls lives. All of us get the strap.

Mostly, I learn to keep out of trouble. The
night I spill ink on the new carpet at home,
I confess when my parents' friends drop in.

But when I skipped the step, I felt
that the kid who made the dare was baiting
me. I don't know why I grabbed the hook.

A woman between worlds

The curtains fold shadows into drape.
She forgets a name as soon as she hears it.

The folds are paisley, cream on cream.
She fails to explain what she needs from her partner.

A tote hangs deep green, bright emerald and gold.
She wonders why she wells with unshed tears.

On top of a carton, a red shoebox rests at a slant.
One son always assumes that she is in the wrong.

A brown handbag sits on a cushion.
In a world at war, she feels the vulnerability of age.

The chair's plain wooden back is marked with wear.
She said goodnight without the usual hug.

A purple scarf with a thin gilt thread falls softly.
This afternoon she watched young men rap and sing.

A many-coloured weave protects her sewing machine.
The men spoke of dealing with anger without violence.

© liveencounters.net POETRY & WRITING Volume Six November-December 2026 *Celebrating 17th Anniversary*

© Anne Elvey
2026 November-December POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

Ellen Miller-Mack

Ellen Miller-Mack's new book *When I Was a Grateful Mammal* is the winner of the 2025 Sappho's Prize in Poetry. She is the producer/host of Poet Talk with co host Meredith Foley— a live radio program on WMUA in Amherst and a podcast on Spotify and Apple. She's a nurse practitioner (retired/rewired),who provided primary care at a community health center as well as for women who were incarcerated at the county jail. She has an MFA in Poetry from Drew University. Her book reviews have appeared in *The Wild Shrew Literary Review, Rattle, Valparaiso, Bookslut, The Rumpus, The Poetry Cafe,* and The Poetry Foundation. Her poems have appeared in *Lavender Review* (journal and anthology January 2025), *Lily Poetry Review, Antiphon, 5 A.M., Redheaded Stepchild, Affilia,* and *The Lake Rises: poems to and for our bodies of water.* Ellen co-wrote *The Real Cost of Prisons Comix* (PM Press). She lives in Western Massachusetts.

Don't Mess with Bessie Smith

Bessie Smith would have worn this dress.
She did. Beneath her full length mink coat.

A spoonful of salt in a glass of water is like the ocean
which is like blood. I've always loved that dress.

The way the beads go when Bessie
spins to eye her no-good man.

You know about Bessie Smith.
The orgy she orchestrated

with her exquisite, dark-skinned chorus girls.
Two nights before, she made a man bleed.

He hadn't stopped to think.
The girls loved Bessie.

She knew how to make things go.
The cops came and went.

Bessie Smith hurled deep foamy curses.

What if I should take a notion
To jump into the ocean.

She slammed the only open door,
but it ain't nobody's business.

© Ellen Miller-Mack

Pearls

thanks for the frequent dream visits the flow of love is stupendous
i soak it up like a potted plant you laugh and say my name
& clasp your aunt's pearl necklace around my neck
we're so good in San Miguel de Allende
San Francisco London & New York City
let's talk before i wake up

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

© Ellen Miller-Mack
2026 November-December POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

Tricia Dearborn

Tricia Dearborn is an Australian poet, writer and editor. Her work has been widely published in literary journals and featured in anthologies including *Best of Australian Poems, Fishing for Lightning: The Spark of Poetry* and *The Anthology of Australian Prose Poetry.* She has been a judge for the University of Canberra VC's International Poetry Prize, and guest poetry editor for various literary journals, including *Cordite Poetry Review* and *Rabbit: a journal of non-fiction poetry*. Her new collection, *Goatscape*, will be out with Cordite Books in 2027.

I DECIDE I WILL CRY IN PUBLIC ONCE A WEEK

to make up for the years of crying only
when premenstrual or in crisis — dam walls
blasted by hormones or the sheer force of distress.

Not a fixed goal, but a corrective
to early training enforced by the threatened
bite of a wooden spoon with a drawn-on smile.

I want to be able to cry without shame.
I want there to be ease in this.

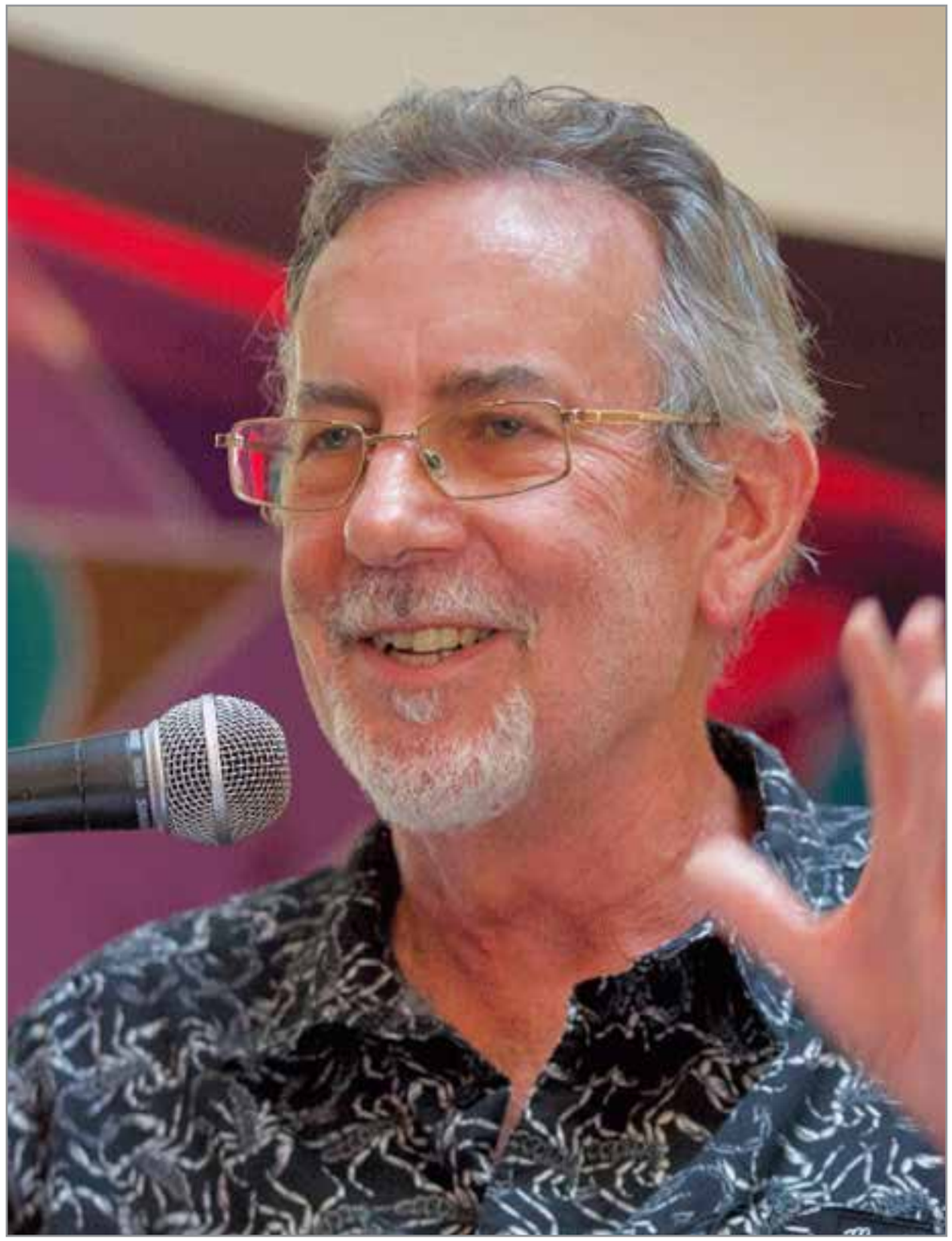
At Store Espresso I watch a small girl at the counter
and like a camera coming into focus, a fact resolves:
I will never have a daughter.

