

THE MADRID REVIEW

ISSUE 7



CARMEN MANSILLA

MICHEL FABER

JM COETZEE

ANNE CARSON

POLLY CLARK

BRIAN BILSTON

ROBERT SULLIVAN

JOHN LIDDY

ANGELA SLATTER

MERCÉ RODOREDÀ AT

THE CCCB

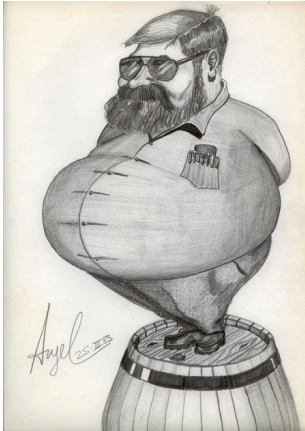
TREASURES OF THE

BIBLIOTECA NACIONAL



Attention Poets!

¡Atención, poetas!



ÁNGEL ARÉVALO
CAMACHO, Madrid
1956, Arquitecto jubilado.
Es padre de un joven con
discapacidad intelectual y
para él inventó un reloj
analógico de lectura fácil,
el RelojAngelote, cuyo
lema es “Si sabes leer
sabes la hora”
Es presidente de la
Federación Madrileña de
Deportes para personas
con Discapacidad
Intelectual. Es dibujante y
caricaturista aficionado.

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VOCES CON EXPERIENCIA



The Madrid Review is proud to introduce two new initiatives designed to widen and celebrate the range of voices in our city. Voces con Experiencia is an open call for writers aged 70 and over, inviting poetry and short fiction that reflect a lifetime of stories, insight, and creativity. Young Voices is a poetry initiative for young people in Madrid, offering emerging writers a space to share their work and be published alongside established voices. Anyone interested in taking part, or learning more about how to submit, can find full details on our website at themadridreview.com.

YOUNG VOICES VOCES JÓVENES



The Madrid Review se enorgullece de presentar dos nuevas iniciativas creadas para ampliar y celebrar la diversidad de voces de nuestra ciudad. Voces con Experiencia es una convocatoria abierta para escritores y escritoras de 70 años o más, que invita a enviar poesía y relato corto que reflejen una vida de historias, experiencia y creatividad. Voces Jóvenes es una iniciativa de poesía dirigida a jóvenes de Madrid, que ofrece a nuevas voces un espacio donde compartir su trabajo y publicarlo junto a autores consolidados. Todas las personas interesadas en participar o en conocer más detalles sobre cómo enviar sus textos pueden encontrar la información completa en nuestra página web, themadridreview.com.

This issue of The Madrid Review is dedicated to Alex Pretti and Renée Nicole Good, who died in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in January 2026 following encounters with U.S. federal immigration agents. We stand with the people of Minnesota in mourning and solidarity.

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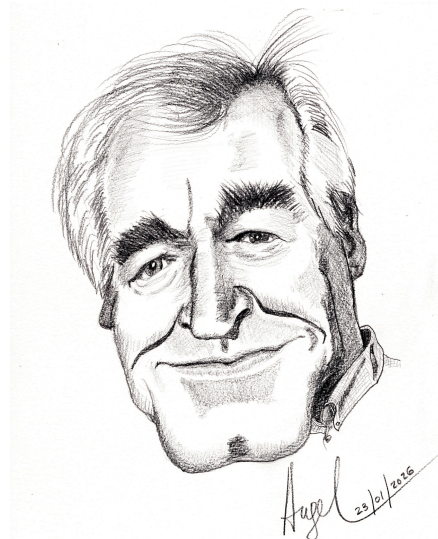
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POETRY BIOGRAPHIES

Merlin Flower is an independent artist and writer.

Mai Trang is a writer based in Hanoi, Vietnam. She works in travel industry, journalism, and film production assistance. In the last few years she experiments more with creative writing and poetry by translating poetry back and forth. To her, poetry contains both mystery and clarity, which makes it a special form of literature.

Yusef Azad is originally from London but has lived in Madrid for the last six years, where he has worked on projects for Spain's Ministry of Health and for the International Commission against the Death Penalty. His poems have been published in *The Madrid Review*, *The Brixton Review of Books* and *The Literary Review*.

Jemma Walsh is an Irish poet based in London. Her work has appeared in *The Irish Times*, *berlin lit*, *The Interpreter's House*, *Banshee*, *Moth Magazine*, *The Alchemy Spoon* and elsewhere. She is a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net nominee and was recently shortlisted in The Free Verse Prize.

Donna Faulkner is a New Zealand writer and poet. Free spirited and unconventional, she came to the business of writing later in life. She's published in *The Alchemy Spoon*, *The Bayou Review*, *300 Days of Sun*, *Takahē: Hua/ Manu*, *Windward Review*, *Havik*, *New Myths* and many others. Her poetry book *In Silver Majesty* was published by the UK based erbacce press in 2024. Awards include first place in both the Loud Coffee Press Annual Haiku and Rune bear Drabble competition 2022. Second place for nonfiction *The Rag Doll Rider* (Havik, 2023); second prize for literature *A Summons to the Revolution* (ZO Magazine, 2025); and honorable mention for poem *Old Friend* (Dark Poets Club, Small Space Deep Impact, 2025).

Gopal Lahiri is a bilingual poet, critic, editor, writer and translator with 32 books published, including eight solo/jointly edited books. His poetry is published across more than one hundred and fifty journals and anthologies globally His poems are translated into 18 languages and published in 17 countries. He has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize for poetry in 2021 and Best of the Net for poetry in 2025. He has been conferred First Jayanta Mahapatra National Award on literature in 2024 for his significant contribution in Indian English Writing. His poems were included in the *Penguin Book of poems on Indian Cities*.

Simon Leonard is a writer of poetry in English and short fiction in English and Spanish. A secondary school teacher most of the time, he has variously been a tobacco picker, lily bulb sorter and car test controller. His poetry has appeared quite widely in small presses and online, and his first collection was published by Alien Buddha Press in 2022. Some of his short fiction has been shortlisted in competitions, although he has never won anything except a fishing rod when he was twelve.

Nazaret Ranea is a poet from Málaga, Spain, based in Edinburgh since 2017. Named one of Scotland's Next Generation Young Makars, her debut collection *Nettles* explores nostalgia, memory, and the shifting notion of home. Her work appears in over sixty publications in English and Spanish. She is the creator of *My Men and My Women*, and editor of *For Those Who Tend the Soil*, in collaboration with the Scottish Poetry Library. Nazaret has performed on BBC Radio Scotland and at festivals including the Edinburgh Fringe, Edinburgh International Book Festival, and StAnza, where she was the 2025 Poet in Residence.

Me llamo Roxana Luder, soy argentina, y amo leer y escribir desde que puedo hacerlo. Trabajo como profesora de Lengua y Literatura en escuelas de nivel secundario en mi país.

Nicholas Hogg is the author of *Tokyo*, inspiration for the Ridley Scott film, *A Sacrifice*, starring Eric Bana and *Stranger Things'* Sadie Sink. A winner of the Poetry London Presents, Gregory O'Donoghue, and Liverpool poetry prizes, his debut collection, *Missing Person*, is out now. His second collection, *Swimming with Horses*, will be published in July.

Kamila Izquierdo is a poet, essayist, and novelist born in Cuba, raised in Spain, and based in Miami. She is currently enrolled in the creative writing MFA at Florida International University, where she serves as the Assistant Managing Editor of *Gulf Stream Magazine*. Her work explores themes of home, belonging, and the figure of the modern flâneuse. She longs for Madrid and seeks to reconstruct the city through poetry. She can be found on Instagram and other social media at @kamilaizquierdowrites.

Vero.Occam.Rigah (no pronouns) – silver-haired gentlepunk, android akin and word-bug living between the folds. Mongers intentional hand-made dis/comfort zones up-cycling frayed ends, solidarity, temporary autonomous zones and queer, dissident or downright awkward lifeforms and moments, all of them niceties simultaneously method and purposes in themselves. Polymath and village's fool, adopted the name from cyborg poet André.Rigah, as both receive often the robotic slur, and Occam from the predilection for having only useful razors around. Disregards grammars, prefers english prime, and feeds and promotes the permanent change in living languages, for the sake of accessibility, universality and why not, joy.

Emma Louise Wells is a mother and English teacher. She has poetry published with various literary journals and magazines. She writes flash fiction, short stories and novels. She is currently writing her sixth novel.

Jerry Simcock is now retired and lives a quiet life, painting, writing, and gardening in East Lothian. He worked for many years as a teacher in a child psychiatric unit, latterly working with children, young people and adults needing additional support. His first novel *Giselle and Mr Memphis* was published by Vagabond Voices in 2022. Poems and Short stories have been published in *Black and Blue Magazine*, *Gutter*, *Hickathrift Press*, *Speculative Books* and Thi Wurd's recent anthology – *Earthly Rewards*. He is currently working on a second novel – *Billy Tuesday* and a screenplay for *Giselle and Mr Memphis*.

Carmen Tiderle writes zany poems for children of all ages and puts on a show when she reads them. Think of any word, and you'll find at least one verse about it in her books. Yes, she even has poems about astronaut cows! Her favorite color is summer, and her favorite animal is blue with dots. She has bangs, temporary tattoos, and believes that if people listened more to the minds of children (and trees), the world would be a better place. She is the author of 10 poetry books including *Turvy-Topsy*, *Funky Rhymes for Funny Times*, *Selfie with Elves*, *Who Put Pepper in the Sea?*, *Homer the Lobster*, and the Children's Prize-winning *Astronaut Cows*. Her texts are included in Romanian language textbooks, and she runs poetry workshops for children.

Roberta Quance is originally from upstate New York, in the Finger Lakes region. She began to write little texts like *Dandelions* around 2016/2017. In her Catalan classes the teachers wanted students to write what they called microrelats. It occurred to her that she could do the same in English. She remembered her early years and an America that had begun to change in the 80s. She was not going to go back but the past was hers, she thought, even if it seemed to be melting like a glacier. She knew she had words that she could find before the memories were gone. So she set about her compilation. She is retired from Queen's University, Belfast. Now and again she writes as a Hispanist. She lives in Madrid.

Roger David Smith was born and raised in the far north of Scotland. He has had poems and short stories featured in various literary magazines and websites including *Cutting Teeth*, *Prosetrics*, *Nerve*, *Nomad*, *The Starbeck Orion*, *The Candyman's Trumpet*, *La Rotonde Review*, *Fevers of the Mind*, *Minted*, *Haus-A-Rest*, *Suburban Witchcraft*, *Urban75* and others. He currently lives in the south of France where he works as a teacher.

Patrick Dillon lives in Ireland and writes poetry, fiction and election leaflets. His most recent book is *Medication Meditation* from Lapwing Poetry. Other publications include *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Cafe review*, *The Stedlijk Gallery* and the *Echoing Years Anthology*. He has read at the Electric Picnic and the White House Bar in Limerick. He worked with horses and as a TEFL teacher in Marbella, Melilla, Salamanca, Zaragoza and Valencia.

Scott Waters is a poet and singer-songwriter living in Oakland, California. He graduated with a Master's Degree in Creative Writing from San Francisco State University. Scott has published previously in *Chiron Review*, *Third Wednesday*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *Main Street Rag* and many other journals. Scott's second poetry chapbook, *Train of Thought*, was published in 2025 by Kelsay Books, and his poetry has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize.

Mara Bergman was born in NYC on leap-year day and lives in Kent, England. She won a *Msexia* Poetry Pamphlet Prize for her collection *The Tailor's Three Sons and Other New York Poems* and a Templar Quarterly Poetry Pamphlet Prize for *Crossing Into Tamil Nadu*. Her two full collections, *The Disappearing Room* and *The Night We Were Dylan Thomas*, are published by Arc. In 2023, Mara won the Plough Poetry Prize, chosen by Imtiaz Dharker and was highly commended in the Bridport Poetry Competition, judged by Roger Robinson. Mara is also an award-winning children's author.

John Liddy is from Ireland and lives in Madrid, Spain. He is the founding editor, along with Jim Burke, of *The Stony Thursday Book* (1975-), one of Ireland's longest running literary reviews and is on the Advisory Board of *The Hong Kong Review*. He has many collections published including *Madrid and Other Poems*, *Arias of Consolation* and *Slipstreaming in the West of Ireland* (with Jim Burke). His most recent work is *Two in One*, a collection of short stories with Liam Liddy. *Spanish Points*, a bilingual anthology of his Spanish-related poems, is currently with a publisher.

Eleanor Holmes (previously writing as Eliot North) is an ND mother-doctor-writer of prose & poetry. She lives in Valencian Country, Spain & works as an NHS GP in the UK. Widely published in print and online, in 2025 she was shortlisted for the Bridport Poetry Prize & has poems (& a filmpoem) out in: *Alchemy Spoon*, *Write Out Loud*, *Ink Sweat & Tears*, *Kaleidoscopic Minds Vol. 2* & soon in *Tendon Magazine* & *Page Gallery Journal*. She also has a poem and flash fiction piece shortlisted & published with Walk | Write | Create, for their *Walking in The Dark* competition. Her hybrid book *#Moth* will be out with Ethelzine in April 2026.

Shaanzeah Nadeem is an aspiring writer and musician from Lahore, Pakistan. She has a Bachelor's degree in English from the Lahore University of Management Sciences and has recently completed her MSc in Literature and Society: Enlightenment, Romantic and Victorian Studies from The University of Edinburgh. Her work has previously been published in *The Aleph Review* Vol. 8.

Jane Hart Dewey is a poet and psychologist from Buffalo, NY currently living in Madrid, Spain with her two kids and Madrileño husband who could and absolutely should write a retaliatory poem about her frequent butchering of the Spanish language.

Julian Gorham's two pamphlets with Paekakariki Press, *Ten Poems* and *Ten Poems Too*, were well received. A third, illustrated by the artist Nelly Dimitranova RA, is on the way. His poem and a film, celebrating the work of printmaker Paul Catherall will feature in an exhibition at Eames Fine Art Gallery, London, this spring.

Steve Denehan lives in Kildare, Ireland with his wife Eimear and daughter Robin. He is the award-winning author of two chapbooks and six poetry collections.

Soy Carlos Fuentes Bagaría biólogo de profesión pero dedicado desde hace 37 años a la educación en diferentes niveles, siempre me ha gustado escribir, principalmente poesía, pero solo para mí o para personas especiales, pero hace un año reencontré a un viejo amor de universidad y eso me motivo a volver a escribir, pero ya con el ánimo de darlo a conocer, y heme aquí proponiendo poemas que me salen del corazón para compartir con la gente sensible...

Marín Scelta nació en Mendoza, Argentina, en 1984. Es profesora de Lengua y Literatura y tallerista. Forma parte del colectivo literario y feminista "Write like a girl", cuyo objetivo es investigar y difundir la literatura hecha por mujeres y disidencias, y la creación colectiva. *Publicó Saber lo que se pierde* (Peces de Ciudad, Buenos Aires, 2016), *Otros territorios posibles* (elandamio ediciones, San Juan, Argentina, 2021), *Así ha de ser la ausencia* (El ángel editor, Quito, 2023) y *El oficio equivocado* (Falta Envido ediciones, Tucumán, 2024). Organiza el Encuentro de Poetas Cuyo-Pampa. Participa, además, en el programa radial Restos Diurnos (que se transmite por Radio UTN Córdoba, Argentina) con la columna "Los ritos", sobre poesía contemporánea.

FLASH FICTION

BIOGRAPHIES

Gustavo Gac-Artigas (1944). Poeta, dramaturgo, hombre de teatro chileno. Es miembro de la Sociedad de Escritores de Chile, de PEN Chile y PEN America. Correspondiente de la Academia Norteamericana de la Lengua Española, titular de la Academia Universalis Poetarum y de la Academia Tomitana de Constanza, Rumania. Su obra ha sido parcialmente traducida al inglés, francés y otros idiomas y reconocida internacionalmente con premios de: International Latino Book Award, International Book Award, American Legacy Book Award, Poetry Park, Róterdam, Festival Mihai Eminescu. Más reciente galardón de la Academia Tomitana: Le Coq (Cocoşul), reproducción de escultura de Brâncuşi (2025) por la dimensión de su obra poética.

Rosie Elizabeth (@rosie_epoetry) is a poet and artist based in Palma de Mallorca, Spain. Originally from the UK, she studied English Literature at the University of East Anglia in Norwich. She is the creator of Hey Heart Poetry (@heyheartpoetry_), a trilingual spoken word event and podcast. Her work has been published in *The New Absurdist*, *Mouthful of Salt*, *BarBar Literary Magazine*, *Sunday Mornings at the River*, *Snowflake Magazine*, *The Wells Street Journal* and on BBC Radio.

María Fernanda Lavado Mosca (Lima, 1998). Estudió Pintura y es bachiller en Literatura Hispánica en la PUCP. Ganó los Juegos Florales edición 2021 en la categoría de poesía. Fue finalista en la convocatoria poética *No Nos callan* a cargo de Victoria Guerrero. Algunos de sus poemas han sido publicados en plataformas de divulgación peruanas e internacionales. Actualmente está trabajando en su primer poemario.

B.R. Mourelo es filóloga y catedrática de la Universidad de Penn State, en EEUU. Toledana de nacimiento y crianza, doctora por la Universidad Complutense de Madrid, ha retomado su pasión por la escritura creativa después de varios años dedicada a la investigación académica (autora de dos libros sobre literatura cubana en el exilio, coeditora de una antología sobre el mismo tema, traductora) y ahora poeta y narradora.

John Adlam lives in Brixton, South London. He is a group psychotherapist and independent activist researcher, co-author or co-editor of four published books in the field of psychosocial studies. He is a Trustee of the Survivors' Poetry collective; a member of the Hill Poets Stanza of the Poetry Society; and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. John performs regularly at open mic events, online and in person. His poems have been or will be published in *lamb* (Wave 27), *After...*, *Full House Literary*, *Snow lit rev*, *South*, *Atrium*, *Asylum* and in several anthologies.

Mi nombre es Julián Otero. Me interesan las situaciones de comunidad y oralidad. También Las bibliotecas comunales e itinerantes. Los oficios de las manos a los pies, o como la encuadernación y la "bibliociclotología" - así la llama un entrañable amigo. La escritura es la manera que tengo para mencionar lo poético que hay en ciertas ideas; y leer me motiva en que no sé nada, preferiblemente. En las mañanas corro y escuché a alguna mirla -o avecilla- cantar en plena chupqua. He apoyado activamente procesos de defensa ambiental, compartiendo herramientas pedagógicas que nos lleven a comprender que es necesario el cuidado de zonas naturales ancestrales

Geneviève Genicot is a Belgian poet and fiction writer based in Madrid, after periods of living and working in the UK, France, Italy, Portugal and Poland. Initially a lecturer in literature and sociology at university, she later worked as a playwright for a street theater company, before becoming a published poet and fiction writer, performer, and editor of both fiction and academic texts. Her work explores journeys, cities, street poetry, and our relationship with machines and technology. She also leads creative writing workshops and literature seminars, introducing French and Belgian literature to international audiences.

Maureen Bridget Rabotin is a lifelong learner, a bit of a rebel, and is now shifting from writing professional articles about leadership to fun personal essays about living and loving her life in France and the move back to the USA. She is a bilingual, bicultural American transitioning to a new phase of life where she can spend more time pursuing her passions of writing, traveling and photography. She is a published author, TEDx speaker and keynote presenter in her previous life. In October 2025, her article *Le Dinêr* appeared in *Pure Slush*, Paris, volume 1. You can find her on Medium.

Elle Boyd lives in Nova Scotia, Canada, with her feline overlords. Her work has appeared both online and in print in several publications, including *The Garfield Lake Review*, *Vocivia*, and *Moonlit Getaway*. Elle can be found on Bluesky @TheElleBoyd. She says she wrote the story because "I just happened to see a photo of a young model with a certain expression on her face - like she was there under duress. Perhaps the photographer wanted that look. She just struck me as unhappy. The story came from her expression."

Kate Davis is a poet, storyteller and performer. She was born and lives on the Furness Peninsula of Cumbria. "I have a disability," she says "you can see it from a distance. I learned early on to keep my mouth shut and my head down. I found ways to look normal; in the end I was an expert. It took me decades, but finally I could speak. For a long time, you couldn't shut me up. Then someone in a position of authority silenced me good and proper. I dreamed of them and the spider. Then I wrote the story."

David Larmore is a writer, sometime actor, lawyer, and MFA student at the Bennington Writing Seminars. His story 'Sunset from the Living Room' recently appeared in *Thin Skin*. His story, 'Unmoored in Los Angeles' will appear in an upcoming volume of the anthology *Made in LA*. He left Indiana a long time ago and for now, David and his family live in southern California. He would like to dedicate his story to his dad, who drove the family west to Cody, Wyoming, where the car broke down.

Anita María Riquelme Suazo (Chile, 1990) Es escritora de microrrelatos y cuentos, mediadora de lectura y una de las fundadoras de la Revista Literaria Liriel. Sus escritos han sido publicados en diversas antologías y revistas literarias. Es integrante de ALCIFF y del Colectivo Internacional de Minificción. Actualmente reside en Santiago de Chile y coordina la antología *La Micrera*, pasajeros de la microficción. como dedicatoria sería: "A mi madre, cuánto te entiendo".

Originally from Seattle, Elizabeth Kate Switaj currently works at the College of the Marshall Islands on Majuro Atoll. She is the author most recently of *Serial Experiments* (Alien Buddha Press, 2025), *The Articulations* (Kernpunkt Press, 2024), and *The Bringers of Fruit: An Oratorio* (11:11 Press, 2022). *The Bringers of Fruit* won the 2023 Whirling Prize from Etchings Press at the University of Indianapolis. She holds a PhD in English from Queen's University Belfast and an MFA in Poetics and Creative Writing from the now-defunct New College of California. She has also taught English in Japan and China. "The idea for *Salvage*," she says, "originated from an October 2025 news article about two letters, written by Australian soldiers en route to fight in World War I, being found in a glass bottle on a beach more than a century later. I had been thinking about the ways a post-literate society could emerge from diminished public education—including the potential for students to set large language models to answer the questions set by large language models employed by teachers. The article led me to explore the appearance of a similar letter in a world in which literacy had been lost."

Antonia Saavedra Díaz is a Spanish writer working between fiction, food writing, and literary experimentation. Her work often explores power, systems of care, and the quiet violence embedded in everyday rituals. She is the creator of the narrative universe *Mari Estrella*, where domestic spaces, kitchens, and institutions become sites of tension and transformation. Her writing has appeared in *The Madrid Review* and other literary platforms. Antonia combines a background in gastronomy and professional practice with a literary voice attentive to structure, repetition, and moral ambiguity.

Kenechukwu Igwe is a fifth year medical student at the University of Nigeria. Writing is his first love which he mostly uses as a means of creative expression, and for further understanding of the nuances of the world around him. This is his first attempt at getting published.

Ankit Raj Ojha's writings have appeared in *Poetry Wales*, *Poetry Scotland*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *Stanchion*, *BULL*, *Indian Literature*, *Routledge*, *Johns Hopkins University Press* and elsewhere. A PhD from IIT Roorkee, Ankit is an assistant professor of English with DHE, Haryana, and a consulting editor with Routledge and Springer Nature. He is the author of *Pinpricks* (a poetry collection), has edited *Wives* (a poetry anthology) and *The Bare Bones Book of Humour* (a short story anthology), and is a founding editor at *The Hooghly Review*. "Time Bomb Down the Drain' is loosely inspired by an episode from my childhood," he says. "On our way to the market once in my home town, my father and I briefly stopped by a roundabout abuzz with rumours of a bomb planted down the drain. We never stayed to see what followed, but the absurdity of it all—the grave danger, and the idle lightness with which my townsfolk dealt with it—stayed with me. This vignette is an attempt to reconstruct, from memory and design, what could have transpired had we stayed on."

Alice Haworth-Booth is a writer and graphic designer from London. She is the co-author of *Protest!*, a non-fiction history of protest movements for children. She writes short stories and makes very short animations. "After my aunt, Elly, died last year," she says, "I started writing a series of very short stories about her and about the strange things that were happening as I kept on living in the wake of her death – the way my mind kept pulling her into everything I was doing. Making each story exactly 100 words long was a way of putting my unfamiliar emotions in order, and was a calming, game-like activity, but as time passed I decided I could give my thoughts more room, if they needed it."

Alex Kovacs (Buenos Aires, 1985) es escritor y estudiante del Profesorado en Lengua y Literatura. Vive en Gregorio de Laferrere, Argentina. Sus cuentos abordan la deshumanización, el consumo y la violencia naturalizada a través de relatos breves de tono distópico y realista. Dedicó esta obra "a mis hijos, mis padres y a mi amor Gabriela; A los docentes que acompañan y alientan la formación de nuevas generaciones y a mis amigos por el apoyo."

FLIPPING THE DAYS

MERLIN FLOWER

Guiding the evening
to a glorious night,
the day went to sleep.
the clock kept
working
like my mind.
Along with couple of mosquitoes, we
clocked the morning too.
A mild rain arrived.

immersed in rain,
the accumulated
tears didn't taste purely salty.

A DEFINITION OF TRAVEL

MAI TRANG

"A definition of travel" is inspired by a saying of my friend, Josh. Once I asked him how it feels to move from one place to another, he said "some things are added and some things are taken away". He soon forgot he said it but that phrase stuck with me for a long time, as I feel that is a very personal and very impersonal way to talk about travel. So this poem is an "extended meditation" on that more layered, more personal, more impersonal.

Choosing another
convergence of
latitude and
longitude to
think of you, to
watch the sun
rise again and
set again, to

Pay a weird attention to different ways
bodies of water

shrink and
expand, to

Give way to the way
Things are added and
Taken away

The way
elements of culture suddenly
blend or suddenly
dissipate.

SOME THOUGHTS ON SOAP OPERAS

YUSEF AZAD

in soap operas
no one mentions
the soap operas
they are watching

don't they need them
in the world they perform in?

a beetle rolls its ball
(shit)
and is satisfied
for out of it crawls
(God)
and all he shines on

still, I think they should
pick up my point
and have a soap in a soap
which we piece together
from leavings of chit-chat
and in-depth dissections
of characters by characters
culverted for the most part
like the rivers of London
but spilling up now and again
as names over open ground
to detain us

and yet I know what will happen
these traces
will absorb
both viewers and soap stars

the real fiction withers
dries dry

they know what they're not doing

JEMMA WALSH

DANCING

I wrote Dancing as a poetic keepsake, an attempt to capture a moment with my daughter, one in which I was struck by an overwhelming feeling of love for her, whilst being painfully aware that time is slipping by. It's a poem of joy grieving.

We put on *Blank Space* (Taylor's version)
and Bella starts to sway, twirl

in her burgundy dress, patterned
with foxes curled up in their tails.

Wide-eyed she mouths the words,
makes up the moves to match.

At *down in flames* she waves
her hands right to the floor.

At *I'm insane* her forefingers
loop the air at her temples.

From the window October's light
catches coppery wisps

of her long hair loosening
from its cage of morning plait.

I dance too - as instructed -
but am caught up in watching

my heart's dam burst, break
on a steady beat.

That I could ever leave her
curve of cheek to a world

that might not fully grasp
its beauty. Her.

And the sudden sting of knowing
this moment *too will pass*.

I feel sad for the strength
of the feeling itself.

Then Taylor clicks her pen
and it's over.

DONNA FAULKNER

THE FUTURE IS ŌTAUTAHI

The roads are slow
Sunday bus east bound,
past matchbox houses.
I chose an orange kayak
pay the vendor,
lose myself in the river weeds.
A shag dives in, disappears.

I push *slowly* through the flax,
out beyond the brackish waters.
Plovers sound the alert.
Somewhere
beneath our feet
the Avon fills potholes
on Pages Road.

Floating
the bones of Bexley.
The nor'wester
remembers
a playground, twin swings blue slide.
Three ducks fly left at sundown.
Port hills blacken trees.

STRANGER GOPAL LAHIRI

My poem Stranger is prompted by my friend's grief on his mom's Alzheimer disease, which is a real heartbreaker. It's like, a whole lot of emotions tied up in that - memories, longing, nostalgia, grief and pain. My friend is still grappling with the reality that his mom's not going to be the same old jovial and lively woman and it's a tough time he is facing day in and day out as his mother can't recognize him anymore. And the poem starts from there! In this poem the speaker is not me but my dear friend!

I see my mother sitting on the kitchen table
with her stained coffee mug.

Her eyes are vacant, she burrows deep into
her own realm of blank memories.

The air fills up with low breathing. She perhaps
does not take this world seriously.

Those two hands need to move, to become,
to transmute; it must find an expression.

Two birds stand near the open kitchen door
engaging in close conversation.

Palm fronds sway gently in the garden
at the edge of silence.

A squirrel comes close to the window and
then rushes back to the rim and idles in the sun.

She locates me at the opposite table and finds
me to my dismay, as a complete stranger.

SHE SPILLS ABOUT HER FRIEND WITH BENEFITS SIMON LEONARD

A story goes with this one: a couple of summers ago I ended up on an unforeseen car-sharing trip from Vitoria to Galicia (my own car had let me down in the Pyrenees on the way from Cologne). The voice I tried to catch in this poem is that of one of my companions in that odd back seat intimacy. At the time, I was working on a collection reinterpreting biblical figures in a way I hoped would be original and give them some psychology - the couple beside me offered a completely different perspective on the hope we put in love to that of the young lovers in the Songs, but one that seemed as important and genuine.

(After Song 4:2 "Your teeth are like a flock of sheep, just shorn, coming up from washing,
Each of them has its twin; not one of them is alone.")

Maybe it's his voice - abrupt, volcanic, so certain,
till you know he's half deaf, can't regulate,
or his fleecy bristle of beard, sheep shorn
by a child.

The way he looks at me - his patient,
processing delay, between the words
and what I want to say. I fill the gaps,
watch his thinking mouth; stained,
unashamed teeth telling their story
of indulgence and neglect - missing twins
far back enough in a childhood like ours
for it not to matter.

Or maybe it's the honesty of his appetites,
the birthday steak we celebrate,
wherever we happen to be - shared vices.
A common pace times in-between moments
in our uncompetitive trudge
till the next necessary break.

Or, alone in the intimacy
of stale shared air,
yesterday's cigarettes suffusing
our fabric, my fingers
find stray hairs on his shoulders,
wandering sheep, as he probes,
hopeful, clumsy, inside me.

Will it last? Will he move in?
Who knows what to want
at our age? But, if you can share
a tent with someone, maybe
you can share anything.

NOCHE

NAZARET RANEA

Noche was written during my last winter visit to my hometown of Málaga, after almost nine years living in Scotland. During that time, I had come to think of the south as a brighter place where, even in winter, it never felt fully dark, or at least not as dark or as early as nights fall in northern latitudes. I was surprised by how early night still arrived. The poem grew from that moment and reflects on distance, nostalgia, and how memory can change and sometimes unsettle the reasons we once had for leaving.

night
here
i didn't remember
the night

here at least
a night
so completely
night

maybe night
when it was time for night
but not here
not like this

so early
so completely

HUITZILOPOCHTLI

NICHOLAS HOGG

You want nothing
from today but this: the sun,
caught in a crooked pane
across the street, lasering star
at a dark room. Standing in a beam.
Holding up a hand. The Aztec
god and you.

PROCESO

ROXANA LUDER

Este poema lo pensé camino a casa, volviendo de trabajar. Buscaba escribir un texto que fuese producto del juego libre con la sinestesia, y que mostrara el resultado de un trabajo interior hecho; en este caso, el mío. El poema me llegó en plena calle, y no pude hacer otra cosa más que sentarme en la vereda (o acera) a anotarlo. Esperar llegar a casa, no era opción.

Con el fuerte pulsar de la tierra,
las flores, desde lo oscuro, se abren.
Y es un pequeño fuego que emerge,
que no quema pero arde,
que no marca pero nombra,
con centelleante sílaba aguda, grave, y esdrújula,
a lo largo y a lo ancho del paisaje.

Y la tersura de sus suaves luces toca el Instante,
perfumándolo con notas doradas
del Círculo del Sol (mi Do Ré).
El tierno murmullo de un viento sereno
colorea de naranja todo ese jardín
con acuarelado acento, que las mueve
entre el ocaso y el albor, verde y frondoso como
siempre.

Ellas me huelen y me quitan el polen
para otras nuevas rosas,
y escuchan en mi caracola la sal de un eco marino.
Y yo, a mi vez, les pregunto
con nacarada inocencia y voz carmín
si sabrá la vida que la oigo suave,
si sabrán los sueños que los veo, de azules, llenos.

HOW I ARRIVE TO MADRID

KAMILA IZQUIERDO

To my friends, who make every return feel like home. This poem traces the journey of returning to Madrid. Its sections mirror the stages of travel, as if I were a needle stitching together the city's different planes. The descent moves from air to ground, then further underground into el metro, before resurfacing in the center, where the speaker walks the final stretch home.

Aeropuerto Barajas, Terminal 4

On May 2nd, I wake over the snow
on the ridge of La Sierra outside my window
as the plane drifts and hovers, lower
and lower, settling me back
on Iberian soil. The Four Towers, the same,
which in the time I've been gone became five,
observe me from the end of the horizon,
as the wheels brawl a landing frenzy
against the tarmac. I heed an open hand,
the towers' shadow, through the glass
terminal. The roof undulations break
into oculi, let the morning in as I cross
the yellow maze diverging visitors from returners,
but I'm somehow both. Through the border
control, my red passport, a mural whispers welcome
home. I march under the ceiling eyes
beholding me as I step down,
down, down,
down.

Línea 8, Nuevos Ministerios

the S's of the Metro Lady echo anamnesis through the cars:

*sábado / sagrao' / salseo / Saed / Sabina / sangría / San Ginés / san se acabo / sastre / serrano
/ sé / segundo / semanilla / sencilla / sentimental / Septiembre / sepulcro / sed / ser / ser de la acera
del enfrente / ser del mismo paño / ser humano / ser más listo que Calisto / ser pilar / ser un cero
a la izquierda / ser todo oídos / ser un creído / ser un fiero / ser vivo y ser vino / si / sí / si Dios
quiere / sidra / sierra / siervo / siesta / sigilo / sinvergüenza / sin / sin igual / sin padre ni madre ni
perro que le ladre / sin querer queriendo / sincero / San Isidro / sobar / sobremesa / sobrescribir/
sobrevivir / sobretodo / sobresdrújulo / sobre el Cielo / sol / Sol / solos / soler / solomillo / soltar
/ solsticio / sonrisa / soñar / sonrojo / sonsacar / subterráneo / subnormal / subida / sufrido /
susurro / suspiro / suerte / suficiente.*

Which was once my voice, and now I practice how to mold myself back into those sounds.

Boca de Metro, Alfonso Martínez

I exit a station before mine. I want to reach
the hotel by foot as I've done before, before Spain was
a before in my life. Carrying my luggage up the underground,
trading the capital below for the one above.

As I ascend, the railings of the station frame
the city like a canvas atop my head rendering
the foliage of spring that stretches over the façades
of iron balconies and wooden doors.

Madrid gazes down at me when I return to her
though one of her mouths. The fumes of her arteries
replaced with the crispness of her mountain breath.
Her tunnels silenced with the chirping of her crosswalks.

And I, standing on Plaza de Santa Bárbara, trace
her branches like open arms with my eyes until I collapse
at her altitude. Her fingerprint abraded on my palm,
as if saying, *de mí no te vas.*

ECCHOLALIA

VEROCCAMRIGAH

The question "if language can change society/ies" comes back again and again and doesn't really lose pertinence. Language changes things: probably more than we think, and less than we wish it to, as tools can only do as much as the agents holding them want them and use them to. While writing the poem I considered language tools like new-pronouns for gender expression, simplified versions of languages for accessibility, inclusion and visibility, or English prime for transparency. Language tools for community making. As all good ideas, or talent, or magic, it needs work, repetition, persistence, to cast some type of shadow, where we all could take refuge.

new
linguistic
and social
repetitions
shift into
a permeable
political
world

humans we find
die a bot
or dig equity
in community
interform as real
as net or community
bind as in ember

kind moment
all dance it

so trace it
a soft project
a job in transformation

INSIDE THE MOMENT

JOHN LIDDY

VILLANELLE

What happens at the given moment or stage
In our lives can take a lifetime to tell
Like the touch of leaf recalled in old age

Happens again because you tried to gauge
The sensation, life's resounding second bell,
A moment to reclaim again the stage

To consider the moment you can assuage,
Listen for its companion in the shell
Of the present, as you seek to engage

With that drone strike, aftermath of outrage
Frozen in the breath of a child's death knell,
Realising that life is lived offstage

In time zones not on the same homepage
Where current needs clamour for the hard sell,
Demanding we wholly disengage.

But like the touch of leaf recalled in old age
We gather momentum from the well,
Mirrored in the stillness of the cage,
A moment again to reclaim the stage.

SNOWMAN

JERRY SIMCOCK

This is poem about a chance meeting, the relating of a story and its impact on the listener...how the listener is presented with a traumatic event and how the mind delivers up a series of images and thoughts from the horror of what has been described, that then get played on the internal screen before they are wiped, let go, passed over or in this case covered by snow!

The horizontal sleet is spent,
leaving fresh snow under blue skies.
I'm out on the path, taking careful steps
over snow compressed to ice,
the wind from the East still strong
and urging me on.

My neighbour, clearing snow from his car, hails me.
He talks of traffic,
of heavy tractors speeding through the village
and then

- I'd slowed down to pass through this village,
there's two cars parked on opposite sides of the street.
A lollipop lady pokes her head out from one car to see if the road is clear,
a child runs from the other side
And Wham!
The child bounced up and hit the windscreen -
blood everywhere and
my heart bursting. Pounding my ribcage.
Police and ambulance came.
I was breathalysed - no trace of alcohol.
I was advised against making contact.
I tried to get back to normal but the vision - that blood - kept returning.
I broke down when interviewed.
Later the police rang - concussion and bruising.
It still haunts me, so I'm a stickler for speed limits.

He shakes his head, gives a weak smile,
- sorry - that just came out.
I nod and say that's ok. Which is bland and trite I know.
We are both cold from the ice tipped wind
and there are no more words.
He nods
I continue to walk,
he returns to work.

I head out of the village and turn North past the Ash.
A few last keys blow out like tattered flags,
black buds are forming on the branch tips.
The full force hits me from the East.
I pull down my hood and squint ahead, following the tracks of others.
There is a bright yellow beacon ahead -
lichen on the Elder - the only colour in this grey white.
This old tree, intent on growth,
cracked, broken and re-sprouting.

By the Sycamore, at the top of the rise,

I turn and pick up pace into the cutting wind,
pulling the hood down further.

Sharp shots - the top of the field lifts off -
Geese flap, honk and shift up into the weather.
Sunlight illuminates them
as they disappear East
into the dark of the approaching storm.

And then it's on me - a whooshing gale of snow.
My glasses white out,
I turn my back to the blast and remove them,
then turn and continue on, eyes to the ground,
tracing the ice cracks and contours.

I turn south and find
shelter from houses and hedges.
Ahead of me a figure with a baby buggy emerges from a gate
and out onto the road.
The wind dies, the snow is fine powder dust.
I follow the fresh tracks of the buggy and the boot prints of its pusher.
All is still, just the gentle whisper of dry snowflakes.
A blackbird stirs and starts up a call
as I turn West up on to Main Street.
By the post box the figure lifts the child from the buggy.
She giggles as she posts the letter.
They wave as I pass.
Entering the yard I see my reflection in the glass
I'm a snowman now,
images of blood and windscreen wiped away

FALL

EMMA LOUISE WELLS

'Fall' explores what it is to soul-search, unearthing truth and raw feelings. I came up with the idea from thinking about mirrors and reflections which morphed into the concept of falling into one to find the true self.

If I allow myself,
I would fall.

Amidst gnarly thorns,
snags and deep lashes,
I would find you,
buried deep in undergrowth,
waiting to be reborn.

Sheer, lucid need
stretches sinews taut,
reaching for an invisible you:
a mirage on the horizon,
disappearing in plain sight.

To fall is to erase myself
yet how sweet the destruction -
marrying heaven and hell
in one heady gulp,
unwrapping barbed wire layers
until I rediscover you,
fall into your chest:
smudging, blurring identities.

If I fell into a mirror,
would you catch me?
Be my breathing hole?

I sense your presence
beneath reflections,
luring as a troubled ghost,
unable to settle without me.

FOUR STONES + ONE

CARMEN TIDERLE

I dedicate this poem to all the anonymous pebbles that filled the pockets of my childhood.

One morning, as I was sitting by the sea,
My thoughts revolving around time and history,
Five stones of varying size
Started chatting in English, to my surprise.

"You know," said the pink one to the blue,
"I've been around since way B.C., it's true!"
"Oh come on, Rosy, that can't be right,
Or maybe you've been keeping out of sight?
Because I really come from way back when, I do!
When they called it the Stone Age, guess whom they referred to!"
"Pfft, that's recent stuff," said the green one with glee,
"Do you remember Abel's tragedy?
Yeah... the first sibling crime?"
"..."
"Well, Cain used me at the time!"
"And Excalibur? That noble blade?
It pierced me first," the green one proudly brayed.
"Oh please," said Rocky, "I smell a liar...
Me, on the other hand, I made the spark that lit the first fire!
That's not even the end of my achievement list:
I once belonged to an alchemist...
And if I only had a microphone,
I'd prove I'm none other than the sixth Rolling Stone!"
"And what about you, Pierre?
Got any accomplishments to share?"
"Well, I suppose I could talk about my first owner...
He wasn't just anybody, he was the great Homer!
I kind of feel sorry about the poor bloke,
Passing a kidney stone really was no joke!"

Translated from Romanian by Victor Ghiga

DANDELIONS

ROBERTA QUANCE

Officially they were weeds, but they were never mown. And so they dotted the grass along the side of her grandparents' old white house. She picked the newest leaves (we'll make a salad, said her grandmother) and left the flowers alone. They gleamed like stars, but the next time she looked their mop heads were white. And the next time, they were blown away. Every year she vowed to get there first. And every year she was too late, caught up herself in that cycle and not knowing it: the explosion of seed that was the death of the flower.

RISE

ROGER DAVID SMITH

(with nods to Toni Morrison and Billy Connolly)

*This poem was partly inspired by how much I hate the phrase "she fell pregnant".
But, mostly, it was inspired by my wife, Lisa, who did all the work.*

you didn't fall pregnant
you rose with it
becoming the person you were meant to be

(no, not fat and grumpy)
big and beautiful? perhaps
but something more, much more

more than one
more than two
more than yourself, more than us, becoming a family,

a home

the life inside unfolding each day
now kicking, now stretching, but invisible
until we see a perfect face on a hospital screen, the sonar of our tiny submarine

and you realise

this is it, this is what we're here for
to make babies and look after the place
everything else is just busy-work

I watch you growing, blooming, changing
close, so close I can hear two heartbeats,
and yet a shield of skin separating me from us

and all I can do is wait and wonder

THE GLITTERING

PATRICK DILLON

Knowing no one,
having nothing to do,
I got on a bus.
It left me at the graveyard.

And there you were,
the darling friend, your presence
rowdy on the windswept grit.
Though there was no wind.

On the marble kennels
of the dead, your laughter
bounced, on their gates and chains,
their steps into the ground.

In me you marched.
The path was shtum,
the masonry humming,
sparkling an intent.

I wanted to tell you
what it was like,

the glass boxes
with the lilies left inside,
the cut-out faces
pressing to the surface.

HARDBOILED

SCOTT WATERS

*This poem is dedicated to my wife,
who knows just where to hang a
vintage curio so that it catches her
daydreaming poet husband's eye.*

My wife's collector uncle
gives us a rectangular
Egg Salad Sandwich-
25 cents sign

yellowed paper
framed behind glass
the back criss-crossed
with twine

now it dangles
from a wall in our kitchen
won't stay flush
because of

the loose twine
reminds me
of a 1930s diner
buried in the bowels

of Grand Central Station
I'm hunched
in my trench coat
hands cupping a coffee

ink from the Times
smudged on my knuckles
thinking of the dame
who left me in the rain

on Fifth Avenue
an ache in my gut
three unsolved crimes
under my fedora

I squint up
at the menu board
remember
the greasy

two bits
in my left
breast pocket
and order

an egg salad sandwich.

MARA BERGMAN

A couple of years ago, I had the great pleasure of visiting the Fundació Pilar i Joan Miró outside Palma, Mallorca. It was January and only a handful of visitors was there. I was virtually alone, left to explore the studios where Miró lived and worked, to follow the story of this extraordinary artist's life. I felt enormously happy, immersed in rooms with his paintings and sculptures. I didn't want to leave. What would it be like to live there?