For some reason this pierces me with loss.
I lean into my girlfriend, am enfolded, tentatively
disarm the barricades, allow these quiet tears

which do not unleash disaster. The café owner,
who misses nothing, sends over to our table
a fudge brownie, on the house.

© Tricia Dearborn

Les Wicks has been published across 42 countries in 19 languages. His 15th book of poetry is *Time Taken – New & Selected* (Puncher & Wattmann, 2022). Well-known as both an editor & workshop facilitator. He can be found at https://meusepress.org/leswicks



Les Wicks

Worse

Rug up, times get hotter.
Could anyone be blamed for not knowing
that atrocity was an easy way out?

Flames are everywhere, I'm freezing
colder than sheep
here in my woollen coat
before a platter of cutlets.
Guilty/not guilty — there should be alternatives
like *uncommitted* or *too busy to*.
They'd fit like this coat.

Love songs & battle cries become indistinguishable
we march around conflagration
deployment & shopping lists
a leg becomes medical waste
burnt mouths have an annoying mumble.

Necessary evils are a limitless source of energy
cookup at a place near you
(the closer you are,
the less you acknowledge)
"we shall overcome" deep in the gut
stuck between teeth
wrapped in the stinky skin of belief
"we shall overcome".

© Les Wicks

A Little Frayed

Main street Kurraga, deserted.
In the old days the Blacks stuck to the eastern sidewalk
so they could look out on the nothings
they did with their land before
civilisation came along.

But what have we done since?
There's a big supermarket outside of town
& Chinese own all the cotton.
The bookstore is a standing joke
while the mayor hunts kangaroos
which are left to rot where they fall.

Sure, I left Kurraga in '84
it hadn't rained jobs for years.
Wife & car both broke down
as I looked for a story that fitted.

Back to bury my father — a local hero —
& all the hate he fed us for dinner.
Nobody here, just the Bridal Shop open
corner Strontium Av.
I know less each year.
All my life. Nothing makes sense.

A cleric once talked about humility
there's something seriously wrong
if a lifetime hasn't yet beaten you down
to that frangible state of grace.

Country ways. *I grew up here,*
what you see is less than what you get. Too much.
Been across years. Can only say
when?

The Limits of a Man

Last week there was a kind of art
in sprays of oil that turned his t-shirt graffiti.
Alan remembers his swearing equally matched last weekend
from wife Monica — a wharfie-level vehemence
when he tried to sneak it into the clothes hamper.

This man keeps his job
great with kids
& doesn't hit.

He's sometimes surprised at what he can fix.
Eyes burrow into domestic unhingements,
fingers twitch with immanence
its like the fluoro light above
is transmitting a full set of instructions.

There aren't too many words
as if he's seen a life littered by them.
He hates litter.

But Monica is crying this afternoon.
Those fingers slump like prisoners.
That mouth which often cracks songs
now a broken gate
flopped open.
His angels are yelling *Useless*
this thing he cannot see a way to fix
his woman's tears.

© Les Wicks

Hemat Malak lives in Picton, NSW, and works as an accountant in the not-for-profit sector. She won the 2025 Bruce Dawe National Poetry Prize and is a Pushcart Prize and Best New Poets nominee. Hemat's poems have been shortlisted for the ACU Prize for Poetry and the Robert Gray Prize and longlisted for the Liquid Amber and Ros Spencer Poetry Prizes. They have appeared widely in Australian and international journals and anthologies, including Rattle, Rochford Street Review, Catchment Literary Journal, Locative Magazine, and publications from 5 Islands Press, One Art, WestWords, and WA Poets. Hemat's debut poetry collection, *Shelf Life,* was published by 5 Islands Press in 2026. Find her at hematmalak.com.