I WANT TO LIVE WHERE JOAN MIRÓ LIVED

when he lived outside Palma, beyond Santa Catalina,
on a hill overlooking the Mediterranean,

a view of the Serra de Tramuntana in the distance.
I want to fill myself with the shapes

of that landscape, to be that full – full
to overflowing, with only enough time

to grab, if not paper, then charcoal, let shapes

explode on the walls

so that anyone passing through
would be bathed in contours of sea

mountain stone tree

I want to paint the way Miró painted – that freedom –

to sculpt with that concentration

heads figurines one gigantic biscuit

have that fire to reduce the world to

red yellow green blue

a line

dot

DOWN BY THE RIU GIRONA
ELEANOR HOLMES

Down By The Riu Girona is a hymn to the Valencian village I live in, with my husband and five year old son, who are both Valencian born. The landscape, language and culture of my husband, and his family, are a constant source of inspiration to me, as well as navigating motherhood as an outsider, with my son as an endlessly curious guide.

dog poo proliferates, and my son
likes to tell everyone: caca! caca!
he cries, dodging them on his scooter,
while the man across the street shouts with glee
as his tiny, elderly mother,
shuffles by to wait for the minibus
with her giant son
sending him off to day-care with a wave
every morning, come rain or shine
she nods at us and says: Bon Dia!
asks about our 'chicklet'
or that was what I thought she said,
until my husband explained
about Valencian diminutives:
the soft 'ch' sound of the 'x' in xiquet,
'kid' in this mother's tongue,
what a place for our chickpea to grow
souped up in rice and bone broth,
spooned with love, the heady smell,
of orange blossom in spring
as we ride along the 'camí vell'
old path beside the Riu Girona,
cutting through fields
where oranges are left to rot on the trees,
because there are simply too many,
and they don't fetch enough money:
back breaking work for those without
papers who are trucked in
when the season dictates
beneath the shadow of our mountain,
Segària, whose crest looks like
the upturned face of a giant
frozen by a siren's stare, (or so the legend goes)
sly smile on his craggy face
as if he saw something
he shouldn't, robber of light,
stealing rain from passing clouds
great heron glide past
then stand stock still,
egret pluck fish in the river weeds
resident ducks water-ski,
neighbourhood geese honking a familiar tune
our chicklet, a parrot behind me,
with two voices
breathes fresh water-mint in my hair,
testing his echo, echo
under the meridian bridge
we ride to school, pillion,
racing pigeons with painted underwings,
catch the early morning sun.

NOW BOARDING

SHAANZEH NADEEM

For the friends I made in Edinburgh, who shared with me their hopes, fears, playlists and snacks. You made an unfamiliar city feel like it was breathing with me.

Restless, I have looked beyond myself
for moments of clarity and belonging.
I have hopped on flights, heart racing,
the inside of my cheek bitten raw.
I have skipped, tripped, scraped a knee
on uneven cobblestones in an unfamiliar country,
drops of my blood kissing the granite:
an offering, an attachment, a plea.

I have traced bus lines, chased my shadow
down lamplit streets in biting Winter air,
laughed and wept in parks, near curious squirrels
that don't look like the ones back home.
I have torn through spaces like a soul starved,
forging bonds in paper, coffee and pain,
pocketing friendships that showed me
who I am when I am away from myself.

And for the first time in years,
in a city that surprised me,
I have felt at home in my own skin,
in the thoughts populating my head.
I have discovered days where the world
tastes less like chalk and more like syrup.
I have found that even absolutely terrified,
I can be disgustingly capable.

ENORMOUSLY DELICIOUS, BURSTING WITH SWEETNESS, LEGENDARY STATUS

JANE HART DEWEY

This poem was inspired by the joys and follies of bilingual partnering and parenting, a theme that shows up with some frequency in my poetry—an alarming frequency, if you ask a certain someone—and also, por supuesto, by my love of that certain someone. The title comes from just some of the super-LAT-ives that can be found on a bag of Sumo Citrus® oranges

So many super-LAT-ives, you say
of the bombastic slogans
on the Sumo Citrus® orange bag
placing the emphasis on *lat* instead of *perl*
which makes me giggle
the way it always does when you
with your head full of languages, you
who beat me at Scrabble e v e r y t i m e
make these subtle errors
like when you stub your great
toe or broom the floor
or introduce your grad school mentor
who went to *Jale* or announce
that you downloaded the movie
Puss and Boots
but pronounce puss
not like the *poos* of adorable kittenness
but the *pus* of a leaking
wound and when I tell you what you've said
we are a tangle of gasping, soundless heaving
for a solid twenty minutes
bellies shaking, cheeks aching
storyboarding the plot
of *Pus and Boots* as our bewildered children sit
blinking in the backseat
just trying to hear the damn movie

SILENCIO URBANO

CARLOS FUENTES

*A MLS por ser mi musa inspiradora
Siempre en mi corazón*

Escucho tu silencio ciudad de poesía
Un silencio que suena a desvarío
Camino entre tus calles y escucho el eco de mi fantasía
Añoro el sonido del silencio y el ruido del vacío

Urbe de hierro y cemento si vieras cuanto te siento
Te extraño en el silencio y te recuerdo en el momento
Sentarme en tus banquetas me genera sentimiento
Eres como un espacio frío, vacío y lento...

Tu silencio emite un canto
Que cuando lo escuchas es como un manto
Cubriendo tu cuerpo y tu rostro del espanto
Actuando como si fueras un santo

Déjame creer en ti ciudad vacía
Me escondo tras de ti a ver quién te espía
Y utiliza tus misterios como guía
Eres como un vampiro que esconde sus secretos en el día

Quiero sentir tu esencia caminando todo el día
Recorrer tus calles, fuentes y avenidas siempre me da energía
Me siento entre las bancas de tus parques para estar en armonía
El caso es que esta noche despierto en agonía

Hoy el peso del tiempo y del silencio me genera apatía
El caso es que entre sueños escucho el ruido que bullía
El sopor del silencio siempre me adormecía
Porque yo nunca supe que a pesar de todo siempre te amaría
Ciudad de fantasía...

LOS TILOS SE HAN DADO POR VENCIDOS

MARINÉS SCIELTA

El poema está dedicado a mi padre y es parte de un libro entero dedicado a él. Hablo desde la casa de su infancia, su patio, el lugar en el que crecieron y murieron esos tilos. Para las Pascuas, cada año, íbamos a visitar esa casa porque era la casa de mis abuelos, aún hoy la visito. Por eso mismo la simbología del madero, de la crucifixión se entrelazan con la enfermedad y la muerte de mi padre.

Los tilos se han dado por vencidos
dicen que no hay explicación posible
pero tampoco remedio

como en huelga de hambre
han asumido un destino de protesta
sin más daño que la luz

miramos el horizonte
y el reloj marca las tres de la tarde
como un rezo
pedimos el día de la pascua

caminamos las estaciones del calvario
cada vez más solos
y ya nadie escucha las letanías
de esa peregrinación

la tarde ha traído un sople desnudo
para barrer las hojas de la parra
que, puntuales, no dejan de caer

¿cuánto cuesta mantener con vida
lo que amamos
si aferrados a la suerte algo parece
crucificado y a punto de sangrar?

donde posemos la última mirada
haremos un refugio para lo claro
donde creamos cavar el pozo de la ausencia
plantaremos
en su lugar
el perdón

un madero marca el sitio de todos los sacrificios
la belleza puede crecer intacta
todavía
debajo de su sombra.

CREDO

MARÍA FERNANDA LAVADO MOSCA

Credo

Creo en el sol y en todas las formas circulares

Creo en la perfección áurea

Creo en la cima del mundo y sus orígenes

Creo en el dolor circular

Creo en la gracia ondulante

Creo en la caída naranja

Creo en el movimiento caudal

Creo en las cuevas en las ramificaciones

Creo en la pena vertical

Creo en la caída y la mano que levanta

Creo en la mirada del ojo y la pupila del ojo la oreja del ojo, la huella dactilar y su lágrima

Creo en el ombligo del mundo en sus fibras de hierro y en su oscuridad

Cuando pregunto dónde estás dios es porque nos ciega la noche

en la mañana cómo te veo y cómo tú me observas

diriges la naturaleza y el enojo del agua

Tu sabiduría eligió la libertad de los seres humanos

pero cómo este libre albedrío me aprisiona

Cuánto tiempo perdí

pero creo en tu grandeza circular

y tus movimientos serpiente que se alimenta de sí mismo y se renueva

Creo en la furia de tu ser

Creo en el fénix que revive de tu ceniza

Creo que tu odio es justificado y tu amor nutre mis huesos

Creo en tus dedos de sangre pendulantes

perfectamente circulares que

alivian el laberinto infierno invierno del tiempo.

THE ARRIVANTS

JOHN ADLAM

This poem addresses longstanding themes and preoccupations in my poetry and prose - and arises specifically out of a collaborative project with the Algerian-born, Franco-Spanish artist Patrick Altes. 'The Arrivants' is not an ekphrastic poem responding to one particular piece, but Patrick and I are working together to generate a range of poetic texts and paintings that resonate on psychosocial themes of human mobility, unsettledness, diaspora and sanctuary, relying on our attunement, synchronicity and unconscious process in the shared inter-subjective space.

Sanctuary is the blush
of a sudden caldera sunrise,
a hidden laurel grove

in a hooded valley crouching –
a lazarette for a quarantaine.
I dare not stain the silence.

We've been on the road
since the day the world
ended. All that we are

is muscle memory and water.
Mica glints in the granite
the way recognition sparks

in the grey-deep walls
of your eyes. An arrivant
grace of angels range

in the grave-green glade.
The amaryllis light weeps
teardrops amid the treetops.

In apocryphal chambers,
stone whispers to stone
over chthonian bones.

SO LONG FEBRUARY, SO, SO LONG
JULIAN GORHAM

The shortest month can often feel the longest, but the dark days got darker this year when my friend Katya died. I wrote this seeking a sort of solace.

So long February, so, so long. I'm
Glad to see you're done and gone.

Now, we're on the slog away from
One more somnambulising coma.

For, once the time with no edges
Unclasps, we can feel the horizon.

Lungs exhumed from winter's tomb,
Up from flocculence and overwhelm.

The winding climb to sunkind idyll, a
Ziggurat that shrinks the race to apex.

Proceed thus to the rush and plush
Of flowered and colourfielded spring.

Where airwash hits, a spritz on skin,
All lemon zest and unchecked vim.

Culminating in the manumit moment
Of a summited summer, nonpareil.

Brained in life's punctuation as icon.
A riot minuted to be delerious best.

One only knows when looking back
From February's next long langour.

LOS TILOS SE HAN DADO POR VENCIDOS

MARINÉS SCelta

El poema está dedicado a mi padre y es parte de un libro entero dedicado a él. Hablo desde la casa de su infancia, su patio, el lugar en el que crecieron y murieron esos tilos. Para las Pascuas, cada año, íbamos a visitar esa casa porque era la casa de mis abuelos, aún hoy la visito. Por eso mismo la simbología del madero, de la crucifixión se entrelazan con la enfermedad y la muerte de mi padre.

Los tilos se han dado por vencidos
dicen que no hay explicación posible
pero tampoco remedio

como en huelga de hambre
han asumido un destino de protesta
sin más daño que la luz

miramos el horizonte
y el reloj marca las tres de la tarde
como un rezo
pedimos el día de la pascua

caminamos las estaciones del calvario
cada vez más solos
y ya nadie escucha las letanías
de esa peregrinación

la tarde ha traído un soplo desnudo
para barrer las hojas de la parra
que, puntuales, no dejan de caer

¿cuánto cuesta mantener con vida
lo que amamos
si aferrados a la suerte algo parece
crucificado y a punto de sangrar?

donde posemos la última mirada
haremos un refugio para lo claro
donde creamos cavar el pozo de la ausencia
plantaremos
en su lugar
el perdón

un madero marca el sitio de todos los sacrificios
la belleza puede crecer intacta
todavía
debajo de su sombra.

MIS VERSOS SON SEMILLAS LLEVADAS POR EL VIENTO

GUSTAVO GAC-ARTIGAS

a esos versos que caminan en la bruma buscando la caricia de unas manos

a veces caen en el desierto
y conversan con los cardos secos
o se sientan a escuchar explotar las rocas
en el frío de la noche

a veces
caen en el mar
y hacen el amor con las sirenas

a veces
vientos huracanados los alejan de los hombres
y se transforman en cometas
que buscan regresar en una estrella

a veces
las más afortunadas
llegan a tus manos
y mueren al cerrarse un libro
o devorados por los ratones

estos
mis versos que caminan en las brumas

MY VERSES ARE SEEDS CARRIED BY THE WIND

GUSTAVO GAC-ARTIGAS

to those verses that walk through the mist in search of a caress. Translated by Priscilla Gac-Artigas.

sometimes they fall in the desert
and speak with the dry thistles
or sit to hear the rocks crack in the cold of night

sometimes
they fall into the sea
and make love to the mermaids

sometimes
hurricane winds drive them far from humankind
and they become comets
trying to return on the trail of a star

sometimes
the luckiest ones
reach your hands
and die when a book is closed,
or are devoured by mice

these
my verses that wander through the mists

COME BACK TO LIFE

ROSIE ELIZABETH

Come back to life is a poem from my unpublished collection Pixel eyes don't cry (but yours do). It was written while I was settling into the rhythm of working online again after some time out. The poem points at that niggly feeling of wanting to be somewhere else: outside of the body, outside of time and outside of a profile. However, in being unable to do so, the narrator's energy pings back to its own desire: "an imagination that cums in red". I dedicate this poem to any artist who uses their imagination to escape. Never ignore its power. It's your way of colouring any situation - whether it's "real" or not.

What is a moment but a moving point?
the pause the breath from memory's own making
if I can't think myself out of it, I'll imagine it

this air, not mine, breathed in, before out
if not opened, it's gone and I can't laugh for counting
all the faces that I made love to, and left to then

walk around Plaza España and pretend like
they're dancing

this is ridiculous, another thought
this is love, a not-me-gut-pull
this is not real, a soul knowing

an all-too-felt symptom of withering at a screen and wanting to climb up up up
and into someone's split for blood and breath

while I watch my corpse below, greying at a lack of vegetation and
an endometriosis problem that never cured

all to have a moment
a green dot at the side of a profile
and an imagination that cums in red, refusing to ever
stop
creating.

THIS MORNING

STEVE DENEHAN

For Charles Bobbett - much loved and deeply missed by his wonderful children, Katie-Anne, Girvan, Judy, Rory, and Oliver.

Did you have a shower
put on deodorant
brush your hair

did you choose
a particular top
a favourite pair of trousers
odd socks or matching

did you have a big breakfast
rashers and sausages
eggs and toast
tea or coffee

maybe just a bowl of cereal
a glass of orange juice, or
perhaps
no breakfast at all

did you clean your teeth
rinse with mouthwash
take a deep cool breath
before you jumped
this morning
from Ashbourne Bridge

VOL-AU-VENT B.R. MOURELO

Vol-au-vent nació una noche de diciembre al calor de la amistad y por un desafío intelectual muy divertido. Esta pequeña pieza está dedicada al entrañable grupo de amigos reunidos ese día en Pensilvania alrededor de una buena fabada.

Gildas

¡Piparra mía!
le dijo la aceituna al boquerón.
Ven aquí tú, salá,
que tu fuego me encandila
y hace sentirme mejor.

¡Piparro mío!
le dijo el mejillón al pepinillo.
Ven aquí tú, bien curtío,
que tus ojos me traen guiños
de este largo camino
entre el vino y el palillo
que nos sujeta a los dos.

¡Piparra mía!
le dijo la anchoa a la patata frita.
Ven aquí tú, bendita,
que me quiero recostar
en tu loma bien salada
como las olas del mar.

Canapés

Canapé, canapé,
que te busco saltando con un pie.
Mi cestita de manjares
que preparo con andares
y con miel,
de caviar y de lunares,
ay, qué bien.

Canapé, canapé,
uno, dos y tres.
Como uno con la mano,
otro tomo y lo engalano
con la salsa que le pones sin estrés.

Canapé, canapé,
te los bailo del revés.
Me los como, me los pido
y me siento un consentido
cuando veo que los vuelves a traer.

Nidos de hojaldre

¿Qué es un beso?

Me preguntas mientras tomo pan y queso.

De tu savia me embeleso
y deseo tu bocado con exceso
mientras pienso en ti con mucho seso.

Bien te ves:
ofreciendo la tortilla
que es una maravilla
de patatas y cebollas a la vez.

Hay que ver,
me divierto con las cosas de comer.
Con piparras y unas gildas
cervecitas y un coctél,
se termina la bandeja de entremés.

Gilda aquí, Gilda allá:
de lo mejor, es verdad,
con vermú y aceitunitas
pa' sellar nuestra amistad.

EL DESEO DEL HOMBRE DESNUDO

JULIÁN OTERO

Escribí El deseo del hombre desnudo pensando en la indefensión, en mi desnudez. Alguna idea sutil tras pensar en el cuidado propio, pero que se sustenta en lo carnal y aún etéreo.

El deseo del hombre desnudo
supeditado al tacto de una mano
imaginaria

No así
la mano ha sido el viento
la trama de hojas de terciopelo
y su revoloteo
la jugada desertora

en un rastro cubierto de maraña

El hombre común y carente
sediento de sus lagrimas
no ha llorado desde que desnudó su
cuerpo
se entregó a la altura
al risco
al borde
y a su mirada expansiva sobre la lejanía

Desnudo ante las aguas
cubierto por un abrazo que se adentra
en su interior

Y por la sangre empieza
por el calor del hombre saciado
que observa los roquedales

a conjurarse empieza por el aliento

Al viento se entrega
la hoja liberada,

caer y caer.

¡El hálito universal!

A FRIEND IN NEED MAUREEN RABOTIN

Sunday 2:15 pm

"I set up the Scrabble board in the dining room. What time does Pierre get back?"
"He'll be back around 3. It's just an overnight trip to check on the house. He said there's a problem with the alarm."
"Want a drink or something or should we wait?"
"I'm fine. Have you heard from him?"
"He usually texts me when he closes up the house. (*Ring*) This must be him"
"Madame Dupont? "
"Yes. Who's this?"
"I am Dr Moret from the emergency room at Creil Hospital. We need you to come here. There's been an accident."
"An accident? A car accident? Who?"
"Your husband was brought in and we've put him in an artificial coma. We need to know if he takes any meds. And if you or a family member can come quickly"
"I live over an hour from there. Will he be ok? What happened? Where's the Porsche?"
"We can't say anything over the phone. Tell me any meds he takes. And get here as soon as you can"
"Marie, get his prescription in the medicine cabinet."
"Here you are. Everything ok?"
"Get the keys to the BMW on the kitchen counter"

Sunday 3:00

"I'll drive"
"Ok. I'm calling my son"
"Hi. It's Mom. Are you busy?"
"Just finishing lunch here. What's up?"
"I've got some bad news. The emergency room at Creil Hospital just called. Your father had a car accident. He went to the lake house to check on the alarm system. It's been tripping up. Marie and I were waiting for him to come home when the hospital called. She's driving me there now. Is there a tracker on the Porsche?"
"I don't know. Let me check. No, but his phone has a GPS. I see it's moving. It's heading to the house. This must have been a burglary. Call the police."
"You call. I'll call the alarm security company. They were supposed to meet your father there this morning."
"Mom, Dad's phone is pulling into the driveway".
"Marie, drive to the house. We can go to the ER later!"
"No. Hang up". Marie pulled the car off to the side of the road. She reached out to touch her friend's arm.
"It's not a burglary. He must have been with his mistress."
"What are you talking about?"
"I was sure you knew"
"Knew what?"
"That he had a lover. It's been years"
"That's not true. He told me he left her."
"I thought you both had some kind of French agreement, a *ménage à trois* thing"
"Don't be ridiculous!"
"I'm not. I was sure you knew. Everyone knew about her."
"Everyone? ... Everyone?"
Then and only then did her eyes well up.
I pulled into the driveway. A blonde woman 20 years younger, thin and upset was talking to the Police. The security technician headed towards us. I helped my friend out of the car. Visibly shaken, she stared at the other woman and accusingly screamed: "what are you doing here?"

DELEGATION ELLE BOYD

"Look up," the photographer says. "Up to the corner." You sigh, close your eyes, try to channel that inner innocence the photographer is looking for, then gaze up and to the right. Your mother stands behind the photographer, an almost menacing presence that must be tolerated by everyone while you are still a minor. You tilt your chin before she can remind you.

The camera clicks; the photographer curses and jiggles the tripod. "More to the right," he says. Your neck is already sore, but you obey. You must always obey. Your mother moves into your peripheral vision. Your eyes flick down and you watch as she twists her own neck far to the right. Her jawline is pockmarked with acne scars. These days modelling agencies may think the scars a unique feature, but not when your mother was young.

"Eyes up," the photographer says. His tone is sharp. Despite the pain in your neck, the closeups are a respite. Then come more awkward poses in six-inch heels and ill-fitting outfits, looking up and to the corner again and again, until your mother is satisfied.

TARANTULA KATE DAVIS

I'd learned to live with the hazy memory of your creeping journey towards me; that blur of movement, the blister of spider venom on my lips, the bulk of your body on my tongue, so heavy I couldn't speak.

It was a shock, of course but I knew I'd asked for it. Talk about shame.

What to do? You were far too big to swallow and two of your twitching legs hung out on my chin. Every time I left the house I tucked them under my tongue, learned to keep my mouth shut.

Work was a nightmare; people were polite, but curious; wanted to know why I'd nothing to say. When I tried to talk your black legs wriggled out. I tried to cover them with make-up but it was no good. All I could do was gag.

'Have you tried biting down,' they said, 'get it over with – move on?' I mimed the failed attempts, the growing desperation. My manager suggested I might secretly have wanted a wolf-spider in my mouth. 'Wrong,' I scrawled on a Postit, 'it's a tarantula and I definitely don't want it!'

She marched off but it made me think; I hadn't checked your species. That night I turned my make-up mirror to 'magnify.' Those legs; they were thinner, more tapered than I'd thought, the hairs more sparse, paler than I remembered.

And that creeping journey how did you really move? I recalled details; you didn't creep; you fixed your rows of eyes on me and you jumped. One moment you were natural history, a book of myths; the next – Wham! you were in my face, swaying on eight legs and way too close for comfort. I saw again your grey belly, the clustered spiderlings.

But what if I was wrong? I joined the Arachnological Society, went to meetings. They were fascinated by you, asked what I could recall about your habits. I told them what I knew. They consulted, measured, made some calculations. Soon I had you identified. My boss was right. Not tarantula – wolf-spider!