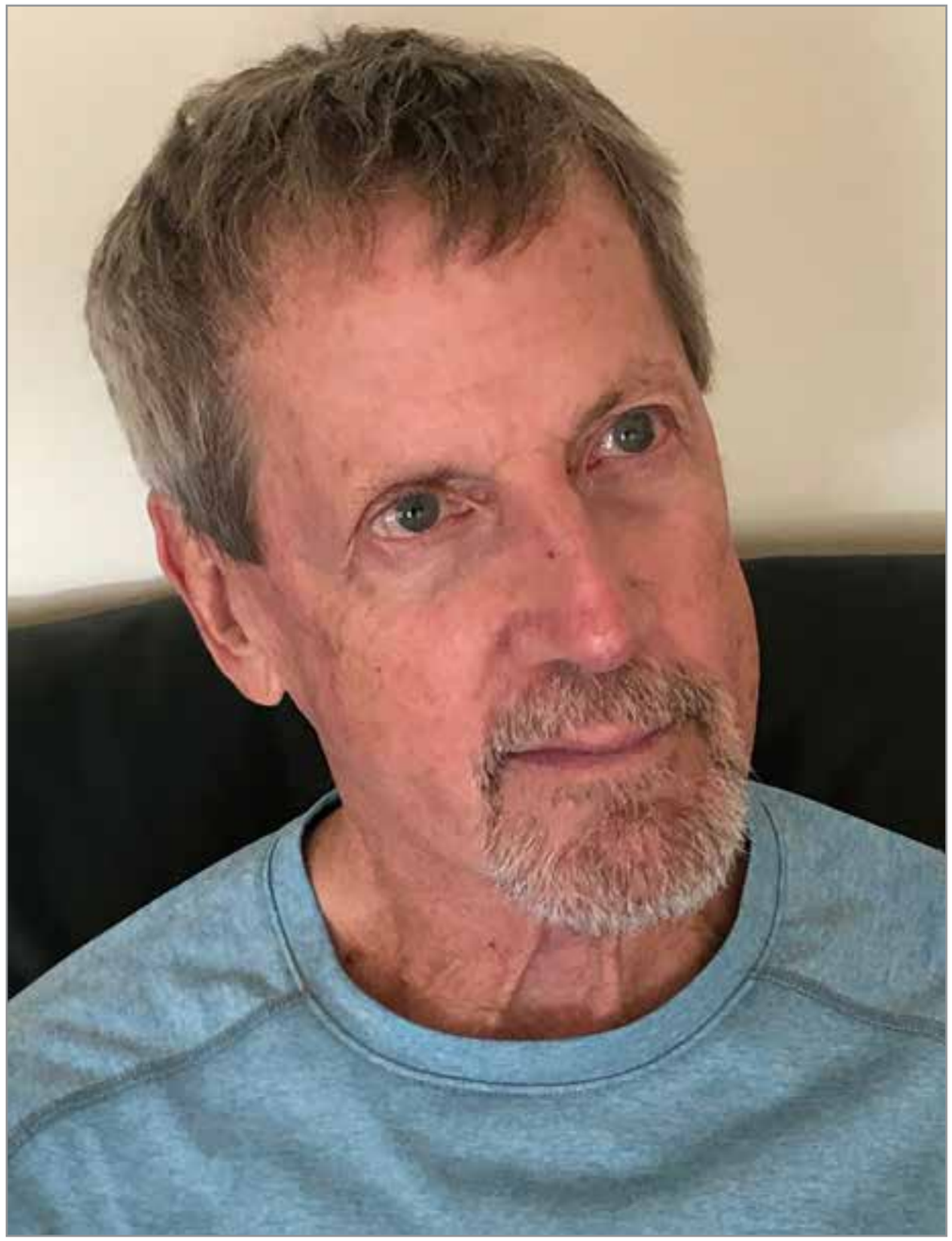
Hemat Malak

Slow-Drying Clay

Who said *this* must be like *that?*
Some fruit grows on the trunk.
Some creatures leave their
young in eggs.
Some women celebrate their
mama-legs—jiggle past my
covered form. They
congregate in circles, the chorus
from the prams: their whipbird
song. And who am I to tell myself
that these are things I'm doing
wrong?
Each dawn
I press my finished shape
inside the die. When evening comes,
I brandish all the grooves
left on my skin
to prove how well I do
not fit inside the lines.

© Hemat Malak
2026 November-December POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

Gary Fincke's newest collection of poems is *A History of When* (2026, Press 53). His "Selected Poems," *The Necessary Going On*, was published by Press 53 in 2025.



Gary Fincke

Afterwards

Orbits

Since the funeral, snow has fallen thick and packable. Her brother begins to roll balls for a solar system in his yard, shaping the huge mass of Jupiter, the extraordinary sphere of the sun. He works the planets to scale, measures circumference and the distances from ball to ball. When the planets seem unfinished, he gives them moons to scale, snow berries and packed pebbles of ice. At last, he needs the neighbor's yard for Pluto, clearing a space for that small sphere before he walks down the street to form the nearest star, nowhere far enough to reach her.

Looking Up

The way, at thirteen, he and his friend lifted the eyes of strangers by pointing up as if they'd discovered an imminence at the outermost limits of vision. A suicide. An ominous low plane. Even the descending closed fist of God, suggesting there were so many likelihoods overhead that when they backed into the street, their heads tilted, there were cars willing to stop, a few doors opening, traffic stalling as they reached the opposite sidewalk, a framed-glass door to a department store where two boys could ride an escalator to the highest floor, becoming the imagined.

© Gary Fincke

The Dim Light

What his mother sewed by, the one shaded bulb over her left shoulder, her chair drawn close, teaching sacrifice in the hours between opening the vials labeled four times a day or as needed, and because it is 1961, the radio emits light with its music, the tubes glowing while she sighs so often it sounds like breathing broken only by the brief brilliance of her cry when her body shifted as she put one thing aside and reached for another. This light, a flightless bird, has always lived in a foster home where myths become biographies. In the museum of memory, he inspects webbed footprints sunk so far into the earth he nearly remembers the shape of a bird so large it believed there was nothing it need fear. Like an approaching search party, the world is a face of lights.