Now, I know all about your kind; how you relay on camouflage, how you need to keep your spiderlings hanging on.

Today I spat you out – opened my mouth – spoke for the first time in years.

PHIL'S FOLLY DAVID LARMORE

To Phil, it all looked good in the morning, a smooth drive to Cody to see some friends and check out a new movie, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, in the theater. Phil left after lunch. He gassed up so he wouldn't have to stop, but he had to pay cash when his credit card wouldn't work. On the road, he heard a weird noise from under the hood. It wasn't a new or even newish car. It made noises. He turned up the radio.

An hour out of Cody, the car died, just turned off, and rolled slowly to a stop on the shoulder of the desolate road. He put on his hazards and started to walk in the shadeless heat toward gas station in the distance. He figured he could get a tow. He'd use the phone to call his buddies. Maybe they could run out and get him.

From a hundred yards away, Phil observed that the windows of the gas station were broken out, and the sign had a long crack in it. Weeds grew around the islands where pumps used to be. An actual phone booth guarded the building, though. Hoping it still worked, Phil trudged toward it. Dust covered the toes of his shoes, and sweat dripped into his eyes.

Phil entered the phone booth and picked up the receiver. There was a dial tone. Saved. He fished his pocket for a coin. No change, not even a dime. Could he find some money in the barren lot or the deserted office? Then he had an idea. He dialed zero on the phone, and the line rang. He would ask the operator for help or make a collect call to Cody. Finally, there was a click.

"If you'd like to make a call, please hang up and try again," the pleasant recorded voice said. Phil slammed the receiver against the phone, and it broke in half. The recorded voice repeated the message. Disgusted, Phil dropped the broken receiver and went outside.

He sat down in the shadow of a gasoline island and leaned against the pole holding it up. He could see the faint yellow flash of his hobbled car's hazards blink in the distance. He tried not to panic, figuring a nap might help him think clearly. When he woke up, it was twilight and cooling off. He decided to walk back to the car in case he had to spend the night out here.

As he sat in the driver's seat in the dark, the only light from the radio, radio on again, because it wouldn't matter if he ran down the battery, lights approached behind him, white and red and blue. He breathed a sigh of relief when a Wyoming state trooper shined a flashlight on his face and knocked on his window.

DESEOS DE AÑO NUEVO ANITA MARÍA RIQUELME SUAZO

Llegada la hora, empezó a servir los platos para la cena de Nochevieja y, resguardada en la soledad de la cocina, vertió las diez gotas sobre el vaso que completó con zumo.

En la mesa disfrutó lentamente cada bocado, dispuesta a demorarse mientras todos engullían y derramaban la comida en el apuro de llenar sus cucharas. De tal manera, sintió el tiempo ralentizarse a su alrededor y se divirtió con el distanciamiento de las voces convertidas en un solo gorjeo difuso y etéreo. Su cabeza golpeó la mesa, rendida por un sueño implacable; nadie pudo despertarla.

Cuando se levantó al día siguiente, contempló satisfecha que la loza ya estaba lavada y se sirvió la copa de vino espumoso.

SALVAGE ELIZABETH KATE SWITAJ

The children grew tired of throwing and kicking the shiny thing between them. They left the beach, climbing over the crumbling seawall, and at last the woman felt safe to approach. She picked up the shiny thing, and when she did, she found it was a bottle. She opened the bottle and pulled out three leaves. The leaves were unnaturally straight-edged and covered in marks. The woman had no use for the leaves, but bottles she did. Bottles could be used for water, storing it and cleaning it of salt. She was about to throw the leaves back into the sea when she remembered the leaves in her late mother's chest. Pages, her mother called them—paper, letters, and the marks were writing, a way to speak to those far away if only they knew how to read. Her mother did not know how to read but pointed to a set of marks on the bottom of one leaf. Her mother said that was her father's name. Her mother did not say his name. He had written to the family after being sent to fight in the great war, before the conflagration. Her mother remembered little of the world before it burned, but sometimes she would point to the marks on the bottom of a leaf and call them her father's name. She did not know how to say her father's name.

The woman looked at the bottom of each leaf. There on the third, the marks looked like the ones she remembered. So it was true then. She would take the leaves back to her shack that leaned against the seawall. She would learn to use these marks.

The woman didn't know yet what she had to say. But there had to be someone who would listen in the world; no one she'd seen since the death of her mother had.

EPIC SUPERMARKET GENEVÈVE GENICOT

For my best listener in La Realidad

At the large Carrefour supermarket in Lavapiés, Abba brightens up Saturday shopping. As I compare the prices of pre-packaged, industrial breads, voices whisper to me that I am the Dancing Queen, that I am young and sweet only seventeen – this is why I move laterally further to the left in the aisle towards the (industrial, pre-packaged) chocolate rolls: because, at seventeen, I can still eat whatever I want. Then, a cheerful man's voice rises above the music in a microphone to suggest something to us with an unfeigned enthusiasm, the end of its sentence remaining in the air, suggestive, joyful, and even though it is probably just a promotion not to be missed in the charcuterie section (I didn't catch everything), for a few seconds I am filled with real doubt: could there be, somewhere, here, in this supermarket, a dancefloor, perhaps a cheesy dance contest where couples would be eliminated one after the other, competing for a giant chilli sausage or a revolutionary non-stick frying pan? I wonder; I wonder because this voice, yes, sounds a bit like Barry's – you know, Barry the campsite DJ in high season, Barry who would invite people to invite each other onto the dance floor by playing slow songs, and then suddenly I walk away from the bakery section and turn around in the hope that I'll discover this hidden and dancing reality, I turn around with a sudden yet fluid movement (young and sweet, I am only seventeen) and then, amazed, I discover the gentle ballet of couples between the aisles, the graceful, slow-motion ballet, neither happy nor unhappy, of customers passing their hands on the arms of shopping carts, to guide them towards the glorious horizon of shared happiness.

Excerpt from the ongoing series "Epic Madrid," where a careful look at reality reveals unexpected facts.

THE FAVOR

ANTONIA SAAVEDRA

Mari Estrella was tired.

Not the kind of tired that sleep fixes, but the other one—the sticky fatigue that settles after you've already done what you had to do and no longer have the energy to begin anything else. She came home with her keys in her hand, her coat still on, already thinking of not going anywhere else.

That was when the phone rang.

- Could you come up for a moment? Laura said.

Mari Estrella looked at the staircase as one looks at an unnecessary inconvenience.

- I'm just getting home.

- It's right upstairs, Laura insisted.

There was no urgency in her voice. No explanation either.

- All right, Mari Estrella said. "I'm coming up."

Laura's flat was warm in a way that felt excessive, like a place that had been closed for too long. There was no food, no coffee. Just a clean table and two chairs set too close together.

They talked about nothing. How buildings seemed louder lately.

Then Laura stood up and returned with a small cardboard box, sealed with tape.

- Could you keep this for me? she asked. "Just for a bit."

Mari Estrella took it. It was heavier than it looked.

- What's inside? she asked.

- "My things," Laura said, smiling. "Don't open it."

It didn't sound like a warning. It sounded like habit.

Mari Estrella went back down with the box pressed against her body. At home she placed it in the hallway closet, behind the coats, and closed the door.

For a while, she didn't think about it.

That night, she remembered Laura's words: I don't trust it here.

She opened the closet. The box was still there. Closed.

She didn't open it.

On the third day, small things began to shift.

On the stairs, a neighbour paused longer than usual.

- "Everything all right?" she asked.

- Yes, Mari Estrella replied.

In the lift, someone mentioned that the doors had been closing differently. As an observation.

At home, Fernando, Mari's husband, opened the closet looking for a coat and stopped.

- "It smells different in here".

Neither did Mari Estrella.

That night, the box seemed to take up more space. It hadn't moved. The air around it had.

She thought about taking it upstairs. Leaving it on the landing. Throwing it away.

She did nothing.

A few days later, Laura rang the bell.

- Do you still have it?

- Yes.

- Keep it a little longer.

- How long is a little? Mari Estrella asked.

- As long as it takes.

- "What's inside?" Mari Estrella asked again.

Laura shook her head.

- If you knew, "you couldn't keep it."

She left without taking the box.

One afternoon, Mari Estrella found the closet door slightly open.

The box was inside. Closed. Intact.

That night she dreamed she opened it and there was nothing inside.

That was what frightened her most.

Standing in the dark hallway, Mari Estrella finally understood what the favour was.

It wasn't keeping a box.

It was agreeing not to ask.

And how easily she had accepted the responsibility.

FLOWERS BLOSSOM ALONE

KENECHUKWU IGWE

I love my village. The trees, the sand, the quiet. I don't go often, it's one of those things that's better loved from a distance. I am there now; mom has insisted we visit some elderly relatives. I hate these occasional visits, but today I'm keen on seeing one of my favourites. We set out to see her specifically because she had been getting sick lately, and we all know she is going to die soon. It's a variegated thing – death. It's felt in the air, food, in ourselves. Everything is slower, voices are louder. I'm scared.

I see her with her children, how keenly they listen when she speaks. I see the sheer admiration. Maybe it's not admiration; maybe it's pity. That scares me, again.

She struggles to talk, and tears swell up in my eyes. I don't try to hold back, yet they never come. I think that this is my curse – to feel a unique type of pain, fused with this (painful) loneliness. I envy the Others, those who can shut the door, soak their pillows, take a shower, talk to someone, then get better. Rather, I'm cursed with this sharp, piercing pain in my chest that leaves me tachypneic. After each episode I smile, and if I'm alone, I laugh.

I greet her the way a "good son" greets an elder: I bow and let her pat my back. She calls me *nwa m*, my son. She calls me repeatedly; maybe she can't hear that I'd already responded. I'm scared. Last year it would've been, "*KK nwa m, doctor ndi be Igwe*", KK my son, doctor of the Igwe family. She would've continued with the same crisp joke that I still laugh at. As these thoughts cloud my brain, the tears swell up again. As usual, they don't come down.

I notice fewer kids run around naked, and they no longer host their annual football tournaments. "Politicians and policemen has spoil everything", she responds to my brother. I wish I'd asked earlier. It should've been me smelling her tobacco-filled breath, trying not to smile at her bad grammar. I'm jealous.

I'm home now. I go up to my room for a cold shower. I love how I can see a very clear reflection of myself on the sprinkler; I'm smiling. I remember the few(er) naked kids now. I suspect I'll think of them again when I go downstairs to eat. And again when I watch the game on TV. I'm jealous, again. They seemed happy. I know they're not cursed in the same way I am. I also know they wished they were me, the son of the *Oga*, Chief, with the nice car. In a very selfish, and maybe mischievous way I take solace in that.

I finally let the water run.

TIME BOMB DOWN THE DRAIN

ANKIT RAJ OJHA

Nothing happens in this town. There were riots once. Almost. Hindus and Muslims had arms drawn amid war cries when a chaat hawker, smelling humongous appetite, set up shop in the battleground and soon the blood-starved had succumbed to samosas.

This morning I see a commotion at a roundabout and stop to enquire. They tell me there is a time bomb down the drain connecting the jail road to the city hospital. It is amusing to think that they know there is a time bomb down the drain connecting the jail road to the city hospital yet are huddled around to watch it go off. They tell me they have ensured safe distance, and besides, it is a low intensity time bomb down the drain connecting the jail road to the city hospital, for why would a multinational, non-profit terror outfit spend millions levelling a nondescript town when the home-grown government shells pennies on its upkeep.

An old man and a man in his thirties argue the make of the time bomb's dial. It's HMT, the old man asserts. The thirtysomething insists it must be Fastrack, for terrorists, unlike government officials, are tuned to the times.

The crowd thickens.

A man with thinning hair in a Bob Marley T-shirt looks on, his head covered with a gamchha as if that would dampen the dent from the impending debris. A street urchin points to the futility of it, to which the man with thinning hair in a Bob Marley T-shirt fires mother-locked word-missiles.

A sweet old lady in a saree with jasmines in her hair minding her own business overhears a pot-bellied, paan-chewing know-it-all deconstructing the time bomb to an awed audience of twelve. She takes offence at the blasphemy of the terrorists having flushed kilos of good gunpowder down the drain when it could have gone into feeding thousands in her humble kitchen. To which the pot-bellied, paan-chewing know-it-all—spitting a mouthful of paan in the middle of the road—assures her that the gunpowder that goes into making a time bomb is not the gunpowder from her spice cabinet. The sweet old lady in a saree with jasmines in her hair minding her own business smiles, relieved that no sacrilege was committed during the construction of the infernal contraption designed to decimate millions.

A lone onlooker with nothing significant about him stands bored. He sends for his children to partake in his bomb time. He has all the time in the world. The time bomb down the drain connecting the jail road to the city hospital can wait.

ENVASES

ALEX KOVACS

El cadáver yacía al costado de la ruta, con la boca abierta mirando al cielo. Su cuerpo se encontraba en un ángulo inverosímil y hacía horas que permanecía de esa manera.

Pasaban varios vehículos durante esa calurosa mañana de diciembre, pero a nadie le interesaba lo suficiente como para avisar a alguna autoridad. Era muy común ver varios cadáveres al costado del camino por esa zona. Nadie hacía nada.

Hasta la época de las fiestas.

De a poco, cada vez se veían menos cadáveres, algunos todavía escurriendo líquido al costado de la ruta y retorcidos, aplastados e inclusive partidos al medio.

Algunas noches, cuando pasaban vehículos, se los podía distinguir a kilómetros. Pero a nadie le importaba.

De un día para otro, desaparecían sin dejar rastros.

Los impuestos parecían estar bien invertidos. Cada mañana, el escuadrón de limpieza vial cumplía su trabajo con profesionalismo: los empleados los cargaban con palas, con tal fuerza que algunos salían despedidos varios metros antes de caer en la caja del camión.

A veces los juntaban en bolsas grandes. Algunos, menos compactos, caían rodando y hacían su característico ruido hueco, metálico.

Después, el camión se los llevaba.

No volvían a aparecer.

“Año nuevo, vida nueva”, suele decir la gente. Pero todo seguía igual.

Las rutas seguían rectas y los cadáveres volvían a agolparse al costado del camino: unos hechos jirones, otros como metal retorcido, algunos escurriendo su líquido, estrellados, al pie de algún árbol o cartel publicitario.

Carteles luminosos, impecables, con advertencias claras: “Si bebe, no conduzca”.

El equipo de vialidad trabajaba mucho más rápido, en especial durante las épocas de calor. De sol a sol, con energía y rapidez. Así los turistas se distraen menos. Algunos los levantaban sin esfuerzo: eran envases más compactos, más livianos. Otros todavía estaban tibios, pero no importaban. Eran envases, después de todo.

No importaban las marcas, no importaba la procedencia. Todo iba a parar al mismo lugar. Otro residuo más en la pala.

Hasta que me tocó levantar un envase, aplastado y pegado al pavimento. El olor nauseabundo al intentar despegarlo todavía me revuelve las tripas.

El ver su documento y descubrir que era mi hijo, con sus dedos alrededor de una lata de cerveza, aún más.

ALICE HAWORTH-BOOTH

HELP

Every morning after she dies, I wake up worrying about a mistake I think I've made at work. I wonder how much money it would cost to correct the mistake - another print run of thousands of copies. I think she will have divided her house between us in her will, but some of this will go to the care agency, some to the funeral directors and the venue for her wake, some to estate agents and to tax, and anyway there are lots of us. Perhaps the cost of a reprint will be £5,000, I think, when I have decided that £5,000 is a reasonable estimate for what will be coming to each of us from her estate.

IDLE THOUGHTS OF A BOOKSELLING FELLOW

David Price takes us behind the scenes of Secret Kingdoms English Bookstore on Calle Moratin. All their author events are free, start at 8.00pm and are based on a welcome drink and 45-55 minutes of interview/readings/Q&A with the author. Reserve your places on the agenda page of their website.



It's been an unusually idle winter for this bookselling fellow. A couple of winter lurgies left me flat on my back over Christmas and the New Year. But to paraphrase a great Spanish proverb, there is nothing bad that does not bring good in its wake, and I have been able to read more than usual. Favourites this winter have included, *Pereira Maintains* by Antonio Tabucchi about a political awaking to the Salazar dictatorship in Portugal. This was well accompanied by *Blindness* by Jose Saramago, a cataclysmic imagining of the consequences of a world gone blind (and with no triffids to clean up after us). I also much enjoyed *Ants and Dinosaurs* by Liu Cixin a preposterous parable of a symbiotic civilisation in the Cretaceous period, with many lessons for our own age. *You Dreamed of Empires* by Álvaro Enrigue was a hallucinogenic trip into Aztec bureaucracy on the day Cortez met Montezuma. Spain related reading included *The Generalissimo* by Giles Tremlett about the life and death of Francisco Franco, and *Madrid* by Luke Stegeman, a multi-layered and lyrical exploration of the biography of this wonderful city. Speaking of this wonderful city and how it draws us in and changes our very sense of self, *A Line Drawn or Printed by The Madrid Review's* very own Jayne Marshall, is a wonderful read on change, identity and belonging. Finally the hard to classify *Truth, Like Water* - a beautiful slice of North Gower Noire by Carys Shannon examining the impact of trauma in a small marshland community.

The last few books named were discussed at book events across the winter at Secret Kingdoms, and we have another packed schedule for the spring. March kicks off in style on Monday 2nd with M.L. Burns launching her new Dark Romance *Hollow*. On Friday 6th we have Scottish poet Grant Smith revealing some *Excerpts from an Addled Mind*. This is swiftly followed by our very own Philosopher Tim Halliday asking us to *Please Slow Down* on Saturday March 7th. Wednesday 11th March sees Gibraltēño Poet Gabriel Moreno join us to launch his bi-lingual *Gibraltar* an experiment in multiculturalism and multilingualism that should resonate with all who find themselves between two cultures. A major event follows on Thursday 12th when we look at *What We Tried to Bury Grows here* with author Julian Zabalbeasco, this is a novel of the Spanish Civil war & its impact on the Basque Country. Friday 20th sees *The Awakening* with Joseph Lyttleton - A story of a journey across an America that has lost its faith, the search for a brother, and the possibility of redemption. Saturday 21st March will be a big evening, it's The Secret Kingdoms Literary Quiz hosted by yours truly. We then take a break over Easter before starting again with a bang with *The Madrid Connection* and author Tim Parfitt on April 17th. If food and cooking is your thing you should join us on Friday 18th April and *Feast on your Life* with Tamar Adler, we then round April off with, *Calladita no More*, essays on the Latina experience with Hady Méndez on the 24th and the return of historical novelist Katherine Mezzacappa with *Lucie Dumas* on the 25th. Lots more to follow in May!

Until next time...

Secret Kingdoms is at
Calle de Moratin 7 in Madrid - Metro Antón Martín

LETTER FROM NEW YORK

RACHEL HARTY



It's February, and the skies are anything but dreary. The major snowstorm in New York has passed, though evidence remains, scattered and unwilling to melt. There are still remnants, white and flake-laden blankets all over town. Just last week, I walked past a round picnic table I mistook for a snowy innertube. Every urban object has taken on a light dusting, kissed from the frozen skies and sifted onto surfaces, much like that of a beignet with powdered sugar on its head. This is making me rather ravenous. But maybe it's not the look of things so much as the temperature itself. Every winter our bodies undergo thermogenesis—heat production—which revs the metabolism as we attempt to keep our core body temperature regulated.

One way to stave off the cold is to stay fueled. In New York, from late January to mid-February, there is Restaurant Week. This means eating at top restaurants for a significantly reduced price, though "reduced" is, of course, a relative term. The menus often resemble tasting menus, or at least hint at the possibility of one. Restaurants and hospitality groups participate en masse. Even the Danny Meyer Hospitality Group, home to the famous Gramercy Tavern, has its offerings, including my favorite, dessert: warm chocolate chip cookies and a glass of cold milk, served with a red-striped paper straw. When the price is slashed and the portions feel unexpectedly generous, trouble sets in. And for those so inclined to fold eating into their art practice, or at least think of it that way, you've come to the right city.

While it may soon be coming to a close, there are some restaurants who carry the spirit well on after. For others, it remains strict and seasonal. Restaurant Week arrives twice. Once in the winter, and again in the summer, running from mid-July to mid-August. Traveling is costly, and so is being a New Yorker, so whether you are passing through or living here, it's worth not surrendering the chance to dine at some of the city's finer tables.

The restaurants are all here; you just have to remember to book.



Rachel Harty is a Florida-born poet and New York City transplant. Her debut collection, *Coffee: A Sip of You and Me* (2024), pairs sharp wit with tender reflections on love, vulnerability, and becoming. Her work appears in The Poetry Society of New York, Poetry Nation, and elsewhere. You can find her—coffee in hand—rachelharty.com.

LETTERS FROM THE RASTRO

KATHLEEN MEREDITH

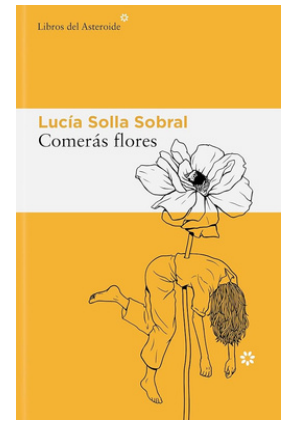
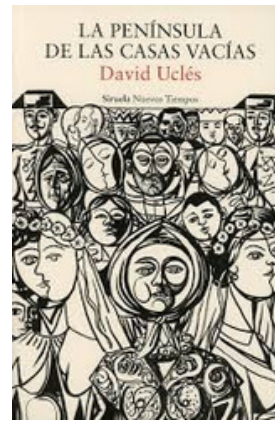
Kathleen Meredith is a bookseller at *Librería Los pequeños seres* located in the heart of El Rastro. You can find the bookshop at Ribera de Curtidores 19 - Metro La Latina.

We are officially through the infamous campaña de Navidad, the time of year that most booksellers anticipate and dread in equal measure. Most December and January releases are new, spiffed up editions of classics or bestsellers, but with a twist—sprayed edges, a new cover, the works! But we are now deep into the rainy winter months of February and March, and the Spanish girlies are reading! At the bookshop many of our bestsellers in recent months have been titles that are not entirely new, but books that have picked up momentum through social media. At least twice a day, someone asks if we have *Las gratitudes* by Delphine de Vigan in stock, *Han cantado bingo* by Lana Corujo, or the debut that continues to sell out week after week, *Comerás flores* by Lucía Solla Sobral.

Comerás flores was published in September of last year, but by December we were ordering ten copies at a time and still couldn't keep it on the shelves. It details the emotional damage of a relationship that spirals into toxicity, the protagonist steadily losing herself in it to the dismay of her friends. Marina's father has just died when the handsome, magnetic Jaime appears. She quickly moves into his four-bedroom flat filled with designer furniture and vinyls and begins to adapt her life to his, finding escape and stability in his routines. She spends the weekends with his friends instead of her own so he won't have to worry about her when she's out. She tries every expensive cheese he feeds her, despite being vegan. However, the routines she once found comforting quickly become controlling, any deviation leading to critiques that are increasingly cruel and manipulative. Solla Sobral writes with a sense of urgency, almost mirroring Marina's emotional state, caught in the unrelenting cycle of a relationship that she cannot slow or escape. This novel is a poignant and gripping account of a situation all too familiar to many, providing a necessary reminder of the ways violence can move silently through the lives of those closest to us.

A release published in early February that I loved was *Malacría* by Elisa Díaz Castelo. It is a delicate exploration of the unseen and unspoken inheritance that is passed down between generations. The novel follows Ele, Perla, and Celia, daughter, mother, and granddaughter, each returning to the same wound again and again to understand themselves and the women who came before them. The book begins with Ele's mother disappearing without a trace. What remains are notes and fragments of the past that allow Ele to trace her mother through time. The two women are on parallel journeys, but in opposite directions, one moving towards a kinder future, the other searching through brutal truths of the past. Díaz Castelo intersperses Ele's narrative with fragments that play with different stylistic forms—diary entries, lists, notes from a German grammar book—to illuminate her characters' interior lives, creating a narrative structure unlike any I've encountered in Spanish fiction.

One of my favorite authors writing in Spanish right now is Marta Jiménez Serrano. Her first novel, *Los nombres propios*, won me over with its glistening and resonant prose, examining the ways we understand and name the world around us. Jiménez Serrano is back with her new memoir, *Oxígeno*, detailing her near-death experience from carbon monoxide poisoning caused by a faulty boiler. In her trademark lyrical style, she reflects on the fragility of life, what it means to love someone and almost lose them, and the significance of a physical space that feels safe and truly your own.



Throughout the book, I often thought about the ground level apartment I first shared with my partner, which was damp with mold in winter and home to skittering cockroaches during the summer. Despite that, it was the flat that made me feel at home, where I built my life in Madrid. Our landlord, much like Marta's, never thought twice about the state of the apartment or ensuring that it was safe or comfortable, only that the rent was paid on time. So often we accept the bare minimum from spaces meant to shelter and nurture us. When housing is treated only as a financial asset, it's stripped of its fundamental role in creating community and shaping a sense of self within a city. Jiménez Serrano beautifully illustrates the precarity of our day-to-day existence, from the roofs over our heads to the oxygen that enters our lungs.

Another hallmark of the winter season is the deluge of literary awards. Some are more polemical than others, but many publishers have their own award either to drive sales or highlight a literary talent or both. A few awards to look out for next time you're browsing the shelves are the Alfaguara prize, the Heralde Prize (Anagrama), and finally the Nadal Prize, the oldest literary prize in Spain. The most recent winner of the Premio Nadal is David Ucles with his new novel, *La ciudad de las luces muertas*. I'd like to recommend his previous novel, *La Península de las casas vacías*, Ucles' interpretation of a Spanish Civil War epic. Ucles moves away from detailed recountings of military strategy, instead focusing on characters, creating a reimagined literary landscape of Spain that magnifies the pain and loss that came with the war. The writing borders on fantastical in some moments, with the narrator even speaking directly to the reader at the outset of a chapter; an acknowledgement that every retelling of history is someone's version of it. As we approach the 90th anniversary of the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, it's worth revisiting the events of Spain's past that still echo throughout our day-to-day lives.

Happy reading and look out for my guide to surviving the Madrid Book Fair in June!



Kathleen Meredith is a translator and bookseller based in Madrid, Spain. She holds an MA in Literary Translation from the University of East Anglia. Her translations of Rafaela Lahore and Marta Jiménez Serrano have been published in *Latin American Literature Today* and *The Spanish Riveter*. She is a member of the translation collective *Traductoras Desesperadas*.

CORRELATIONS

JOHN LIDDY

In this, the first of my columns for *The Madrid Review*, I would like to begin with a tribute to Louis Bourne (1942-2023). Future contributions will explore links or enlaces between Spain and Ireland, Madrid and beyond. Variety will be the spice for those cultural, literary and social correlations that spring to mind.

Louis Bourne: Educator, Hispanist, Poet and Translator

South from Madrid

South from Madrid

*There is gilt and dust
of vegetal urge, of a birth
resting in the bosom of chance,
minuscule murmur: mimosa.*

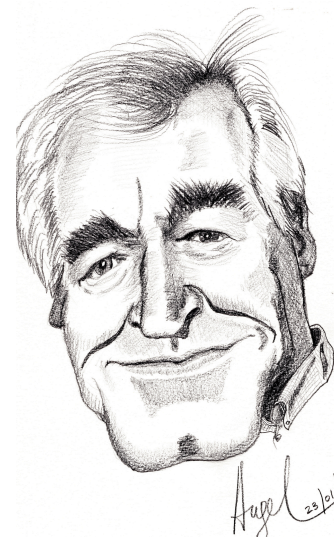
(from *The Thought of Seeing* by Louis Bourne)

During the latter years of ill-health, which involved daily medication, Louis continued to translate and write poems, publishing his first book of poetry in English, *The Thought of Seeing*, at the age of seventy-seven in 2019 with Revival Press, the publishing wing of The Limerick Writers' Centre, Ireland.

That book was launched in Limerick City Library, introduced by the poet Knute Skinner with a reading also in Dublin's The Winding Stair Bookshop, and Louis was in his element. He felt at home in Limerick and marvelled at the sinewy flow of the River Shannon outside his hotel window. In Dublin, I remember him becoming very emotional in Grogan's Pub on South William Street, once a favourite watering hole with his friend, the writer, Benedict Kiely, whom Louis knew from his student days in Virginia and Oxford. Dom Taylor, Director and Editor of Revival Press presided over the events in Limerick and Dublin, organised with the help of The Irish Writers' Union, which made for a Madrid occasion as my own book of the same title, and many of the poems in Louis' work, touched on the people and the landscape of surrounding Castile.

Louis looked forward to returning to Madrid twice a year during the last twenty years of his life; a habit he practised on joining the staff of Georgia College & State University in the US as Professor of Modern Languages and Cultures and later as Professor Emeritus of Spanish. Previously, he had lived in Madrid for thirty-two years, working as a teacher and translator after receiving a BA in English from the University of North Carolina, an MA from Hollis University in Virginia, an MA in English Literature from Oxford in the late 60s and a PhD in Spanish from New York University, Madrid, where he met his wife Adelina Rosales Martin, who predeceased him in 2007.

A Virginian by birth and Madrileño by choice, Louis was due to arrive in Madrid on the 16th December, 2023, but it was not to be. After frantic transatlantic phone calls to no avail, our mutual friend, the poet Clara Janés, wrote to say Louis had passed away. Another poet friend, Antonio Dominguez Rey, had relayed the news to Clara, who had known Louis since the 60s and I, the 80s, and during those visits to Madrid we shared many a 'sobre mesa', literary collaboration and poetry reading. We admired his translation work and looked forward to seeing the poems of Robert Bly published in Spanish, although I always encouraged Louis to publish more of his own poetry in English.



He gave a lot of his time and energy to the work of other poets, whom he admired and befriended. The poet Justo Jorge Padrón benefited enormously from his gifts as a translator.

Of all his extensive translation work, perhaps *Crackling Sun: Selected Poems* by Vicente Aleixandre (1982) is the better known. A work which should have received greater recognition within Spain and further afield. For it was Louis who brought Aleixandre to a wider English reading public.

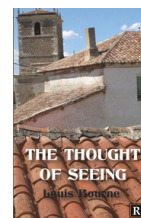
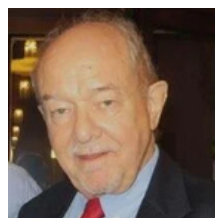
As well as his own *Médula de la Llama* (1981), *Lienzos en lo humano* (1986), *Ráfagas de un signo* (1997) and *Recodos del río: Poesía reunida 1981-2011*, he translated *On the Cutting Edge: Selected Poems* (1988), *Embers of Nadir* (1995) and *Memory of the Fire* (2004) by Justo Jorge Padrón. His other translated works include: *The Book, Behind the Dune* (2012) by Andrés Sánchez Robayna; *Selected Poems* (1987) by María Victoria Atencia; *Poesía esencial de Francisco Matos Paoli: estudio y antología* (1994); *Fuerza Invisible: Lo divino en la poesía de Rubén Darío* (1999) and *El polvo del torbellino: Antogogía poética* by Rafael Bordao (2023). Numerous articles, essays, poems and translations by Louis can be found scattered amongst prestigious academic publications and literary reviews in Cuba, England, Ireland, Spain, South America and the US.

Louis made a generous donation, through a bequest, to endow and establish Professor Louis Milton Bourne Fellowship with New York University for students who demonstrate financial need and academic merit, and who are enrolled in the MFA in Creative Writing in Spanish programme at the Graduate School of Arts and Science.

He was granted his wish for his ashes to rest in Madrid, but I miss his visits in winter and summer and the chats we had about poetry and poets from both sides of the Atlantic.

It is now time for some serious study of Louis Bourne, his life as a poet and translator and his contribution to the world of Spanish letters.

Que la luz eterna brille para él/Go lasadh solas síoraí air/May eternal light shine on him.



John Liddy is an Irish poet living in Madrid. He has many collections published and is a life-long supporter of the 'little magazine'.

RODOREDA, A FOREST

Mercé Rodoreda at the Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona

by Jayne Marshall

A forest really is the perfect image to represent the life and work of celebrated Catalan novelist Mercé Rodoreda. Exiled after the Spanish Civil War and then again during World War II, her stories are haunted by lost souls searching for the way back home. And reading her, like a long walk in a deep forest, is absorbing and sensorially rich. As Colm Tóibín puts it in the introduction to her novel *Death in Spring*, reading her is less an act and more allowing the work “to soar” – to let it surround you. If it were up to me, I might add to the idea of a forest the image of a house of mirrors, as her work is permeated with themes and motifs that echo back and forth, sometimes merging, sometimes reflecting off one another. In fact, if you visualise a house of mirrors inside a forest, you are partway to inhabiting and understanding Rodoreda’s world.

The Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona – the CCCB – is a natural home for Rodoreda’s work, not only as a cultural hub for Catalunya but also as an organisation focused on bringing literary exhibitions to the public. Director of the CCCB, Judit Carrera, described the concept behind *Rodoreda, A Forest*, and other exhibitions at the Centre, as presenting “visual essays”; not biographies of the authors they feature, but portraits of a writer’s world and their work. In the case of Rodoreda, another directive for the exhibition was to reclaim her as a major literary figure, one who finally shrugs off the qualifying labels of “female” and/or “Catalan” – she is an important literary figure, full stop. One way the exhibition seeks to do this is by letting the modern relevance of her writing speak for itself.

Recurrent themes in her novels structure the exhibition, encompassing innocence, desire, war, homes and streets, metamorphosis, and the soul. The visual essay includes 400 works of art across different mediums and epochs, all in conversation with one another and with the author, in order to showcase the timelessness and universality of her work. One of the specially commissioned pieces by Cabosanroque (Laila Torrents Carulla and Roger Aixut Sampeitro) includes large screens playing videos of Ukrainian women and children, now resident in Barcelona, reading extracts from *Journeys and Flowers*, a short story collection by Rodoreda marked by, and centred on, the experience of war and exile. In this way, her words speak across time and experience, as a reminder that war is an ongoing modern reality; it hasn’t been left behind in the 20th century, as was once hoped. Rodoreda’s interest in the natural world and her way of granting it agency, so that trees, flowers, and weather all react to the human world and its (often barbarous) actions, also feels painfully relevant today in the context of the climate crisis.

Her modern relevance is not only thematic but stylistic too, stemming from the poetics of her writing. Rodoreda was interested in bringing her stories into conversation with her contemporaries, often subtly and subtextually referencing other writers as well as visual artists in her work – she was meta before that label existed. She also experimented in Catalan with Modernist literature’s hallmark stream of consciousness, exemplified in the work of Joyce, Woolf, and Faulkner.

Her particular fusion of the real with the fantastic also feels very current, yet the way she extrapolates this to reflect a world where the beautiful and the terrible coexist is one inextricably linked to the wider human experience. No line is drawn between the two; instead, Rodoreda mirrors back to the reader a morally ambiguous world – our world.

The curator of the exhibition, Neus Penalba, is Professor of Iberian Literature at Bryn Mawr University, and the tour with her added even more depth to the intertextual and multidisciplinary conversation that the exhibition invites. The breadth of her knowledge of Rodoreda’s work, as well as where the modern echoes of her influence can be heard, was vast and fascinating. The tour felt like one of those brilliant and slightly mad conversations with a friend during which you talk for hours about a favourite writer or artist, digging into your collective knowledge, making connections between their work, going down rabbit holes (or perhaps forest paths). A bifurcating, looping conversation at the end of which you either feel like you’ve answered all of life’s unanswerable questions, or you’ve lost yourself inside your own mind.

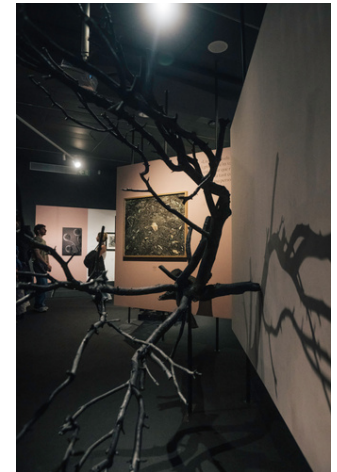
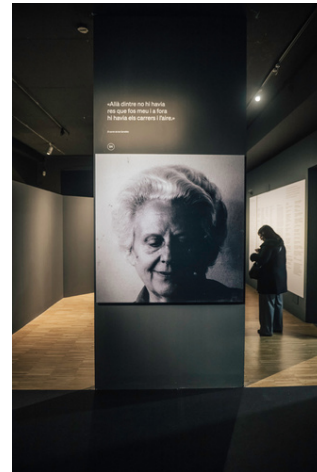


Photo credit: Alice Brazziti

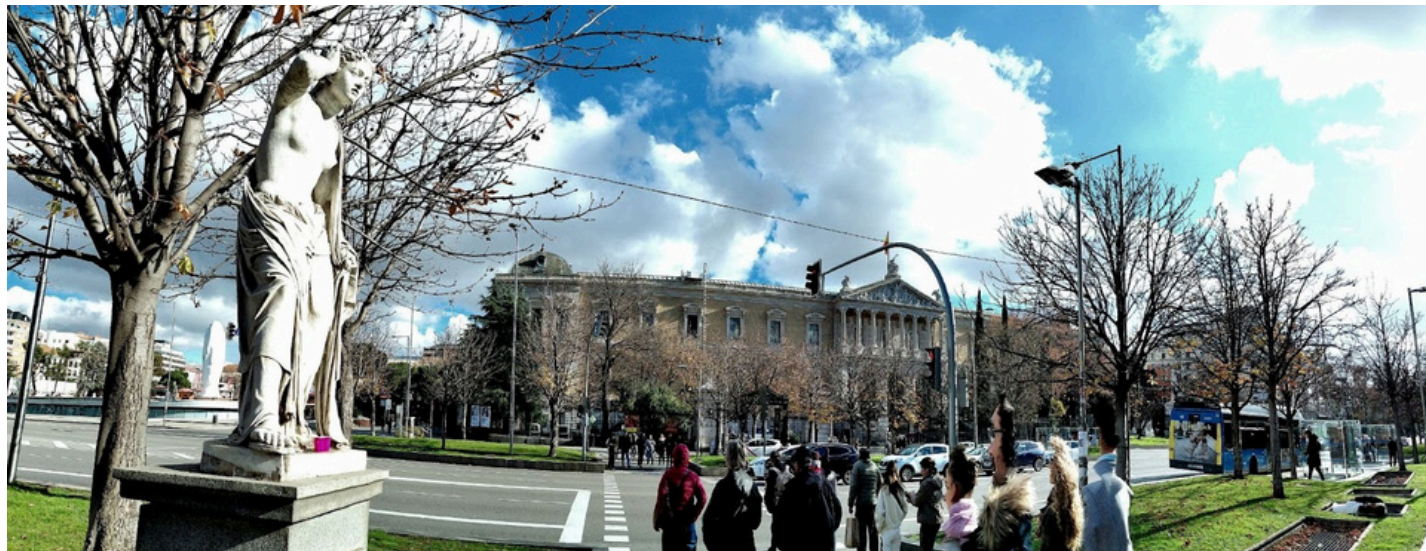
In a similarly sinuous way, the experience of reading Rodoreda or walking around the exhibition is such that it’s hard to pin down exactly why it’s so affecting. Even when the big topics are in play – like death, war, or desire – it’s less that you feel you’re looking at them head-on, and more that what is evoked is something that is both beyond the actual while also encompassing it. Colm Tóibín again: *Rodoreda’s genius ... is to lure the reader’s attention away from her terrain as merely emblematic or symbolic and make it seem lived-in, real, part of history rather than fantasy. This is a landscape of the soul ... full of dark feelings and forebodings that are sharply present and ominous and persistent.*

She does this through her deceptively simple, pared-down style, which allows the reader to see whatever she wants the reader to see, from the most realistic visual detail to haunting, dreamlike visions. The only way to know which it is for you is to allow yourself to get lost in the forest and discover your own path through that “landscape of the soul.” Just make sure to leave a trail of breadcrumbs, or you may not find your way back home again.

The Fragility of Greatness: Books, Time and the National Library of Spain

A chat with Adelaida Caro Martín from Department of Manuscripts, Incunabula, and Rare Books.

Photo and story by James Hartley



It's a shock to hear that the great works of Spain's literary Golden Age were printed on some of the worst materials imaginable.

"The paper was terrible," says Adelaida Caro Martín, shaking her head. Adelaida works in the Department of Manuscripts, Incunabula, and Rare Books, where time is measured in centuries rather than years. "The ink was bad as well - and the metal slugs were so worn that the printed letters blurred." She pauses, then adds, with a shrug: "Yet those are the books that changed literature."

We are speaking deep inside the Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid's National Library, an institution many of us pass daily without thinking of entering, mistaking its monumental presence for inaccessibility. The current building, on the Paseo de Recoletos by Colón, opened in 1896. Its architecture is unapologetically monumental, designed to embody permanence, authority and national culture. Shared with the wonderful Museo Arqueológico Nacional, it's an imposing landmark, flanked by statues of the authors of those cheaply printed classics - but readers should know it is not a museum of closed vitrines but a working library and worth a visit.

"There is this idea that you need special permission to come here," Adelaida says. "But most people can." Any visitor can apply for a basic reader's card, granting access to modern collections. To consult materials published before 1957 - including manuscripts and rare books - a researcher's card is required. That does not mean being a professional academic: journalists, writers, artists and independent researchers are regularly admitted.

Although open to everyone today, the origins of the library lie in monarchy. Its oldest collections come from the private libraries of the Spanish kings, particularly the Habsburgs, whose books were housed in the Alcázar of Madrid, where tourists now funnel into the Royal Palace. Manuscripts and early printed books were kept in what was known as the Torre Alta, long before the notion of a public reading room existed.

In the early eighteenth century this changed. Part of the royal collection was separated and transformed into the Real Librería Pública, the institutional ancestor of today's Biblioteca Nacional. "It was a library that had belonged to the kings," Adelaida explains, "but it was placed at the service of the public."

The remainder stayed with the Crown, forming what are now the Royal Library in the Palace and the collections at El Escorial. The National Library, meanwhile, grew through other, less ideal mechanisms. After the War of Spanish Succession, libraries belonging to nobles who had supported the losing side were confiscated and incorporated into the collection. "Much of what we have is political history as well as cultural history," Adelaida says. "You can read power in these books."

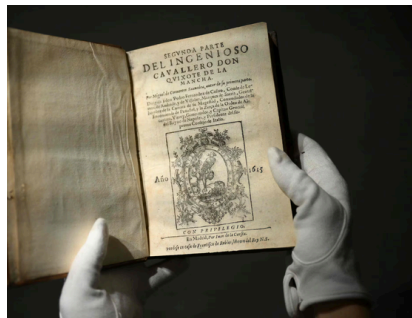
By the nineteenth century acquisitions, the legal deposit and donations had turned the library into a vast repository. Today, it holds millions of items - books, manuscripts, maps, prints, photographs, newspapers, sound recordings - most of them historical. "We acquire very little nowadays," she notes. "The collections were formed over centuries."

Its *incunabula* collection, for example, the largest in Spain with more than 3,150 editions printed before 1501, includes rare Spanish imprints from nascent presses in Segovia, Sevilla and Barcelona. The *manuscript* collection, numbering roughly 83,000 pieces, ranges from medieval codices to personal archives of luminaries and encompasses illuminated books that are works of art in their own right. Not all treasures are textual: the music collection preserves thousands of printed and manuscript scores from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, from chamber music and sacred polyphony to autograph manuscripts by Spanish opera and zarzuela composers such as Francisco Asenjo Barbieri.

Its *Cervantes* collection includes no fewer than twenty-six seventeenth-century editions of *Don Quixote* - (Adelaida says a perfect signature of Cervantes would be the library's dream find) - alongside related imitations, sequels and theatrical works, offering a rare view into how *El ingenioso hidalgo* was read and reimagined in its own time. There are also autographed plays and fragments from Lope de Vega, Francisco de Quevedo and Pedro Calderón de la Barca, plus printed comedias and manuscripts by Tirso de Molina and others. Marginal annotations add colour while a wider view is provided by the multiple editions circulating at a time when print culture was still young.



Adelaida Caro Martín



Song Across Space and Time: An incredible family odyssey

By James Hartley

It's the physical condition of Spain's seventeenth-century books, though, that might surprise modern readers. Compared to the elegant productions of eighteenth-century France or England, they often appear crude.

"The seventeenth century coincided with a moment of economic collapse in Spain," Adelaida tells us. "There were repeated bankruptcies and printing houses had very little money." Paper was cheap and unstable, ink corrosive, metal type reused until it lost precision. In some cases, the ink has eaten through the paper itself. "It's a paradox," she says, "that the greatest moment of Spanish literature coincided with one of the poorest moments in Spanish printing."

The eighteenth century tells a different story. With economic recovery came technical excellence: thick paper, rich ink, pages that remain supple centuries later. "You turn them today," says Adelaida, "and they feel almost new."