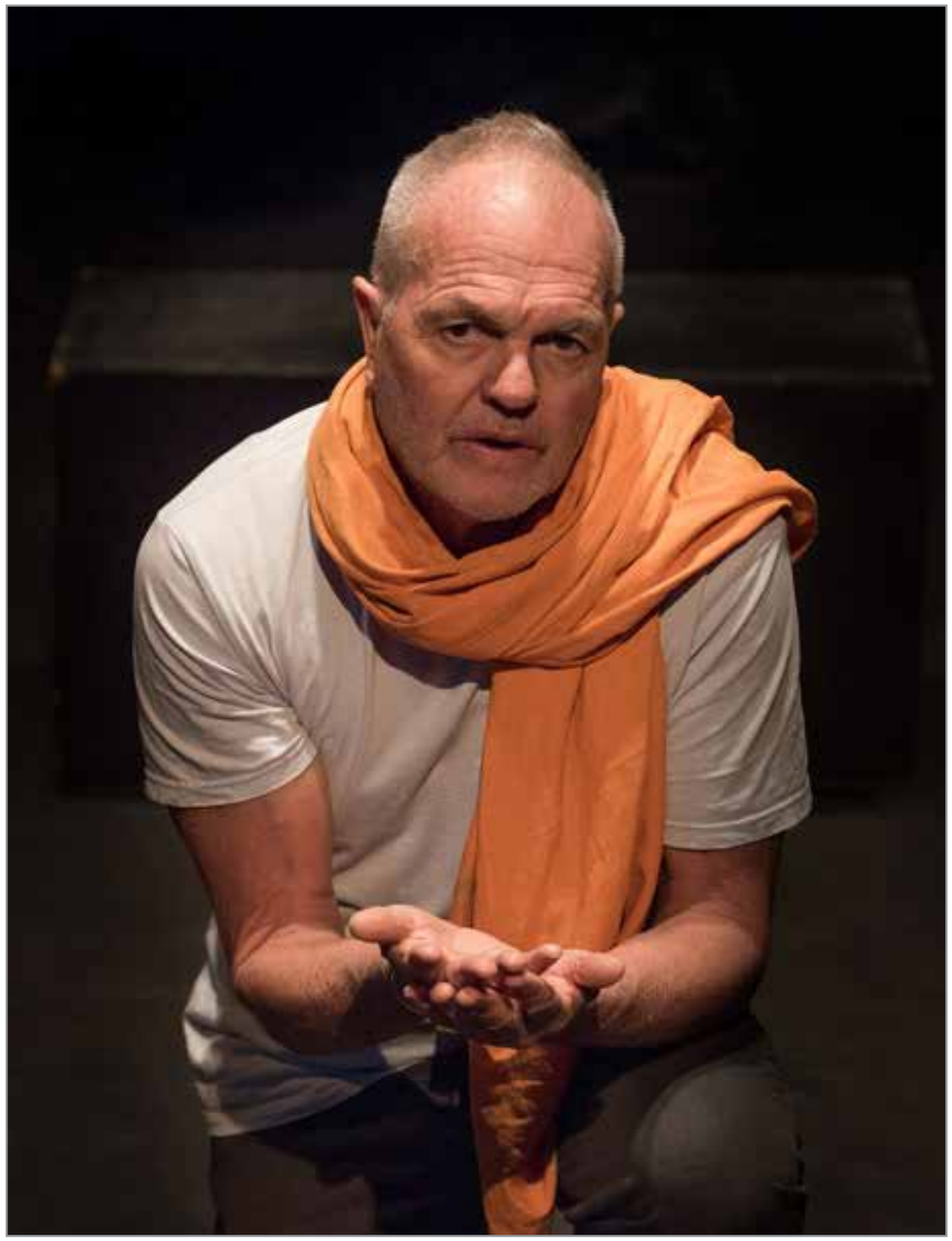
Worship

After his student's accidental death, he copies her poem about the possibilities of love. Her setting is the garden of St. Paul tended by ancient nuns who, each month, trim the decorative trees and prune the rose bushes to allow kneeling for the blessing from a smiling Mary. Her lines are a gospel of surfaces, touch by touch where nerves nearly breach the skin. They detail the blossoms, the topiary that shadows the erosions from storms. And then, at last, shifting to a statue of the garden saint, how his hand is smooth from centuries of kisses, her poem ends in an astonishment of prayer.

The Abilities of Birds

Sometimes, a mother hen's screeching wakes her chicks unhatched in eggs. Ravens remember past relationships. Crows recognize the voices of birds of other species, and, in Australia, lyrebirds, the males, mimic any sound they hear, from cameras to car alarms, to attract quiet females for mating. Such shrieking as prelude to joy, but here, for the third consecutive year, doves have chosen the central crotch of his weeping cherry, fluttering, more often than hourly, from the lawnmower and slammed car doors in the driveway. Last night, for the third consecutive year, the nest has collapsed during a storm, eggs strewn beneath the hapless veil of drooping branches. So persistent, those doves, remarkable as the couple next door who are paying for pregnancy, the wife acknowledging, yesterday, their third failure, her voice, from where she now stands beside his tree, keening into the knotted wail of unendurable.

© Gary Fincke



Stephen House

Stephen House has won awards and nominations as a poet, playwright, and actor. He's been commissioned often, with 20 plays produced, many published by Australian Plays Transform. He's received international literature residencies from The Australia Council for the Arts to Canada and Ireland, and an Asialink residency to India. He's had two chapbooks published by ICOE Press Australia: 'real and unreal' poetry and 'The Ajoona Guest House' monologue. His poetry is published often. He's performed his acclaimed monologues, 'Appalling Behaviour', 'Almost Face to Face' and 'The Ajoona Guest House' widely. His play, 'Johnny Chico' ran in Spain for 4 years.

AN ONGOING BATTLE

there is a world leader ignoring the climate crisis
and its effect on nature getting worse each year
turns his back on extinction and lost wilderness
prefers to focus on money and war

this guy at the top thinks he knows it all
does not ask about facts or science
barks out his orders and spouts forth his lies
makes decisions as if he is the expert

he pulled out of the world climate agreement
and now wants to repeal rules that limit emissions
while ongoing destruction of the natural world
makes the earth cry and distresses many

global warming does not upset this leader
or those who support and applaud him
they ignore the horror with an uncaring smirk
brush it aside and away from their reality

animals and birds and insects and reptiles
fish and whales and amphibians and more
forests and oceans and lakes and rivers
in an ongoing battle to survive

indigenous people from around the globe
do not turn away from the crisis either
they are aware and see exactly what is happening
feel and live with the damaging impact

continued overleaf...

© Stephen House
2026 November-December POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

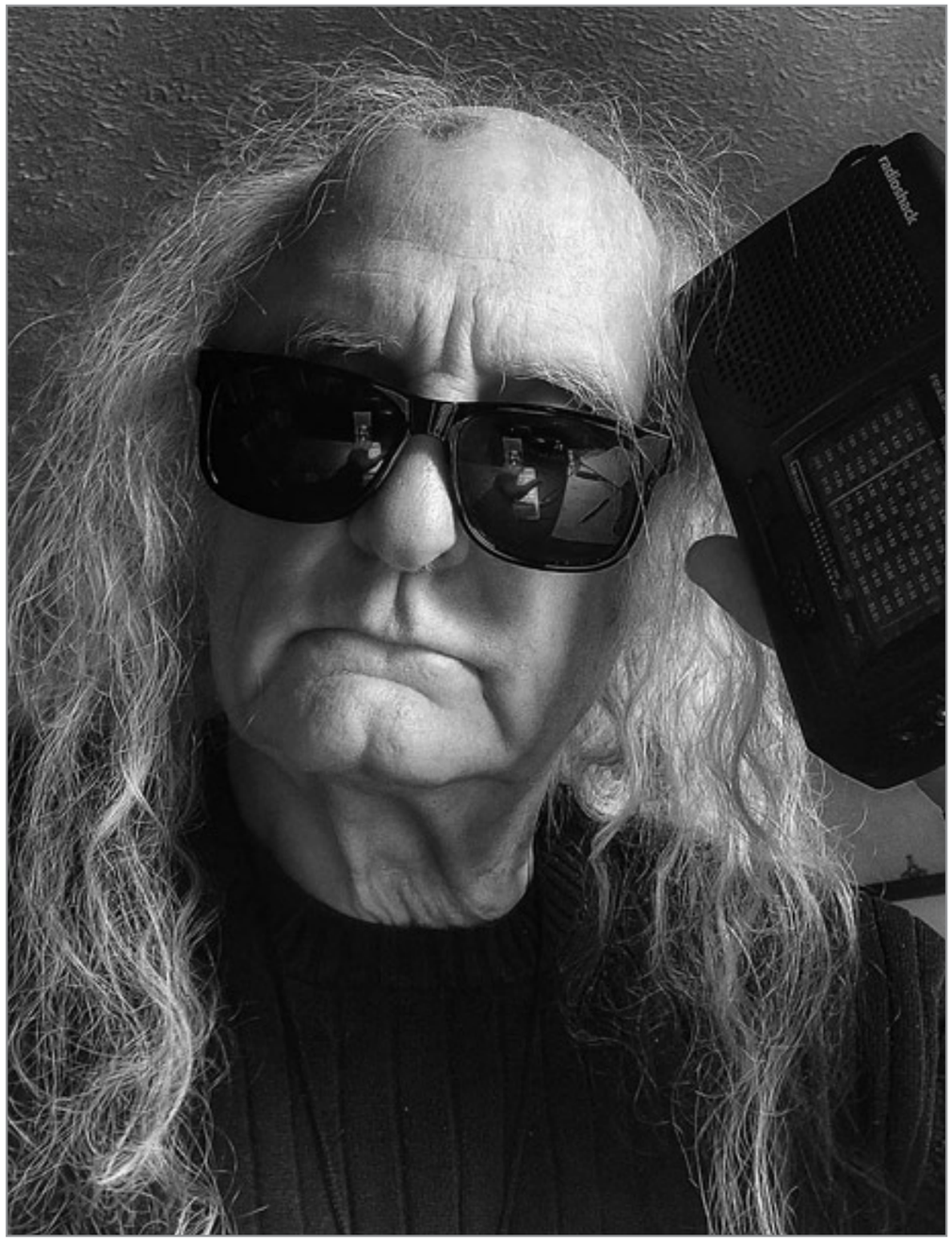
some world leaders ask for real information
they know the earth heating is a major issue
i have listened to them speak on the tv news
with clarity and concern and wisdom

to vote for intelligent leaders could be a start
towards helping nature and planet continue
for if we do not tackle this catastrophe now
it will be the end of the nature and wildlife we love

in democratic countries our voices will be heard
if we shout loud and make statements with purpose
and while saving the earth is not entirely in our hands
we can do much to bring attention to the issues

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

© Stephen House
2026 November-December POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net



Joe Kidd

Joe Kidd is a working poet/songwriter/artist. He has been awarded by the Michigan Governor's Office and the United States House of Representatives for his efforts to promote social justice, cultural diversity, and world peace. Joe was appointed Lifetime Beat Poet Laureate by National Beat Poetry Foundation, 2026. He has been named Official Poet and Ambassador of Peace by the Government of Bir Tawil North Africa. Joe holds Honorary Doctorate in Literature from Birland International Royal University. He is ordained in a non-denominational religious order. Joe Kidd has received numerous awards including: Songwriter of the Year, 2024 Platinum Eagle Award, Champion of Diversity Award from Images & Perceptions Organization, Official Woody Guthrie Poet 2026. He is a Pushcart Prize nominee 2025. He has toured 9 countries in Western Europe. Also Canada, Mexico, Jamaica, Greece, and 36 states in USA. He has been featured in international anthologies, magazines, websites, festivals, and other personal appearances worldwide. Joe is a member of National & International Beat Poetry Foundation, 100 Thousand Poets For Change, Poets Against Racism and Hate, International Singer Songwriter Association, Michigan Rock & Roll Hall Of Fame. Joe Kidd has published 2 full length books and a number of music recordings with his partner Sheila Burke. In 2020, published The Invisible Waterhole, a collection of spiritual and sensual verse. In 2024, published a short auto biography titled 'Digging Underground - Portrait of a Beat Poet Laureate'.
Official Website: www.joekiddandsheilaburke.com

My Father's Hammer

in the days of thunder in the sky
reach out, the instrument demands attention
children run from such a power
tiny feet blistering in cold wet shoes

come, assist me to lift this tool
we will break the rocks that anchor our hearts
the wall that imprisons the authors of legend
shall crumble before our burning eyes

each blow delivered creates a pool
where divers break the silent night
the pearl of wisdom formed in darkness
hides below the crashing wave

dear mother, where does beauty survive
beyond the sweetness of your smile
the secret temperature, the river of blood
the blanket that covers the revelation

free me now, kiss my cheek
put your arm around my shoulder
I shall walk this path of jagged stone
bread and water, the feast of souls

I have swung this hammer, this heavy load
dropped it to crush the target below
held and protected between my eyes and my legs
awake in the dreamtime, deployed and explored
hear the inheritance, hammer is a word

© Joe Kidd
2026 November-December POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

Alina-Lavinia Grigoraş

Alina-Lavinia Grigoraş is a Romanian journalist, author, editor and translator with over 25 years of media experience, currently serving as Editor-in-Chief of the English-language publication *Romania Journal* (since 2014), based in Bucharest. At *Romania Journal*, Alina Grigoras is also writing and editing news, directly in English. Her journalistic career spans extensive coverage of politics, culture, economics, diplomacy, and heritage, including 15 years as a reporter and editor for *Nine O'Clock*, alongside early roles at *Adevărul* and *Republica*. In parallel with her newsroom leadership, Alina Grigoraș is an established children's and fantasy fiction writer. She made her literary debut in 2014 with the children's story collection *Scufia cu Vise/* The Dreams Hood (Oscar Print). In 2024, she published *Aligri și Cele Patru Anotimpuri. Volumul I – ANRIA/ Aligri and The Four Seasons, Volume I- ANRIA* (Leviathan), the first installment of a planned four-volume fantasy series that weaves themes of nature, courage, and self-discovery into an allegorical coming-of-age journey.

Part-time autumn

The summer's lazy reddish sun
Is lingering on the corner of my temple,
It will be soon forever gone
Have nothing to resemble.

Entering the halved time of breath
Raising an eyebrow in disbelief,
I do not see the leaves of death
I do though sniff the summer's thief.

The scent of autumn starts to peep
Beneath the tired living souls,
The emerald fades to sleep
After the summer's failed goals.

Time is not full now anymore,
It's broken in piles of puzzles,
Almost hardly to restore
Abandoned to harsh muzzles.

Time is broken in mosaic pieces
Like a bitter-sweet part-time,
Autumn grants us fewer leases
Tricks us towards a winter's crime.

The summer now forever gone
I enter autumn's part-time reign,
With fewer farces to be done
Hung on a menace's pain.

This onward offer chokes my time.
Shrinks it to a shorter version
As an autumn's rainy grime
Left to a part-time work conversion.

© Alina-Lavinia Grigoraş

Antebellum

Bodies hunger for pre-womb times,
Less belligerent,
More disheveled in sensations,
Freed of the clang of arms
Of all times altogether.

This war that we call living
In all its senses,
Paths and corners,
Uprooting innocence from the womb
Tears us apart.