She says conservation practices have changed profoundly over the last century. Where restoration once meant aggressive intervention, today it means restraint. "There was a time when old bindings were removed because they looked worn," Adelaida explains. "They were replaced with new ones. Today, those bindings would be considered priceless."

Modern conservation aims for minimal, reversible intervention. Repairs are deliberately visible. When ink corrosion has destroyed parts of a page, conservators rebuild the support in a way that distinguishes clearly between original and repair. "The goal," she says, "is to make the document usable without erasing its history."

While getting your hands on these treasures might only be possible via the amazing online resources, the library is worth popping into for a free guided tour or to check out one of the many exhibitions held on the public floors. Adelaida says that every object displayed in these exhibitions is carefully assessed by curators and conservators. "We think that an exhibition shouldn't just show something, but it should be a way for these pieces from our collections to enter the public conscience."

Today, the BNE is stewarded by around 500 staff - 26 in Adelaida's department - orchestrating the cataloguing, conservation and management of the remnants of Spain's literary heritage.

Since its automation in the 1980s, every new acquisition has been entered into the online catalogue, yet the library still preserves the painstaking legacy of card catalogues and much of its pre-1980s material is gradually being integrated, a reminder that the work of preservation is never complete.

The library stands as both sentinel and bridge, linking the sparse, painstaking output of the Golden Age to the self-published proliferation of the present, ensuring that every book, whether a seventeenth-century quarto or a modern ebook, will continue to speak to readers for centuries on.

"These books survived wars, neglect, terrible paper and bad ink," Adelaida says. "The least we can do is let people see them."

Alan Kovacs is a violist, conductor and teacher based in Madrid. For more than three decades he has been a central figure in Spain's musical life, serving as professor at the Real Conservatorio Superior de Música de Madrid, where he directs the Orquesta de Cuerda and mentors young musicians whose careers now extend to leading European ensembles, from the Berlin Philharmonic to La Scala. His own background, however, unfolded far from Spain - first in Argentina and later across Europe - and was shaped by the chamber traditions and orchestral cultures that marked the twentieth century's musical diaspora.

Only in recent years did Kovacs begin to fully understand the remarkable family history that preceded him. The story, once assumed to follow familiar European and South American trajectories, revealed itself instead as an epic passage through imperial Berlin, revolutionary Shanghai and colonial Hong Kong, before arriving in the concert halls of Argentina and Spain. What he uncovered reframed his sense of inheritance: music had not merely been a profession handed down through generations but the means by which his family survived exile, political rupture and the upheavals of a turbulent century. Here is his family's story:

Berlin: Beginnings in a World of Music and Order

In 1895, a girl called Irmgard Heinrich was born into a cultivated Berlin household where music structured daily life. The violin and piano were not merely instruments but markers of education and refinement and Irmgard's talent earned her a place at one of the city's foremost music schools, where she studied under Adolf Steinmann. Berlin itself was alive with musical possibility: concert halls, salons, and academies fostered virtuosity and precision at the heart of the German Empire's cultural life.

It was there that she met Liao Shangguo, twenty years old and far from Guangdong Province, where he had been born into a Confucian scholarly family. Sent to Germany to study law as part of China's broader project of modernization, Liao immersed himself in European intellectual and cultural life. Music became their meeting ground: violin lessons grew into conversation, conversation into friendship, and friendship into marriage. In 1922, their daughter Leonore - Yuji in Chinese - was born. This baby would be Alan Kovacs's mother.

Postwar Berlin was unstable. Economic scarcity, political unrest, and growing xenophobia made life increasingly precarious for foreigners and mixed families. In 1926, the Heinrich-Liao family embarked for Shanghai, carrying both their hopes and their instruments across the seas.

MÁS ALLÁ DE MADRID

Gaicho literature and Argentina's obsession with nostalgia

By Romy Hügler

Many tend to think of Argentina as a rugged land of endless grass plains and enormous cattle ranches, an image which is nothing without the figure of the gaicho, rioplatense cowboy, clinging lithely to his horse – he cuts a striking figure in his wide-legged trousers, beret and espadrilles, and thrives on a diet of prime beef and mate. If you think of Argentina this way, you're in good company: many Argentines see their country this way too.

But when did the gaicho become such a decided cultural icon for Argentina? The nomadic horsemen of the pampas played a pivotal role in the battle for independence, it's true; they also were quickly seized upon by those looking to define an Argentine identity separate from both Spanish colonial influence and the country's indigenous roots, which the gaichos played a part in violently subduing. According to Beatriz Sarlo, the transformation of gaichos into a national symbol was a "timely invention, for immigrants from Italy, as well as Germany and central Europe, were arriving by the thousands in Buenos Aires, and intellectuals were worrying about the future of their culture". And so, The Gaicho is born: a national good and cultural export, which immediately became Argentina's favourite literary protagonist.

El Gaicho Martín Fierro, the 2,316-line epic poem by José Hernández, is the most iconic example of gaicho literature. It hits all the usual marks: long journeys on horseback, bloody conflict with indigenous tribes, campfire songs. At its heart, though, lies a fundamental literary conceit, of which nobody was a shrewder critic than Jorge Luis Borges. According to Borges, "Gaicho poetry is a unique phenomenon in literary history. It is not, as the name suggests, a poetry made by gaichos; it was the work of educated persons from Buenos Aires and Montevideo." In this sense, reading gaicho literature becomes an exercise in understanding nostalgia, and Argentina's homesickness for the archaic, for the untamed, for the original.

Borges's short story *El Sur* naturally makes its contribution to gaicho literature not by studying The Gaicho, but by studying the genre itself. The story narrates the fevered imaginings of Juan Dahlman who, from his hospital bed, dreams of a nobler death than that which befalls him. Dahlman, who feels himself "hondamente argentino", dreams of a return to his ancestry: not to the German immigrant from whom he got his name, the evangelical priest who descended into Buenos Aires by boat, but his criollo side. The story ends with Dahlman's journey into the pampas – a journey we presume to be a drug-induced daydream – armed with a thirst for blood and a dagger we are not sure he knows how to use.

Roberto Bolaño, faithful Borges fan, offers a response to *El Sur* in his 2003 story *El Gaicho Insufrible*. It is another tale of the urban Argentine who, disheartened by the modern world, heads back in time to the world of the gaichos. In Bolaño's story, the protagonist Pereda – a well-read lawyer who spends his days comfortably in the libraries and bars of Buenos Aires – does not flee just any version of the city, but one wracked by the 2001 financial crisis.

The country's days of "barbarie" return with a vengeance in the capital. Town squares attract desperate people looking to trade trainers for a packet of pasta. Seven currencies appear in the collapse of the peso. There is nothing to eat: where cowboys used to sit around fires, neighbourhoods set up communal cooking pots to keep people from starving.

"Fue entonces cuando Pereda decidió volver al campo." And he does. The world of gaichos looks a lot different in 2001 than it did in their heyday, but Pereda makes of it what he can: he lets his beard and his nails run long, moves into a falling down house and adopts a diet consisting mainly of rabbits, talking distractedly to the quiet young gaichos around him. He shares with them his philosophical musings:

"Les hablaba de Argentina, de Buenos Aires y de la pampa, y les preguntaba con cuál de las tres se quedaban. Argentina es una novela, les decía, por lo tanto es falsa o por lo menos es mentirosa. Buenos Aires es tierra de ladrones y compadritos, un lugar similar al infierno (...). La pampa, en cambio, era lo eterno."

The pampas are eternal and essential – the "core" of the country which, despite the takeover of the urban elite and the mass installation of European immigrants, haven't changed. Right? And yet, the fantasy that Dahlmann and Pereda invoke in their pursuit of the criollo is just that: a fantasy. It's the same fantasy Borges spotted in eager writers from Buenos Aires and Montevideo: those urban, university-educated men mounting a horse for the first time and claiming a return to their "roots", although they are returning to something quite different from what it once was.

But why is Argentina so nostalgic for a world most of them don't know, of which many of their ancestors were never part? Bolaño offers "el problema de la madrastra":

"Los argentinos no tuvimos madre o nuestra madre fue invisible o nuestra madre nos abandonó en las puertas de la inclusa. Madrastas, en cambio, hemos tenido demasiadas y de todos los colores, empezando por la gran madre peronista. Y concluía: Sabemos más de madrastas que cualquier otra nación latinoamericana."

In the context of Argentina's melting pot history, perhaps it's unsurprising that there's a conscious effort to cling to gaichos, however inauthentic some of these efforts may be. This tendency towards romanticising the misty days of the past, with their images of galloping on horseback and noble bloodshed, is nowhere clearer than in literature, in a genre sustained on nostalgia.

This nostalgia has only begun to be questioned in literature, for example in Gabriela Cabezón Cámara's *Las Aventuras de la China Iron*. Published in 2017, the novel tells the story of Martín Fierro's unnamed wife, who offers a vastly different perspective on this era of Argentina's history. The world of Fierro is one which operates on the abuse of land, women and children and, as usual with cases of strong collective nostalgia, shows us a reality quite different from what we imagined.

Romy Hügler was born in Germany, grew up in London, has lived in Madrid. She now lives in Buenos Aires.

Shanghai: Cosmopolitanism, Reinvention, and Music

Shanghai in the late 1920s was a city of extremes. Its foreign concessions offered European-style streets, cafés, and concert halls, while the Chinese city thrummed with traditional markets and temples. It was a global hub of commerce and culture, drawing artists, intellectuals, and refugees from around the world. Yet beneath the cosmopolitan surface, political fault lines were deepening. The Shanghai Massacre of 1927 inaugurated the period known as the White Terror, targeting labor organizers, intellectuals, and suspected communists.

To survive, the family adapted. Liao became Qing Zhu, adopting a name that evoked the ideals of refinement and withdrawal associated with classical Chinese literati. Irmgard became Huali Si - *Beautiful Silk*. Together, they navigated a fractured society while creating spaces of continuity. Huali Si taught piano and voice and composed art songs set to classical Chinese poetry, drawing on the regulated structures of Tang-dynasty lüshi, whose eight-line forms and strict tonal patterns offered a disciplined musical language. Qing Zhu wrote essays and edited journals that articulated a modern Chinese musical aesthetic, bridging Eastern and Western traditions. Their home became a gathering place for students and musicians, a private conservatory amid political uncertainty.

Their work intersected closely with Xiao Youmei, founder of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, who had returned from Germany with a vision of uniting Western musical rigor with Chinese tradition. The conservatory emerged as a space where musicians navigated colonial modernity, nationalism and artistic ambition simultaneously.

Leonore: A Child of Two Worlds

Leonore grew up between these overlapping worlds. Her schooling at the German Kaiser Wilhelm School placed her nominally within a European framework; her status as a “guest,” granted because of her mixed heritage, shielded her from compulsory affiliations. Her real education, however, came through Shanghai’s musical networks, where refugee musicians from Europe taught her violin and ensemble playing, connecting her to repertoires ranging from Mozart and Beethoven to the contemporary works circulating in interwar Europe.

By seventeen, Leonore was performing as a soloist with the Shanghai Municipal Orchestra, navigating the breadth of the Western repertoire while rooted in her mother’s teaching and her father’s intellectual guidance. Qing Zhu continued to write and teach into the 1950s, while Huali Si’s legacy endured through her compositions and the many students she mentored, even as records of her later life remain fragmentary.

Argentina: Exile and New Horizons

By the late 1930s, Shanghai’s cosmopolitan era was dissolving under the twin pressures of war and occupation. The Battle of Shanghai in 1937 and the subsequent Japanese control rendered the city increasingly unstable. At the same time, Shanghai became the only viable refuge for Jews fleeing Nazi Europe, as most countries refused asylum. In this context, Leonore married Erwin Kovacs, an Austrian Jewish refugee who had survived Shanghai’s wartime hardships.



“This photo was taken during a recording for Shanghai radio, circa the 1940s,” Alan Kovacs says. “It shows my mother playing the violin and my grandmother at the piano.”

The couple initially planned to settle in Brazil, but a stopover in Buenos Aires altered their course. The city’s vibrant orchestras, conservatories, and musical culture offered both continuity and opportunity. Argentina became home. In Mendoza, Leonore joined the Symphony Orchestra of the National University of Cuyo as second concertmaster and devoted herself to teaching. It was there that her two sons, Elías and Alan Kovacs, were born.

A condition of hyperacusis eventually forced Leonore to withdraw from performance. Together with Erwin, she found spiritual sustenance in The Christian Community. After his early death, she was ordained as a priest and later served in Buenos Aires. In her later years, she was reunited with her half-brother Liao Naixiong, a distinguished musicologist who traveled from Canada to Argentina - a quiet culmination of a family long divided by geography and ideology.

Legacy Across Continents

Huali Si’s art songs remain part of the Chinese vocal repertoire. Qing Zhu’s writings, once marginalized, are now recognized as foundational to modern Chinese musical aesthetics. Leonore’s teaching left a lasting imprint on orchestras and conservatories throughout Argentina, a pedagogical lineage continued by her son Alan Kovacs in Spain, where his students now perform in some of Europe’s leading orchestras.

Through him, this story endures: not merely as an account of exile, but as a testament to the continuity of music across borders and generations. Even as names changed, cities fell, and nations rose and disappeared, music remained the thread that bound this family’s century-long journey into a song across continents and time.

IT IS GOOD TO LET IDEAS MOVE

An interview with Anne Carson

by Jayne Marshall

I first discovered Anne Carson's 1998 novel-in-verse, *Autobiography of Red*, when I was handed a reading list for a master's in creative writing. On the application form for the course, we'd been asked to check a box indicating which discipline we most identified with - poetry, fiction or non-fiction. At the time, such delineation suited me very well, as I still held fixed ideas on what writing was and how to describe and categorise it. I drew a fat red cross in the fiction box.

Despite being asked to choose, we were required to attend classes covering all three genres, and it was in the poetry class that we read and discussed Anne Carson. Discovering her work was a turning point for me. *Autobiography of Red*, described as a verse novel, or novel-in-verse, is loosely based on the Greek myth of Geryon and on surviving fragments of the lyric poem 'Geryoneis' by the ancient Greek poet Stesichorus. Carson is a classicist and translator, as well as a poet and essayist, and she has taught classics, comparative literature and creative writing at universities across the United States and her native Canada. For her books and translations Carson has been awarded the Guggenheim and MacArthur Fellowships, the T. S. Eliot Prize and the PEN/Nabokov Award, amongst many others, and was appointed a Member of the Order of Canada for her contribution to Canadian letters.



Photo credit: Jeff Brown

With such a heady mix of authorial expertise, and forms and disciplines on the page, *Autobiography of Red* helped me glimpse the vast possibilities of what writing could be. And not only as a writer, but as a reader too. I knew little about poetry at the time and even less about ancient Greece, but I loved the book. I let reading it happen to me, rather than trying to understand every allusion, reference or structural nuance. Yet the book was necessarily replete with those same things as, to give the reader that kind of seamless experience, the author has to do the heavy lifting, to deeply know their subject.

This memory was fresh in my mind when I asked Carson whether that had been her intention - to create an immersive experience, where, despite the rich and textured writing, readers feel more than they analyse. Her answer sent the question hurtling back in my direction: "Perhaps we can avoid the exhausted word 'immersive' and just ask, what exactly are 'those definitions'?"

'Those definitions' referred to the part of my question in which I'd explained that, on first encountering her writing, I was coming from a place of reading fiction and poetry that stayed strictly within 'those definitions'. As prompted by Carson in her response, I thought about what I'd asked, and I remembered something else from that same creative writing master's. Shortly after graduating, I realised I was not a genius. Instead, I had to admit to myself that I fell in that vast middle ground between really bad and really good. There are many excellent writers, but only a few brilliant ones.

For me, Anne Carson belongs firmly in that latter category. Which makes it both difficult to write questions that are worthy of her talents, whilst also fuelling a reader's desire to penetrate her intellect and understand more about what goes on inside such a mind. I had to slough off the feeling her answer had given me that I was a plucky teen writing for a school newspaper, but my take is that she effectively sent me back to START. In asking about her process, though a standard enough question, she was showing me that I was essentially (and somewhat lazily) handing the responsibility off to her. If I admired the effect of her writing, then instead of asking how she achieved it, why didn't I deconstruct its component parts myself (and in doing so come up with a better question).

In 2020, Carson was awarded the Premio Princesa de Asturias de las Letras, so I asked if Spain's admiration for her was reciprocated. She replied that ever since she walked the Camino de Santiago in 1983, she had admired the country's "pulse and presentness". Pulse is something that comes up in *The Beauty of the Husband*, Carson's 2001 essay centring on Keats's idea that beauty is truth. The subtitle to the book is "a fictional essay in 29 tangos", as - as it states on the blurb - 'a tango (like a marriage) is something you have to dance to the end'. It's a subtitle so dazzling it takes a few reads to absorb.

A performance of Carson's essay 'Possessive Used as Drink (Me): A Lecture on Pronouns in the Form of Fifteen Sonnets' at the CCCB in Barcelona this year, also incorporated poetry with dance. I was interested in how these cross-form structures originate for her. I asked, when she is developing a work, how she determines its shape and its relationship to other art forms. She replied that: "[Robert] Currie is the one who has the choreographic ideas. His mind is spatial, as mine is grammatical. Also he knows a lot of dancers." Robert Currie is Carson's husband and creative collaborator. A visual artist and designer, he and Carson are known for their interdisciplinary projects, including the book design for her poetry collection *Nox* and performances of *Antigonick* Carson's translation of Sophocles' *Antigone*. Carson finished by saying: "So we combine tastes. It is good to let ideas move."

It is good to let ideas move is both the starting point and the ongoing lesson her work teaches me. It says it all, really. Although it is also easier said than done for most of us - which perhaps is where the difference between being brilliant and, well... not, lies.

ENGLISH EX-MACHINA

In conversation with J.M. Coetzee

by Jayne Marshall

How important is language in the stories we consume? Not the poetics of placing certain words together, but the root language used to form a narrative. It is tempting to think of it as merely a vessel, perhaps. Or, more romantically, as a channel for an artist's consciousness – the ideas, sensibilities, and characters lying beyond language, scooping readers up and dropping them somewhere immaterial and universal. But a closer look at the question, by writer and recipient of the 2003 Nobel Prize for Literature, J.M. Coetzee, brings up broader issues about who controls the literary and cultural agenda, therefore also controlling how stories are told, and thus what kinds of narratives end up in readers' hands.

According to *The New Yorker*, Coetzee is waging war against English as a global force. In conversation with *The Madrid Review*, Coetzee clarified:

"War" is the wrong word. But I have no personal grounds for fidelity to the English language ... I also have acute misgivings about the spread of English as the language of education, commerce and public affairs in countries where it has no deep cultural roots.

A disembodied English that becomes the language of power is something Coetzee experienced first-hand. Born in Africa to parents of Polish and Dutch descent, in whose homes Dutch and German were spoken (Polish having been jettisoned), he describes those languages as being abandoned early on in his life 'in favour of a more powerful father tongue, English'. Later, Coetzee's writing success seemed to contribute to the view that it was only natural that English should be the ruling language. This idea of a dominant Anglophone perspective - or mediation - where use of English propagates a system in which 'the gatekeepers of the North' force the cultural and literary agenda, made Coetzee reflect on his own place in that system as an 'assimilated foreigner'.

For Coetzee, the South is less defined by global politics, as a negative "other" of the North, and is more about countries and places connected by flora, fauna and climate, as well as a past and a culture, where 'the commonalities of history include long and complex histories of colonization.' Another connecting difference Coetzee noticed, was that those gatekeepers of the Northern perspective got to decide what was translated into English and what wasn't. And so, which writers from the South were promoted in the North and which stories about the South would be accepted into the repertoire of world literature.

This led Coetzee to conduct an experiment: given two versions of the same book in different languages, can we always tell which is the original and which is the translation – the "negative other"? For his 2020 novel, *The Pole/El polaco*, Coetzee worked in conjunction with his Spanish translator, Mariana Dimópulos, with the intention that the English and the Spanish versions of the novel would in fact cease to be versions and coexist as equals:

I worked to produce a Spanish version that was, in no way we could detect, inferior to the English. At moments when the English did not easily go into Spanish, the English was revised to make the fit easier. It was my intention that the notion of an "original" version of *The Pole/El polaco* would thereby be brought into question.

And, with no particular loyalty to English, he:

... envisaged that the English text, having metamorphosed into Spanish, would retire for a while, withdraw into the shadows, while the Spanish text would give birth to whatever translations emerged.

However, if English is the dominant global force, it is also the publishing world's lingua franca and Coetzee saw his plan defeated by the industry:



Photo credit: CCOB

My usual publishers in Poland, in France, in Japan and other countries simply declined to translate from the Spanish text. The Spanish text, they said, did not constitute the original, and their policy was to translate from the original – in fact, not only their policy but an article of faith with them. Thus, I faced an impasse. For eight months the only version of the book that existed in the open was the Spanish one, whose career was like that of any other Spanish book in the sense that it was reviewed in Spanish-language periodicals and bought by Spanish-speaking readers. Then I gave way and permitted translation from the English text.

For now, thwarted by the industry, Coetzee's concerns about English as a global political force have given way to wider linguistic and philological questions about language and translation, and about what each can and cannot do.

In 2025, Dimópulos and Coetzee published a book of essays on the topic, *Speaking in Tongues*, where they go beyond the dominant Northern perspective, taking in and tackling a subject where there 'are hardly any neutral positions to adopt.' Perhaps this is why debates about language and storytelling tend not to conclude so much as proliferate - only getting wider and not narrower as each idea opens infinitely out into another; each attempt to step outside the frame revealing another beneath it. And on all sides contained, maddeningly, by the system (language) that the conversation aims to interrogate.

Another angle on the debate can be found in recent trends in literary criticism, which have also questioned the dominance of Anglophone storytelling from a craft point of view, exploring instead different ways to tell stories outside of the standard narrative arc based on conflict resolution traditionally popular in the North. In her book *Spiral, Meander, Explode*, Jane Alison asks:

For centuries there's been one path through fiction we're most likely to travel – one we're actually told to follow – and that's the dramatic arc. But there so many other patterns that run through life, tracing other deep motions. Why not draw on them too?

The Irish novelist Rónán Hession is also interested in this idea. In a recent radio interview, in response to a question about why his novel *Leonard and Hungry Paul* felt very "kind", he responded by saying that prolonged exposure to literature from other parts of the world and other languages has shaped how he writes his own stories. Broadly, Anglophone readers (and publishers) like a three-act structure - conflict and a satisfying dénouement, yet in other countries and cultures that isn't the case. Hession used the example of *kishotenketsu*, a form of plotting in Japanese literature, which he described as 'an entirely drama-free' and thus relying less on a central conflict and more on exploration and contemplation.