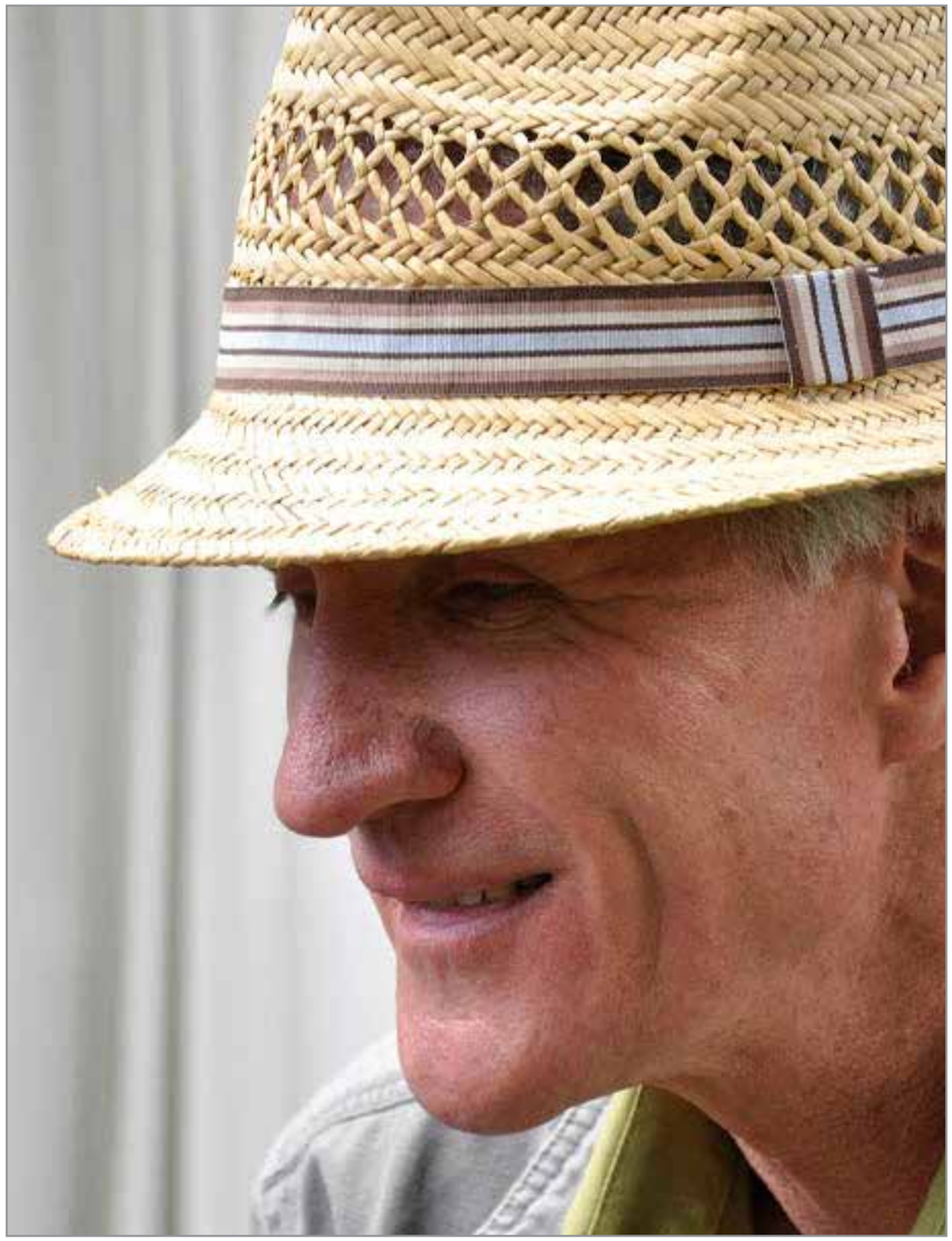
Leaves us no time to breathe,
To introspect.
Throws us to the mundane perks
Of all the lives we lived
In one deadly instant.

This war that we call living
Mummifies us in stony hardships,
In lost hopes,
Makes us long for the goosebumps
Of the inception.

We long for the antebellum times
Of our pre-birth
When we were free and pure,
Far away from the foul games
Of our future existence.

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

© Alina-Lavinia Grigoraş
2026 November-December POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net



Mark Laurent

Mark Laurent is a professional musician and writer. He's recorded over 20 albums, worked as a recording producer and session musician, as well as touring NZ, Australia and the UK for several decades. Mark has published 5 collections of poetry, an illustrated children's book, and has written numerous articles and reviews for New Zealand and international magazines. He is currently putting the finishing touches on a candid, novelized memoir of the 1970s hippie scene in Aotearoa. He lives in Auckland

At Tahora

after the Christchurch earthquake

She was shaken up
more than you'd guess
in the broken city

Scared too
to see her baby girl
catatonic, temporarily
housed in the psych ward

This kind of broken-ness
isn't put back together
with sticking plaster

Though a different kind
of band aid
fiddle, guitars and voices
seems to help.

Tahora is a small music festival on The Forgotten Highway, Taranaki.

© Mark Laurent

Auckland

This town is puckered with mountains
A many-breasted mother earth
Drowsing under ruffs of cloud
Water lapping at her hems

Tamaki Of A Thousand Lovers
More than lines on a map
Beaches, birdsong, mirror-glass
Uncertain weather

Down on these streets
The broken and the bankers
Everybody's asking
Someone else to give

Red man stop
Green man walk
10 – 09 – 08 - 07 -
Going somewhere

Friday night Queen St
Preachers preaching
Sirens screeching
Hare Krishna ch-ch-ching

Midnight in the laneways
No-one seems to sleep
24 hour party people
Crisp air carries voices

Voices of a thousand lovers.

Crucifix

The cross of Jesus haunts my life

As a child I saw it, Sunday by Sunday
in its place of honour at Mass
held it in my hands at Rosary
fascinated by the tiny figure stretched
swooning upon the necklace of prayer

Then there were the stark
Christless crosses of Protestantism
– as if they rejected the path of suffering
along with the Pope

The delicate floral traceries of my
little, silver hippie cross
which I suppose marked some vague spirituality
I was hoping to own and display

I have stood, sat or knelt
at the foot of this cross
- a mixture of awe, thankfulness and guilt

I've felt like the pinioned victim
who may never get taken down

I have wished for that kind of glory
that courage

I've wanted to create as much distance as possible
between myself and that flag-staff of tears

The cross stands, like a sign tree
at every intersection on my journey.

© Mark Laurent

Patrick Burke

Patrick Burke lives in sea-side Rush, north of Dublin, Ireland. Having spent four decades in the world of work (manufacturing and training) he stepped back in early 2025 with an open mind as to what might fill the void, not expecting it would be poetry. A promoter of food-growing and sustainable living in his local community, inspiration comes from nature and the unfolding threats of biodiversity breakdown and climate change. Reflections on childhood memories and the loss of family members during the Covid pandemic have also been sources of creative material. With past experience curating music performances in his local library, Patrick has added poetry-readings by local writers to the mix. A local published poet has also kindly agreed to take on the role of mentor. Drawing on a love of structure and form founded on an engineering background, combined with the creative freedom that poetry brings, approaching writing as both an act of problem-solving and emotional release has become a daily activity, with the possibility of a first collection now firmly on the horizon.

The Grieving Bees

Little brownies, little brownies, your master is dead,
The child taps, then whispers to the hive;
Sent out at midnight, the oldest boy
- the last day his father was alive.

Early next morning, clad all in black,
The new-made widow comes to implore;
Little bees, if you will, please follow,
Before the mourners knock on our door.

The bedroom window lies open wide;
But it cannot be for all that long.
Only that you might come, grieve, and sing
For your master, your single-note song.

They swarm and fly to the open sash;
Squeeze through, reforming over the bed.
A pair of beeswax candles stand lit;
Children summoned, each bowing their head.

There, the master, in his Sunday best;
Worn hands clasped in his final repose,
Disappears in an amorphous cloud,
That envelopes his burial clothes.

Clocks have been stilled; piano lid locked.
In the widow's pocket, lies the key.
Throughout the house, now only one sound:
A cello-like drone; pitch-perfect C.

In the room, cut lilies scent the air,
The bees too respectful to forage.
But all the way back, they will dally,
To gorge in the garden on borage.

© Patrick Burke

A Fish Box of Earrings

Once at Christmas, I gave you earrings
and it has become a thing – a yuletide tradition;
like a spawning fish, I return to the same place.

Each year, different staff: part-timers – college students;
patiently unlock cabinets, retrieve items,
drape them over their hands for me to appraise.

Though deferring to the owner when it comes to price;
the tag just a suggestion, an opening gambit:
she welcomes the haggle.

Always the same ritual: she obliges
with a handwritten note, packed with the gift,
that you love to read on Christmas mornings.

Edwardian rolled gold and cranberry glass

Over time, accustomed to that most female of spaces;
- often the only male, working my way
around display cases; narrowing choices.

Gold tone on silver with lapis lazuli

In our bedroom, you store them in the walnut box
that I gave you in the early days;
before we became an item.

1960's silver and black onyx and malachite

A gift I carried back from San Franscisco;
tucked inside, a note from its maker;
- and a Navajo chant.

Happily, with abundant showers, may I walk.
Happily, with abundant plants, may I walk.
Happily, on a trail of pollen, may I walk.
Happily, may I walk

On the lid – a fossil of a tiny fish,
the note says fifty-five million years old,
now fifty-five million and forty.

© Patrick Burke

Eyeing the Bubble

Gaudí said, *the straight line belongs to men, the curved one to God.*
My father, who worshipped the sun, would have loved Barcelona.

What might he have made of its unfinished basilica;
he, who traversed the Suez Canal; epitome of the straight line.

Put to work for the summer I crank by hand the mixer;
stand upwind and shovel-feed the beast with sand and cement;

four to one; after each scoop, belches of dust escape into the hot air.
Water from a bucket, fed in sips, completes the mix.

I tip and wheel a barrowful to my father, who,
already stripped to the waist, waits at the half-built wall.

With a trowel he scoops and butters a bed of mortar,
gently placing the first concrete block;

another at the far end. Nylon builder's line
wrapped around and tensed between the two.

He taps them with the trowel butt;
up a bit - down a bit - left a bit - right a bit;

until the line against the blocks lies flat and true;
oozing mortar scrape-flicked by trowel back into the barrow.

Running a spirit level across top and sides,
he eyes the bubble, taps again - more gently now.

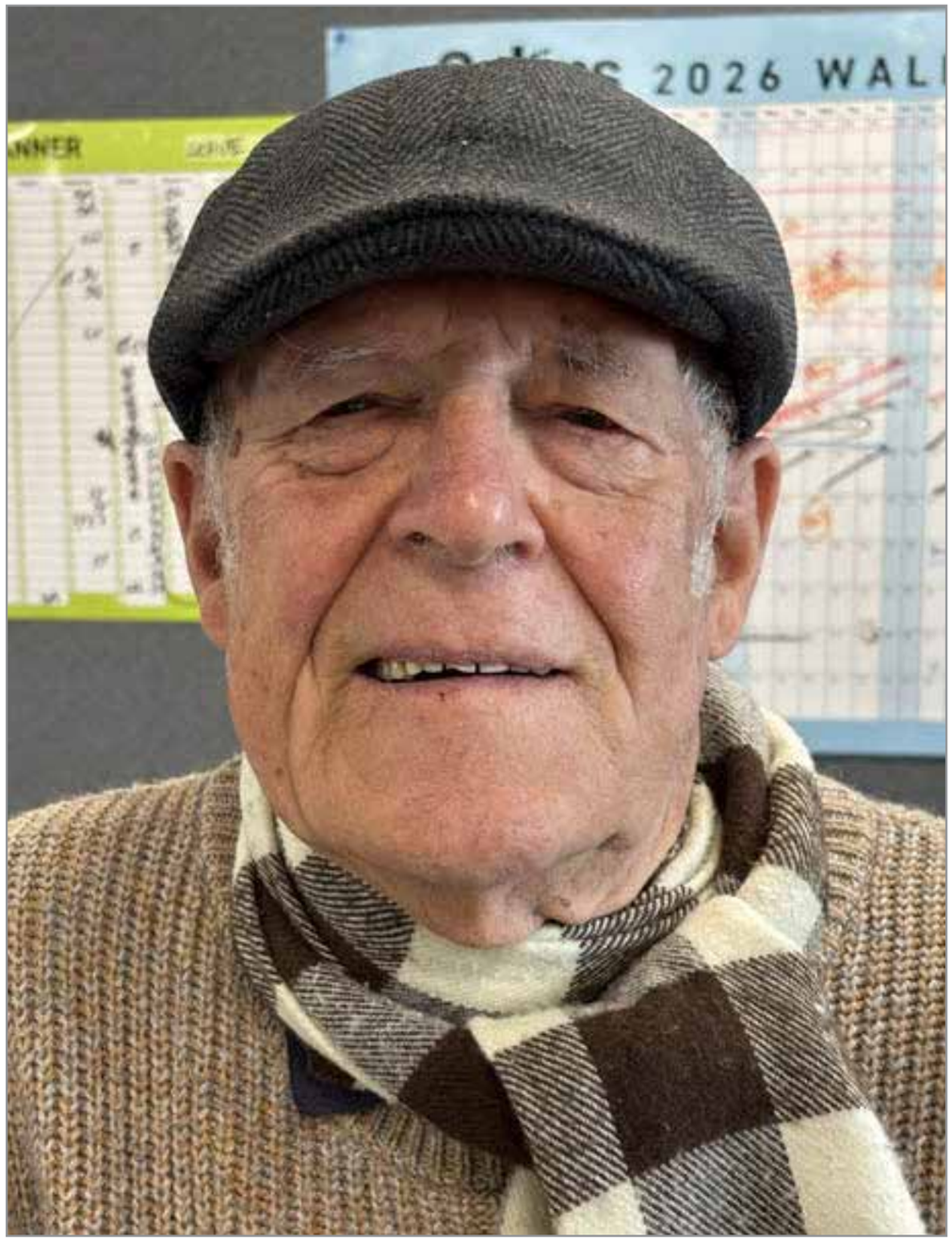
Those first blocks so important,
like quoins to the ancient Egyptians.

No spirit level for them; no nylon line.
They managed with A-frames of timber;

plumb lines of woven flax, mixing by hand,
mortar made of water, gypsum, limestone and sand.

True worshippers of the Sun; their god, Ra,
having created them, from his own tears and sweat.