If Coetzee's experiment with *The Pole/El polaco* ultimately ran aground on the practical realities of the publishing industry, that failure in itself is instructive. Together, these conversations — about translation, narrative form, and linguistic dominance — force us to notice the what, the where and the how of storytelling, and in doing so ask us to read with a heightened awareness of what else might be possible.

Angela Slatter: Reimagining Dark Fantasy

By Cristina Jurado

Once upon a time, in a land far, far away, there was a girl with worlds in her hands. Her love for stories began early, when her mother read her and her siblings tales of wonder from distant places just before bedtime. Later, lying in bed, she would revisit those stories, adding layers of settings, plot twists, surprising characters, and a thousand and one new elements—all touched by a flicker of the same darkness that surrounded her as she drifted toward sleep. To the eye, she was just another girl—shy with strangers, witty at school, lively with her friends, sweet and headstrong with her family members—but, upon closer inspection, the power of her imagination revealed itself, growing ever stronger. Later, she became an accomplished author, a teacher of the craft, and an advocate for the importance of folklore and mythology. She builds worlds and populates them with all kinds of characters, always unexpected and often tinged with darkness.

This could very well be the beginning of one of the multi-awarded, bestselling Australian author Angela Slatter's stories, drawn from her own career. Known for her versatility and imaginative range, Angela holds an MA and a PhD in Creative Writing and is a graduate of Clarion South 2009 and the Tin House Summer Writers Workshop 2006. While her professional life has centered on writing, she has continued to teach and provide services within the creative writing field. One of today's most notable fantasy authors, her work has been translated into Bulgarian, Chinese, Czech, Dutch, French, Italian, Japanese, Ukrainian, Polish, Romanian, Russian, Spanish and Turkish. Her latest releases, set in the Sourdough Universe, are published by Titan: *All The Murmuring Bones*, *The Path of Thorns*, *The Briar Book of the Dead*, *The Crimson Road* and the forthcoming *A Forest, Darkly* (2026). In 2023, she collaborated with Mike Mignola and Valeria Burzo in *Castle Full of Blackbirds*, set in the Hellboy Universe and two years later published a contemporary horror novella *The Cold House*.

Several Spanish publishers have championed her books: *Masa madre y otros relatos* (*Sourdough and Other Stories*) and *La Biblia del bosque amargo* (*The Bitterwood Bible and Other Recountings*) were released by Dilatando Mentes; Duermevela presented *De conjuros y otras penas* (*Of Sorrow and Such*) as well as *La quinta bruja* (*Ripper*) and *Una senda de espinas* (*A path of Thorns*); and *El rumor de los huesos* (*All the Murmuring Bones*) was published by Minotauro. Angela has graciously agreed to answer a few questions for The Madrid Review in light of her current and upcoming releases in Spanish.

It's always a pleasure to speak with an author with such a remarkable career: you have won the Shirley Jackson Award, the British Fantasy Award, the Ditmar Award, several Australian Shadows and Aurealis Awards, and even an Ignotus Award here in Spain. What do these awards mean to you personally? Do they make the work of writing easier—or, in some ways, more challenging?

I always say that awards are just a bonus. That's not to in any way diminish the honour of winning one, but you can't (or I don't think you should) spend your career thinking 'I'm writing to win an award!' For a start, winning an award doesn't make you a better writer, and losing an award doesn't make you a worse writer – it just means that a judging panel enjoyed your work.

The other thing about writing with the intention of winning an award is that you genuinely cannot control anything about the process, apart from writing the best book you can – so is everyone else! I also think that you get more out of just being on shortlists because while you're on the shortlist, there's all this suspense and potential; after the winner's been announced, there's no more suspense, the question is answered and everyone is moving on for the next bit of excitement.

I also think if you're taking awards too seriously it can make it hard to write the next thing because there's a little goblin in your brain saying 'What if the next thing isn't as good as this one?! What if you're a failure!?' And that can be really destructive, I think. So my advice is that if you win an award, that's great, it's a lovely honour and a treat, but if you don't win (or even get nominated) then that's fine because you started writing in order to tell stories, not in order to collect trophies.



Several of your collections and novels have been translated into Spanish, making your work accessible to Spanish-speaking audiences. What do you think connects most strongly with Spanish readers? Having met Spanish readers at Celsius Festival, were you surprised by any of their interpretations or responses to your work?

I think probably the very strong element of dark fairy tale in my writing is what makes the connection and I've had so many Spanish readers reach out to share the fairy and folk tales of their own regions. That might be because I was raised on European fairy tales, those are what my mother read to me at bedtime, and that's what I later on sought out for myself. It's what I studied in both my Masters and PhD in Creative Writing. I think even when I'm writing contemporary horror I just naturally gravitate towards including mythic or fairy tale elements – I just can't resist the dark path through the woods. At Celsius, I had the best and most incredible time – I have literally never been treated so well at a writers' festival. I genuinely didn't think many people would have read my work, but I was so wrong! I got to have some truly wonderful conversations with Spanish readers, and it was wonderful because I felt there was a true and deep understanding of fairy and folk tales and how embedded they are in people's life – that, even when you're an adult, you'll still find echoes in your mind of those elements, the way you look at landscapes and listen to people. After Celsius, I thought 'Maybe I need to move to Spain! This feels right!'

Which books or authors have been most influential in shaping you as a writer in your adult life, and why? Have any artists—whether authors, painters, musicians, or filmmakers—served as influences on your stories? Any Spanish or Latin American?

So many influences! It feels like a crime to only choose a few and I'll surely forget someone. But, my list would have to include Tanith Lee, Margo Lanagan, John Connolly, Jane Gaskell, Umberto Eco, Angela Carter, Wilbur Smith, Marina Warner, Stephen King, Nancy Kress, Sheri S. Tepper, Shirley Jackson. Film imagery that stays with me includes the Neil Jordan version of Angela Carter's *The Company of Wolves* and also his *Byzantium*, and Coppola's *Dracula*. My taste in art tends more towards pre-Raphaelite images, but I also love Renaissance art. Music-wise, I love a good harpsichord! Baroque chamber orchestras, Medieval music and Gregorian chants. But also Pink, Of Monsters and Men, Florence and the Machine, Pairs Paloma, Taylor Swift, Neil Diamond, Wolf Gang... the list could go on forever! But those are often the musicians I listen to when writing. I'll also play a bunch of Skyrim soundtracks sometimes to put me into the sense of a landscape or a mood or pace.

As for Spanish and Latin American authors: Gabriel Garcia Marquez (especially *Love in the Time of Cholera*), Jorge Luis Borges (his collection *Labyrinths* was a landmark for me), some Isabel Allende (a lot of very gothic elements in her work), and Manuel Mujica Lainez (*The Wandering Unicorn*); on my TBR are several Isabel Cañas books. In terms of film: Laura Esquivel's *Like Water for Chocolate* (the imagery of the film is gorgeous and again, very gothic), obviously Guillermo del Toro (*Pan's Labyrinth*, *The Devil's Backbone*, *The Orphanage*) as his aesthetic is always striking (and gothic!) and I admire the broad reach of his work.

Your stories have also accompanied us for many years. What is it about the short-story form that draws you so strongly?

Well, I could be flippant and say it's easier to master the short story form because it's shorter and takes less time! But that's only a little bit of a joke. When I decided I was going to take the risk and try to be a writer, I liked the short story because its length meant it was easier to keep it all in my head, remember what I'd written, and also be able to sort of take a helicopter view of it so I could see what didn't work. To do that with a novel (or even a novella) it's harder because there's so much to remember.

So, part of starting with short stories was that it was a really good size for me to build my writing muscles on, for me to keep practising improving every time I wrote. I also have always loved short stories, even before I started writing, I adored multi-author anthologies and single-author collections. I still have so many of the ones I bought when I was fifteen. When I started writing, that was the form I tried and kept working at until it was something I think I'm good at. I love that slice of life element; I love that you can pull a reader in really quickly to a rapidly escalating situation and then leave! A short story can break your heart or lift you up or terrify you just as a novel can – and it's a real artform to create that intensity in such a short space. I love the challenge of choosing the right word, of making sure my descriptions are so sharp and tight that it feels like there's no other way this thing could have been described. That economy of words really appeals to me.

I greatly enjoyed the article you published last year on the Fantasy Café blog, "The Long and the Short of It,"[1] in which you reflect on writing stories of differing lengths. Do certain themes or motifs emerge more naturally in one form than another? Are there ideas that only feel fully realized in a short story or a novel for you?

You know, it's a question I've pondered for a long time because I get asked it over and over. I think I finally decided the answer is just 'It's as long as it needs to be!' I think when I have an idea, I generally have a sense if it's a short story because I'll have a good idea of how it ends. That might change as I write, the ending, but I'll at least have the feeling that I'm writing a shorter piece. If I'm doing a novella or a novel, I don't stress too much if I don't really know what the ending will be because I know I'll have time to explore the possible contours of the story.

As far as themes are concerned, I don't come to a story thinking 'This is the theme!' I just have an image or an idea or a character in a certain situation and I write from there. When I finish, and do my first read-through, that's when I notice the themes that have just come through as I've written. That then helps me shape the story in the next draft – I decide which ideas and themes I want to emphasise and which ones aren't quite working and are best removed. The motifs might already be there after the first draft or I might have to insert ones that work best with the dominant themes that have come through. It's very much on a story-by-story basis for me.

I think a short story is about a slice of life – you don't get to do all the lead-up and roll-down that you have time and word count for in a longer piece, so you're just very carefully examining one facet of a jewel. It's very much a moment in time sort of a thing for me. That being said, I've written short stories that I felt could be examined in more depth – my short story "Brisneyland by Night" turned into the novel *Vigil*, another one "Red Skein" was used in *The Path of Thorns*, and "The Summer Husband" was the spark for the new novel *A Forest, Darkly*. So, some stories won't quite let you go...

In addition to your work as a writer, you are also a creative writing teacher. Do you find that the act of teaching craft—plot, structure, voice—changes the way you approach your own work? If so, how?

What teaching has given me is a series of frameworks I can fall back on each time. Sometimes you forget how to do a thing – if I've been writing a novel, then I generally haven't written a short story in a long while, but I can always go back to the three-act structure and remind myself of what to do. The whole thing with that gap between teaching knowledge and writing practice is something I've noticed with other writer friends too – we all know the techniques! We remind students of them all the time, but sometimes you don't see them in your own work (I do keep a list of things I know I always make mistakes with so I can fix them in the second draft stage) but the place you do see it is when you're editing or beta reading for someone else, be they student or a very experienced published author.

I think the place where you find your most valuable lessons is in editing for someone else – and you must be aware that if you're noticing this problem in their work (and honestly, also in books that are already published), maybe you'd better go and check your own work for the same issue! I can pretty much guarantee you'll get a horrible shock. Don't ever assume you know everything or indeed that you're automatically doing everything right.

Your work is deeply rooted in folklore. Some critics describe it as “retelling,” though I prefer to think of it as “reimagining,” since you are not simply recounting new versions of traditional folk tales. Instead, you seem to draw on their ingredients to create narratives that challenge conventions and expectations. How conscious are you of bending these folk structures to address issues like patriarchy and class, and does the source material ever push back against your intentions?

I think my first short stories were definitely more retelling with some twists, but the more I wrote, the more deeply I was exploring the short story form and the history and meanings of folklore and fairy tales, the more my stories become reimaginings as you say. I think I'd say that the first time I made that leap was in the short story “Sourdough” – I felt like I had grasped at something that was beyond my reach but I'd caught maybe its tail, and that I could keep doing that and pulling myself forward each time. I'm very conscious of using folklore as part of my world and the meanings of my stories. The themes of patriarchy silencing women and women fighting back in different ways are really strong in my work, I'm very aware of it and it's intentional. I'm very aware that the old tales are the stories women used to tell each other, used to tell children, and they're often containing coded and secret meanings and warnings. In Maria Dahvana Headley's *The Mer Wife* there's a line which contains the idea that 'gossip' is how women communicate in terms of being how we share secrets and warnings with each other; it's the voice of the world for us, how we speak in code (I hope I haven't screwed up that interpretation too badly). I've loved that since I first read it because I think it articulated something I'd been writing into my work without really consciously thinking about it. I feel that way about story; it's one of the ways we speak to each other. I definitely think that the new novel, *A Forest, Darkly* is very much about women speaking to each other and looking after each other no matter what the circumstances and also being aware of all the things society does and says to turn us against each other. Folklore structures in storytelling are a perfect way to do that.

The Verity Fassbinder books combine crime fiction with dark fantasy, while the Sourdough novels lean more heavily into folklore and the Gothic. How does your approach to structure and pacing change between these two kinds of stories?

I have a general structure that I use for all my novels (which I adapt and change as the story requires, it's meant to be a guide not a strict set of laws), so both the Veritys and the gothic fantasies have structures that mirror that framework. The Veritys are set in my hometown of Brisbane, they're a modern day urban fantasy/supernatural crime series, and all the locations are very familiar to me, so it was definitely 'easier' to do the setting for those. It was a matter of taking locations I knew, asking 'what if' questions and imagining them differently – for example, the café Little Venice doesn't exist but I set it in a kind of space between other recognisable buildings in that suburb of West End; the house that Verity lives in is one of the old houses I lived in when I first started writing the books. With the Sourdough world books, there's more imagination involved because I'm making that setting up as I go. It bears a resemblance to European countries, but I need to adapt that to the needs of the story.

Verity Fassbinder is a recurring, contemporary protagonist, whereas the Sourdough Universe is shaped by place, myth, and lineage. What different freedoms or constraints do these narrative frameworks give you as a writer? How do you choose your main characters?

I think choosing my characters comes down to the voice in my head at the time! With Miren in *All the Murmuring Bones*, I knew she was a girl who was the end of a long family line, that she'd been born and raised for a specific purpose and I thought “What if she says no?” With Asher from *The Path of Thorns*, I was thinking about someone coming to a place with their own agenda, when gothic heroines are usually sent to a place where things happen to them – what if Asher made things happen? Ellie in *The Briar Book of the Dead* came about because I wanted a heroine who wasn't the chosen one, who had no special powers, but would fight with her wits. Violet in *The Crimson Road* was another girl refusing the fate others imposed on her – but then she had to do the 'fated' duty anyway! And Mehrab in *A Forest, Darkly* is my grumpy menopausal witch in the woods because that's my era! And I wanted the voice of an older woman in this book, who has her regrets and also her hopes. So, basically, they talk to me, and I want to tell their story.

In 2023, you collaborated with Hellboy creator Mike Mignola and artist Valeria Burzo on the graphic novel *Castle Full of Blackbirds*. How did working in a visual medium shape the way you approached storytelling for this project?

It was astonishing and very eye-opening. I genuinely didn't comprehend just how much heavy lifting the art had to do, and how much the words had to be pared back. So, I apologise to every cover artist I ever worked with up to that point – I hope I'm better informed now! It was a huge honour when Mike asked if I'd be interested in doing the graphic novel, and I was very lucky in getting to work with Valeria (her lush, gothic style fitted beautifully, as did Michelle Madsen's colouring) and the Darkhorse editorial team (who are SO knowledgeable about everything Hellboy-related. Fortunately, I was able to put my short story writing and editing experience to good use when it came to cutting back dialogue and description to their most precise and effective. It was a challenge, something completely new to me and I felt refreshed after doing it – I think that's always the case with a new challenge that pushes you out of your comfort zone. In terms of how I did the work, I worked out a kind of timeline with story elements and motifs that I wanted to include, and experimented with the order of things. Then when I felt it would work, I took 20 x A4 sheets of blank paper and scribbled on them and drew stick figures. Finally, I typed up a neat script with notes to Valeria about how I saw the art. It was such a fascinating process.

Can you share with us your current projects?

As I type, I am literally on a break from trying to finish a new novel, *Our Lady of Battles*. I will be launching a new novel – *A Forest, Darkly* – on 10 February. After that I will start writing a novella called *By Fire, By Water*. In October another novella, *Fitcher's Bird*, comes out. Then there's another secret project. I've got two different limited editions of *The Path of Thorns* coming out. And after that I will start a final (for now) Sourdough novel for Titan, *The Scarred Queen*. When I get some free time (!) I have four other novellas to either edit or finish, so I'm hoping to get to those this year so my agent will have some sales to make. I also have a graphic novel version of *Ripper (La Quinta Bruja)* that I would love to see published. One day! A girl can dream.

Thank you so much for taking the time to answer these questions and good luck on your future endeavours!

[1] <https://www.fantasybookcafe.com/2025/04/women-in-sff-month-a-g-slatte/>

FICCIÓN ESPECULATIVA EN PLENA FLORACIÓN

Por Cristina Jurado

Los meses de primavera son, en la industria literaria española, algunos de los más activos: lógico si se tiene en cuenta el aluvión de festivales, ferias y concursos que se celebran desde ese momento y hasta el verano. Como ya viene siendo costumbre, vamos a repasar algunas de las novedades que verán la luz en los próximos meses.

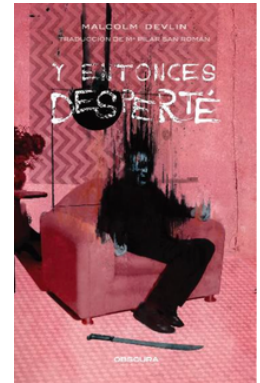
Empezamos con la ciencia ficción: Siruela acaba de anunciar para marzo la publicación de *La otra parte*, novela de Alfred Kubin que apareció por primera vez en 1909 y que pronto se convirtió en referente de la literatura distópica, en particular, y fantástica, en general. En ella el autor austríaco nos lleva de la mano de un artista a un reino europeo recién creado en busca de una sociedad ideal para encontrarse con un sistema opresivo. Esta misma editorial lanzará *Las fronteras* de Carolina Sarmiento, un eco-thriller poético con ingredientes distópicos que ahonda en las drásticas consecuencias de la sobreexplotación de la Tierra. El sello Dolmen apuesta por *Skyward Inn*, de la británica Aliya Whiteley que fue finalista a los BSFA y al Arthur C. Clarke Award. La novela nos traslada a una posada en Qita, un planeta conquistado por la Tierra, y las tensiones que surgen como consecuencia del conflicto entre ambos mundos.

En lo que a la fantasía se refiere Minotauro presenta *El Embrujo* de la escritora Silvia Moreno-García, conocida por *Gótico Mexicano*, y en la que la brujería intergeneracional se combina con el terror y el misterio. El sello Oz publica en abril *La torre de los vivos y los muertos* de uno de los referentes del grimdark o fantasía épica más oscura: la británica Anna Smith Sparks. Se trata de la segunda entrega de "Empires of Dust", en la que la protagonista del primer libro accede al poder y deja a su paso un rastro de violencia y muerte. Hidra presenta *De Sangre y Fuego: Vinculados y Vencidos 1* de Ryan Cahill, una fantasía épica clásica que revisa y actualiza el género para contar una aventura repleta de criaturas fantásticas y magia.

En mayo desembarca con el sello Duermevela *Luenga Sombra*, la tercera novela de la serie "Media Alma" de Olivia Atwater. Esta historia continúa desarrollándose en el universo creado por la canadiense donde se mezcla la Regencia británica con el romance y la fantasía queer. También dentro del género romantasy se enmarca *La Balada de los Dragones: Hasta que Caiga la Luna 2* de Sarah Parker para Plaza y Janés, la secuela de una de las sagas más vendidas a nivel internacional. En esta entrega la sed de venganza de la protagonista se contraponen a sus sentimientos mientras un fenómeno lunar llega para remover los cimientos de su realidad.

La editorial Insólita propone *La ley del Trueno* de Sergio Mars, en la que reinos enfrentados en un mundo secundario reflejan la lucha entre deidades rivales. Por su parte David B. Gil regresa con Suma de Letras y *Ciudad de Sal*, un thriller inquietante que tiene como escenario la Costa del Sol y en el que la acción vertiginosa une a un inspector de policía y a la agente a la que sustituye por jubilación. El británico Malcolm Devlin lanza con Obscura *Y entonces desperté*, la crónica de un narrador no confiable sobre una extraña epidemia y sus devastadoras consecuencias en la salud mental colectiva.

Marina Tena vuelve al terror con *Nana de Sombras*, una novela publicada por Dolmen que sigue los pasos de un niño a la hora de enfrentarse a seres fantásticos. Seix Barral es la editorial que trae al español *La noche devastada*, del francés Jean-Baptiste del Amo, ganador de numerosos premios como el Goncourt por su novela *Una educación libertina*.



En esta historia de adolescentes aficionados al cine de terror que viven a las afueras de Toulouse en los '90, una casa abandonada y un joven que muere en misteriosas circunstancias son los ingredientes perfectos para una aventura inquietante.

La Biblioteca de Carfax publica en breve *El ángel del Lago Indian*, el último volumen de "La trilogía del Lago Indian" en el que la ya legendaria Jade Daniels regresa a Proofrock después de pasar por la cárcel y se ve enfrentada a más amenazas *slasher*. Este mismo sello nos trae en abril *Pesadilla bajo la lluvia* de Naomi A. Hintze. En esta historia sobre la maternidad y el terror (¿hay algo más terrorífico que dar a luz?) la protagonista se ve aislada en la mansión de su familia política mientras se desata un auténtico diluvio en el exterior.

Ronald Malfi desembarca en la editorial Ediciones Ocultas con *Mr. Cable*, una inquietante novela sobre un escritor al que llega un misterioso libro que no ha escrito pero en el que aparece como autor. Eloy M. Cebrián vuelve a la escena literaria bajo el sello de Dolmen con *La Guardiania*, en la que criaturas lovecraftianas y un ambiente gótico se dan cita en un escenario urbano actual y que sorprenderá al lector con su multiplicidad de voces. Comparte editorial con esta obra lo nuevo de Ander Pérez: se trata de *El eco que nos persigue*, un horror-thriller situado en un ambiente opresivo que nos sumerge en misterios plagados de extraños fenómenos.

Laurel Hightower, autora nominada a los prestigiosos premios Stoker, ha entrado en el catálogo de Dilatando Mentes con *The Day of the Door*, una auténtica pesadilla sobre abuso infantil, investigaciones paranormales y secretos familiares. Otra de las apuestas de esta editorial es la saga de fantasía oscura *Selene Shade Resurrectionist for Hire* de Victoria Dalpe. La primera entrega nos introducirá en el mundo de la protagonista cuya capacidad para revivir a los muertos la convierte en una arma poderosa para la policía pero también en un objetivo para sus enemigos.