© Patrick Burke



Paul Protheroe

Paul Protheroe - 82 years old. Busy community worker and volunteer. Published selected poems, *One fingered in Papatoetoe* (2006), *Sometimes like Taurus* (2014) and *Creeping along the Bloodline* (2020). Also, published poems in Mate, Presto, Takahe, Encounters, in the UK and in a wide range of New Zealand magazines especially those sponsored by the Titirangi Poets. Wrote a book for the Cambodian community living in New Zealand that has been translated into Khmer. Lives with partner in Papatoetoe Auckland,

A Reluctance To Abandon

(for P)

Our inability to “let go”
is like the adhesive that won’t budge.
We chat. It is our weekly rap.
Today she’s the triumphant actor
emerging chest-beating
if from a screen audition,
on fame’s elevating cusp.
There’s her salacious wit,
kinky referencing, aberrant humor,
euphoric feelings of levitating
beyond the tangible, skin buffer.
Tomorrow who knows
Whether to expect hissing sarcasm,
cussing, misanthropic anger,
or merely a low, cruel dig
at my latest attire.
Always lurking like an amoeba in blood,
ready to strike, is her empty dark feeling
of being unloved,
trapped in a dirge-centered limbo, minor key
or stalked by the elongating shadow
from the Pol Pot era, something strenuously denied.
Miraculously, she gets revived, rescued
through a cool draught aspect
of Buddhist logic; pain and anguish
are marinated and anaesthetized
from examining life’s transience,

continued overleaf...

© liveencounters.net POETRY & WRITING Volume Six November-December 2026 *Celebrating 17th Anniversary*

© Paul Protheroe
2026 November-December POETRY & WRITING © liveencounters.net

enabling her to hoist a bulwark
against capitulation.
It is at the cerebral cauldron
That we met our waterloo, fate;
Linguistic entanglements, age disparity,
A frustration with erudite language,
A paucity of stimulus,
Jarring sensibilities,
Troubling snags and outages
From our radiating linkage
If this connection is like an enhancing cable
In the remote ocean depth,
yet our yearnings are ardent;
To skip back over fifteen years
Of alluring, stored memories, love,
laughter, caring, steadfast respect,
Something we will never disown.

Photograph by Mark Ulyseas.

© Paul Protheroe

Anju Jha

I have written my debut collection of poetry, *Specks of Epiphanies* and submitted for acceptance. It presents a gamut of universal themes representing love, loss, hope and resilience. I am a public servant in a large federal government agency and have recently completed Master of Creative Writing at Macquarie University in Sydney. I have also undertaken a short-term creative writing course and a poetry workshop at Sydney University with Mark Tredinnick, an Australian poet, essayist, and teacher.

Allegiance to my mother

One dreary summer day
My mother dies -
leaving a yawning abyss
– I sob, eyes teary and glistening.

A month after, my grief persists
- I find reprieve as

my mind glides to my sparkling blue
journal which I use as a catharsis to vent my grief.

I begin to pour my anguish
coursing through my brain into my poems.

Each poem takes a rhythmic move with
every enjambment; every pause.

It captures every memory
- of her blooming garden with flowers swaying

of sparkling floors in our home, she kept.
Of her love that lingered in the cosy walls
her aromas wafting from the kitchen.

My senses inflated with
- her favourite tunes that reverberate.

I capture every everlasting bond she built
– in soft rhythms of poems devoted to my mother.

© Anju Jha

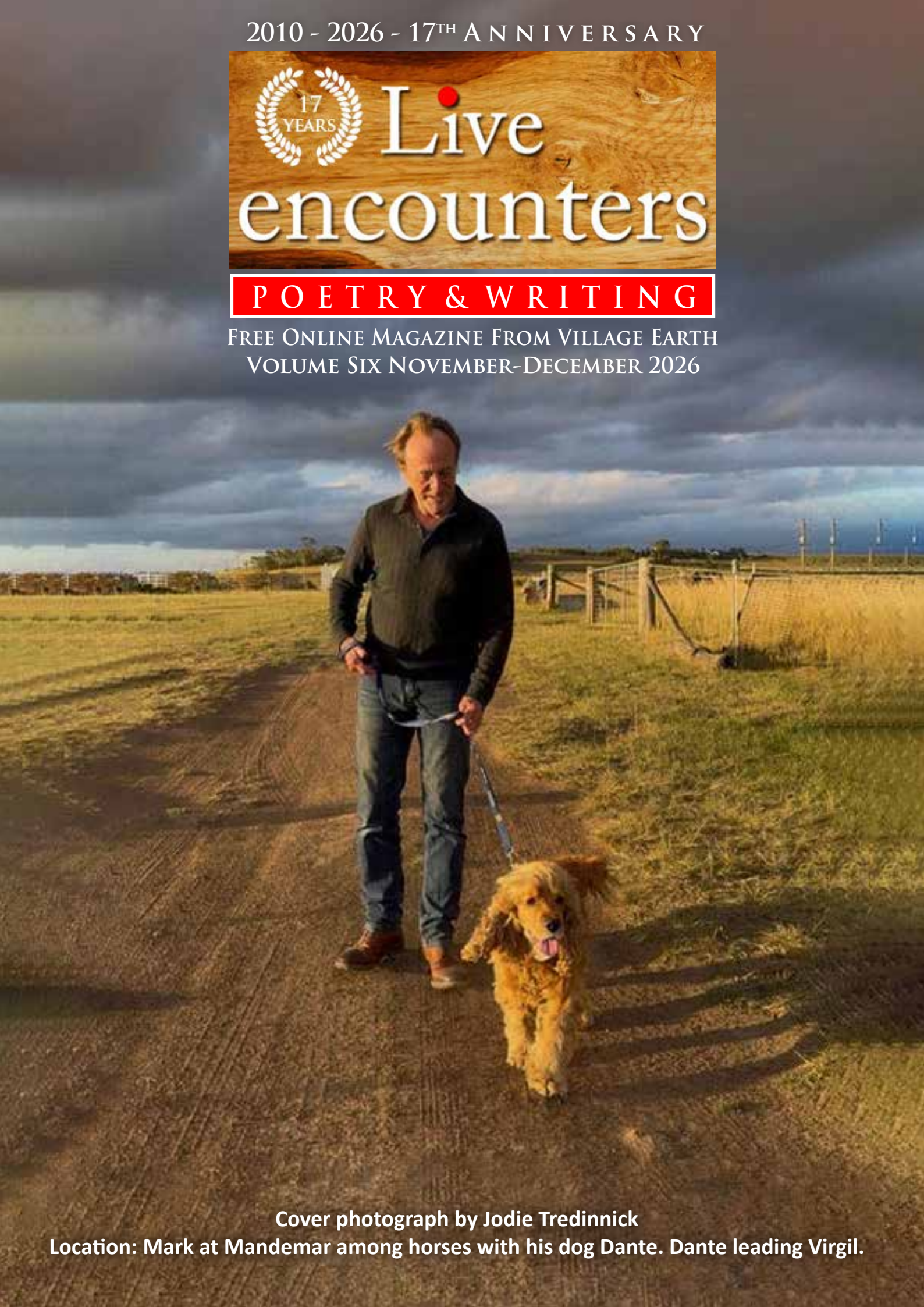
2010 - 2026 - 17TH ANNIVERSARY

17 YEARS

Live encounters

POETRY & WRITING

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



Cover photograph by Jodie Tredinnick
Location: Mark at Mandemar among horses with his dog Dante. Dante leading Virgil.