Y para cerrar este aperitivo sobre novedades, la decana Valdemar ha anunciado la publicación de *Dioses Oscuros: Cuentos Completos* del escritor de culto T.E.D. Klein. Esta obra aúna dos colecciones del autor, *Dioses Oscuros e Historias Reconfortantes*, en las que las narraciones con elementos lovecraftianos se abordan de manera original e innovadora.

Carmen Masilla: “El arte no es qué contar, sino cómo contarlo”

una entrevista con Lis Iglesias

Carmen Masilla es una artista madrileña con una notable trayectoria internacional y nacional, cuya obra forma parte de las colecciones del Museo Europeo de Arte Moderno de Barcelona, el Museo del Dibujo del Castillo de Larrés y galerías de referencia en el sector cultural. Ahora, pendiente de su próxima participación en la Feria de Arte que se celebra en la primera semana de marzo en las instituciones madrileñas, conversa con Lis Iglesias sobre su trayectoria, su motivación y sus inquietudes.

Estudiaste diseño y publicidad y llegaste a ser profesora en la Universidad Politécnica, ¿qué fue lo que te llevó a cambiar el rumbo y dedicarte por completo a tu arte?

En realidad, nunca quise otra cosa que dedicarme a la pintura, a la escultura, pero el dibujo y la pintura, en mi familia, eran considerados más una habilidad que una profesión con futuro. Por otro lado, ya desde los 7 años me divertía creando ropa y reciclando prendas, pintando estampados. Conseguí unir mis dos pasiones y además logré ganarme la vida con ello. Trabajé para alta costura, diseñé para revistas y grandes firmas y fui profesora de ilustración y moda. Sin embargo, nunca consideré que fuera realmente mi camino. Así que un día en una clase me quedé sin poder hablar, sin ganas de comunicarme con el mundo y sentí que era mi forma de dar un puñetazo en la mesa y cambiar mi rumbo.

En ese momento abandoné mi profesión y viajé a Florencia para conectar con la pintura directamente. Consideraba que todo lo que había pintado hasta ahora no tenía ningún valor ni interés. Sabía que debía formarme para poder comunicar lo que quería contar. Pintar tres cuadros mal pintados no te hace pintor, y yo no quería eso.

Has pasado tanto por academias como por talleres de artistas reconocidos. ¿Qué momentos y qué artistas han sido clave en tu formación para configurar la obra que realizas ahora?

Al principio uno debe aprender de forma clásica para entender de dónde venimos en la pintura y para tener un amplio conocimiento de técnicas y soportes, entender las herramientas con las que vas a trabajar. Por otro lado, la imagen realista clásica es la que mejor entiende el espectador, por costumbre. En ese momento me fascinaban los clásicos del siglo XIX, caracterizados por un purismo académico increíble, no podía concebir que se pudiera pintar de ese modo. Fortuny, Madrazo, Pradilla.

Ver obras de Velázquez, Sargent, Goya... Ahí uno se siente demasiado pequeño e insignificante y comienza a replantearse sus propias limitaciones y metas. Profundizar en los movimientos del arte y conocer la historia de la pintura es lo que ha sido clave para el cambio en mi obra. Klimt empezó con una pureza pictórica absoluta, y resulta interesante analizar su posterior evolución. Lo mismo sucede con Picasso, Euan Uglow, y sobre todo con la casi impronunciable Helene Schjerfbeck, además de Egon Schiella, Balthus, Kokoschka... La lista sería interminable. Aquí entiendes que desaprender es el único camino para la evolución, no se puede seguir haciendo las cosas del mismo modo.

¿Qué es lo que te ofreció la figura femenina como primera fuente de inspiración, de trabajo?

Mi pintura es figurativa y la comunicación la realizo a través de un personaje femenino.



Es el tema, el medio de expresión de ideas y emociones. Sin embargo, no es una “musa pasiva”, sino una creadora y comunicadora. En ocasiones me ha ayudado a reimaginar mitos clásicos, o reivindicar la fuerza feminista, incluso en lo referente a mi identidad personal. En la actualidad, el cuerpo femenino me permite romper con los estándares tradicionales clásicos para explorar la diversidad y la fragmentación de la figura.

La pandemia fue un antes y un después para muchas personas. ¿Ha tenido un impacto significativo en tu obra, en tus temáticas o intereses?

La pandemia sí fue un antes y un después. En mi caso, sentía la necesidad totalmente profunda de encontrar un lenguaje diferente que me ayudara a contar las historias de otro modo, con una mayor coherencia y de forma más personal. Alejarme de la época del espectáculo y de la competencia absurda me dio la libertad para crear, sin la presión de tener que gustar obligatoriamente. El arte es una necesidad totalmente profunda y el cambio siempre viene ligado a esta necesidad de investigar, de evolucionar. El mundo paró y me dio la oportunidad de parar con él para reflexionar. No es sólo “qué contar”, sino “cómo contarlo”.

Tus obras, en muchas ocasiones, dejan al descubierto el proceso más técnico de la pintura. Algunas llegan a parecer inacabadas. ¿Qué idea se esconde detrás de este planteamiento?

Cuando voy a museos y veo algunas obras inacabadas, o con la prueba de color, me parece realmente fascinante. Tener la posibilidad de poder meterse dentro del cuadro, ver cómo está hecho, que pasos ha recorrido el pintor, parte del dibujo, de la grisalla, incluso ver los arrepentimientos. En ocasiones me gusta dejar impreso el proceso del cuadro, la idea de estar en el camino y no haber llegado aún. ¿Cuándo está una obra acabada? ¿Qué marca el final de la obra? Un cuadro puede estar pintándose durante años.



Día de perros(abajo) **El color del silencio** (arriba)



Tal vez hay que dejar pistas al espectador para que pueda finalizarla en su mente. O tal vez sea solo parte del propio lenguaje. En realidad, no es un acto forzado, siento que lo pide la obra.

En los retratos que realizas, se puede apreciar el carácter, la personalidad de la figura que capturas en el lienzo. ¿Qué tipo de personas te resultan más interesantes de retratar, desde un punto de vista artístico y personal?

Me fascina el retrato. Uno se enamora un poco de cada persona retratada, da igual la edad, el sexo, todos me parecen fascinantes. No se trata de reproducir sólo líneas, sino sumergirse en las expresiones, las miradas, las texturas, las emociones que revelan su esencia, el carácter. Capturar eso es lo que me motiva. No es tan importante que se parezca, sino que sea, como se suele decir "capturar el alma". En cuanto a la elección de los modelos me gustan las figuras andróginas, que no se aprecie mucho el sexo ni la edad. También me gustan los rostros extraños con bellezas peculiares. No hay nada más surrealista ni abstracto que un retrato y al mismo tiempo es casi como pintar un paisaje. Plantear las facciones, sus arrugas y expresión, la complejidad de esas formas dispuestas con perspectiva como un paisaje. Puede llegar a ser lo que uno quiera.

Después de tantos años trabajando como artista independiente, ¿qué consejos le darías a la Carmen que empezaba?

Que no tuviera miedo ni complejo, cuando uno viene del mundo de la ilustración siempre queda una parte que se siente usurpadora, pero con el tiempo pienso que eso es la grandeza del entorno. Al final, la pintura es la materialización de todo lo que uno ha absorbido en la vida. Por otro lado, que sea honesta, coherente y consecuente en su trabajo, que siga su camino y confíe en sí misma. Todo llega de algún modo y no tiene que gustar a todo el mundo. Que deje de lado querer que la admiren, esa época del espectáculo y de la competencia absurda, que trabaje para una misma y que siga trabajando, investigando, aprendiendo y desaprendiendo.

¿En qué momento te encuentras ahora mismo como artista?

En un momento bastante agradable, pero también en un momento de búsqueda y de acción para no quedar atrapada en un círculo del que no se pueda salir. Hay que seguir estudiando, investigando y pensando. Acabo de colaborar en una película maravillosa de Jorge Dorado, *Las vidas posibles de mi madre*, en la que soy la "mano pictórica" de la protagonista. Algo totalmente nuevo para mí, pero a la vez una increíble experiencia. Me he sentido muy mimada por todo el equipo, he conocido a gente maravillosa y he tenido la posibilidad de meterme en la piel de una gran mujer fascinada por la pintura.

De la mano de Inédita Gallery, bajo un proyecto titulado *El espejo* en el que la sociedad se mira, vas a formar parte de la Feria de Arte Contemporáneo de Madrid, que se celebra entre el 4 y 8 de marzo en la Galería de Cristal del Palacio de Cibeles. ¿Qué proyectos tienes ahora por delante?

Estoy profundamente agradecida a Luis de Inédita Gallery por haber confiado en mi trabajo. Siempre me ha encantado su visión del arte y la libertad que se respira en su galería. Estoy agradecida y feliz, aunque también me genera tensión estar a la altura de lo que se espera de mi trabajo. Los proyectos para este año a corto plazo son exposiciones colectivas, y preparar individuales en las galerías con las que trabajo. Por supuesto, lo más emocionante va a ser la feria con Inédita y al final de año la presentación de la película que me hace muy feliz.

Robert Sullivan: Aotearoa's Māori Voice in the World

Madrid is a long way from Aotearoa and yet in Robert Sullivan's poetry, the Pacific seems to fold itself around the reader like a familiar rhythm.

Born in Auckland in 1967, Sullivan belongs to Ngāpuhi, the largest *iwi* (tribe) in the far north of New Zealand, and Kāi Tahu, the principal *iwi* of the South Island, alongside Irish, Scottish and English ancestry. From a young age, he was steeped in the voices of his ancestors, stories, chants and histories passed down through his family and community, experiences that shaped his understanding of language and identity. "I remember lying on the grass as a Year 6 pupil, looking up at clouds and writing about an alligator floating," he recalls. "It made me realise that a poem could take me somewhere else, to another world, and I could write it."

Sullivan's family history is interwoven with the land and sea of Aotearoa. He grew up aware of his whakapapa, the ancestral connections that stretch back to the earthmother and skyfather, and to the landscapes of Ōamaru and the northern reaches of Ngāpuhi country. That consciousness of lineage, of belonging, would become the backbone of his poetry. He has described his work as a conversation with his *tūpuna* (ancestors), carried forward in language, song, and story. "Our oral literature continues to evolve including digital media as well as in-person sharing of forms using musical instruments literally brought back to life from museum cases by musicians, inspiring new instrument makers, and new compositions in the Māori language by expert speakers," he explains.

His early encounters with both Māori and European literary traditions - reading books in English, hearing stories in te reo Māori (the Māori language) and visiting marae (ancestral meeting places) with his extended whānau (family and wider kinship group) - cemented a lifelong fascination with how words could carry history, identity, and imagination. These experiences shaped not only his poetry but also his academic path: he earned an MA and PhD from the University of Auckland, focusing on creative writing and indigenous poetics, and has since balanced his roles as poet, teacher, and editor, bringing the richness of Māori oral tradition into both scholarship and literary practice.

Asked how he thinks Māori poetry resonates with readers in Europe or Latin America, Sullivan's response is both immediate and embodied. "The haka is our best known poetic form in the Māori language, belonging to the oral literary continuum, and it is used to forcefully assert a feeling and a position. Last year one of our youngest members of parliament, Hana Rāwhiti Maipi-Clarke, used the haka to vehemently object to contentious legislation reinterpreting the Treaty relationship between Māori and the Crown here in Aotearoa New Zealand. It seemed to gain worldwide attention, at least in the English-speaking world." Maipi-Clarke was later named one of Time100's 'The World's Most Influential Rising Stars', proof that Māori performance and voice can travel far beyond the Pacific.

Sullivan situates himself within a long lineage of New Zealand poets who have travelled and translated across continents. "Our most significant poet in the English language, Hone Tuwhare (1922–2008), spent some time in Germany. Hinemoana Baker's collection *Funkhaus* has been published and translated in Germany and Poland. Keri Hulme was better known as a novelist but her success with *The Bone People* also drew attention to her poetry in Europe. I love her poetry. Apirana Taylor and Kiri Pihana-Wong have shared their poems at the Festival Internacional de Poesía de Medellín in Colombia and were very well received. Essa May Ranapiri had a residency in Scotland and my collection *Star Waka* was translated as *Sternen Waka* and launched at the Frankfurt Book Fair."

Sullivan's work blends ancestral voices with contemporary craft. He prefers the term Māori oral continuum, emphasising that Māori oral literature is not frozen in time. "English language poets who are Māori are the outliers again in the world of Māori poetics, at least numerically. If I want to express what it is to be a Māori person in the 21st century I must use te reo Māori to convey our ancestors' soulfulness." In his opera analogy, English functions as recitative, te reo Māori as aria, carrying depth and emotional resonance.

Translation, for Sullivan, is a reshaping of the audience. "Because I have a New Zealand accent, most readers overseas aren't in a position to hear that, so all the tonal qualities in the poetry are lost even to English speakers ... I sometimes translate my work into te reo Māori and even that transition is like entering another room of poetry. The act of translation means a shifting of the seats in my audience." His poems have appeared in Russian, Ukrainian and Japanese editions, each with typography and rhythm recalibrated to a new cultural ear.

Sullivan is equally committed to poetry as lived experience. He wants to normalise poetry, weaving it into everyday life. "My goal is to share poetry writing workshops on my mother's and my father's marae or ancestral meeting places. I've made commitments to do that several times a year, as well as other community venues. Poetry belongs everywhere." His writing process, by contrast, is quietly intimate: "I tend to begin by hand, usually in a notebook, and then redraft on a computer ... Writing by hand has a different rhythm to that of the keyboard, a human rhythm."

Literary influences, he admits, come from far and wide: W.S. Merwin and Pablo Neruda for epic vision, Roberto Juarroz for verticality, Federico García Lorca's duende and the Māori concept of mauri as a living creative energy. And yet his work remains firmly anchored in the landscapes, stories and trees of Aotearoa. "The tribes or iwi that I belong to ... had great forests. I can't help but think of our trees and all our tree relationships handed down through our creation narratives when I think of verticality."

As an editor and anthologist, he has co-edited *Whetu Moana, Mauri Ola, Puna Wai Kōrero*, and other seminal collections, nurturing a vibrant community of Māori and Pacific writers. He celebrates the next generation: Tayi Tibble, essa may ranapiri, Alice Te Punga Somerville, Tusiata Avia, Selina Tusitala Marsh. Spoken word, slam, experimental forms are not trivial pursuits but "how we negotiate the hard and the good stuff of life. Many of these poets are interested in heart and soul. Some are more experimental."

Sullivan's vision for his Laureateship stretches from marae workshops to regional and online events, bringing poetry into daily life while maintaining its ancestral depth. He sees poetry as a vessel, carrying history, lineage, and human experience across oceans and languages. In his own words: "Poems draw us back to what matters, to the present moment ... they help us make sense of joy, of grief, of love."

Michel Faber: Escape Into Imagination

By James Hartley

"My memory has always been alarmingly soluble," Michel Faber tells me. Growing up in "a very unhappy household," he confesses that early recollections have dissolved into "later reconstitutions," assembled largely from surviving photographs and narrative necessity.

Born in The Hague on 13 April 1960, Faber lived in the Netherlands until the age of seven, when his parents emigrated with him to Australia. They left behind his half-brother, placed in a home for "troublesome juveniles", and a half-sister whom Faber would not meet until years later, facts, he says, that "probably lie beneath all my writing." He has described his family as "very inflexible and harsh," leaving him with a lasting feeling that even kindness, once fractured, can never truly be restored.

From his earliest years in Australia, Faber has been an outsider. Relocating to a new country at seven, learning a new language and navigating the emotional absence in his home placed him apart. He found his first companions in literature and art. "With comics, I'm not sure the word read is the apt one, as it's always been the artwork that thrilled me. Barry Smith, Jack Kirby, Gil Kane, Neal Adams - these were constant companions of my youth. Most of the time, the scripts existed just to give the artists something to do." But his creative ambitions extended beyond appreciation: "When I was 19, I attempted to draw my own graphic adaptation of Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse 5*. I gave up after a page and a half. It took too long and I wasn't good enough." (see illustration, right).

His first forays into writing began even earlier. By the age of eight, he had already produced a homemade booklet of stories, and throughout his adolescence he devoured every book he could lay hands on, from C.S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* to Vonnegut, William Golding and the satirists of the twentieth century.

Faber's formal education culminated at the University of Melbourne, where he read Dutch, philosophy, rhetoric, English language and literature, a curriculum that afforded him familiarity with Tudor poetry, Victorian novels and the architecture of Great Books. Yet even with that intellectual grounding, publication would elude him for decades. He worked in odd jobs - cleaning, nursing, phone sales - and wrote relentlessly, filing away stories and novels that he would not submit for publication until the encouragement of his wife, the writer and teacher Eva Youren, spurred him to take literary competitions seriously in the mid-1990s.

He won several short-story prizes - Macallan, Ian St. James, Neil Gunn - which led to his first published collection, *Some Rain Must Fall* (1998). This was followed by *Under the Skin* (2000), a novel that blended science fiction, horror and psychological inquiry, and which was shortlisted for the Whitbread First Novel Award.

The Crimson Petal and the White (2002) followed, an 850-page Victorian epic centred on Sugar, a 19-year-old prostitute navigating the grim streets of 1870s London, and William Rackham, the heir to a perfume business. The novel was adapted by the BBC into a four-part serial in 2011, bringing Faber's London to TV audiences to memorable effect.



Photo: David Rose



NOTES FROM IBIZA BY CLARE CAMPBELL

Faber has never been content to write the same book twice. His other novels include *The Hundred and Ninety-Nine Steps* (2001), a strange, photographic novella set in Whitby; *The Courage Consort* (2002), a meditation on music and avant-garde sound; *The Fire Gospel* (2008), which riffs on myth and belief; and my own favourite, *The Book of Strange New Things* (2014) in which an English pastor is selected by a corporation to undertake missionary work on a distant planet where he preaches to peaceable native inhabitants under wobbling, waving rain. Viewed alongside the equally fascinating *Under the Skin*, which was adapted into a 2013 film, *Strange New Things* underscores Faber's uncommon ability to write fiction that invites reinterpretation in other forms without losing its integrity and sheer bloody weirdness.

When I asked how much of his writing is autobiographical, Faber responded: "In the strictest sense, almost none." His novels are exercises in world-building, he says, while on a deeper level he admits they are "very personal indeed," wrestling with questions of damaged people attempting to break cycles of hurt. In *The Crimson Petal and the White* this emerges through the prism of Victorian familial abuse and the possibility of transcendence, a theme that, as his correspondence and answers make clear, haunts and motivates his work.

Revealing, too, is that he says he is "on the spectrum". Though not formally diagnosed in his youth, he and Eva recognised traits that today are understood within the broad and complex tapestry of autism. His neurological wiring, he suggests, informs both his literary sensibilities and his relationship with the world; alienated and compassionate, observant of nuance and resistant to facile categorisation. It sums up his books, too: in each he creates a world which he then explores, worlds within worlds which he will never entirely know.

His most recent book, *Listen: On Music, Sound and Us* (2023), is a rare foray into non-fiction. Unlike many books about music, which focus on artists and genres, Faber's is an exploration of *listening itself*: how it works, why it matters and what it reveals about us. Drawn from decades of personal obsession with music, the book weaves together memory, neuroscience and cultural critique in a way that is audacious and often playful. Asked how music intersects with his prose, Faber said he doesn't often read poetry and rarely focuses on song lyrics, but that the *sound* of music informs his sense of rhythm in prose.

Despite his reputation, Faber remains largely unconnected from social media and digital self-promotion. He notes that the era of handwritten letters from readers, where people confided what his books had meant to them, has faded, replaced by the noisy commentariat of online platforms, in which he desires to take no part. Looking forward, Faber feels he has "produced the body of literary work that I was put on earth to produce." After a recent heart attack and triple bypass, he says he's content to slow down. His current ambitions - completing and honouring Eva's unfinished stories and becoming a better photographer - are enough, he says, to fill his remaining days.



I never imagined it could happen, but deep in the labour of writing my own novel, the enchantment of reading began to fade. Perhaps it was noticing the mechanics behind each sentence, or the work of stripping my prose back to its bare beams, but I no longer saw books through love's rosy lens.

At school a friend once drew me in a bubble, drifting above the class, lost in *Anne of Green Gables*. Later, disgusted by the dissection of the stories I loved, I dropped English Literature.

When I became pregnant, I was afraid I'd have no time for books, so I read as if I had nine months left to live. In the hospital, Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* rose and fell with my contractions. Even breastfeeding brought pockets of reading time, if I could drag my gaze away from my bubble baby.

At some point during the time of disenchantment, I began to read a poem each day before writing, and it became an unexpected consolation. Poetry stayed alive and unknowable, where novels had not. Taking a risk, in case it too lost its magic, I signed up for an online course. 'A poem is like a house, with many rooms,' it said.

In Ibiza, the houses seem to grow out of the ground - beings with histories reaching back to the Phoenicians. Built by hand from whatever lay nearby, measured by the body in cubits, they squat on high slopes with their doors turned south against cold winds. Each beam carries its load, each flat roof collects rainwater, each whitewashed wall reflects the sun.

I read poems the way I entered those houses; unaware of myself, my entire being held within their rooms. I didn't think or analyse. Everything fell away except feeling and presence, lit by dusty shafts of light in the darkness.

My body is a house too. I used to live somewhere above it, floating, reading, dreaming. But after I had my child, I had to learn to stay within its walls - she needed her mother to be at home. I measured it in cubits, elbow to fingertips, aware of its cracks and repairs, its rooms of light and shade, forever shifting.

The Ibizan poet Villangómez wrote in *Of Love* that his beloved embodied in a poem was 'ja eterna i diferent': eternal now and changed. It consoles me that something can be held close without being ruined, that intimacy doesn't have to kill its mystery. The island is like that too. No matter how long I stay, no matter what changes, its fascination endures.

In the end, it was rereading *The Brothers Karamazov* that restored my faith in novels. I hadn't remembered much of it, but this time, it was littered with clues as to what had gone wrong in the years between. It gave the sense that everything was understood, and yet kept a kind of opacity. A poem, a house, a body, an island, and even a novel give shape to the uncontained: emotion, time, self, memory. They hold the living, but not for long. Inhabited, but never fully known.

Clare Campbell was born in Hong Kong to Scottish parents, and raised in London. She holds a master's degree with distinction in Creative Writing from the University of Hull. A writer, gardener and mother, she now lives in Ibiza, where she is working on her first novel. You can contact Clare at clarecampbell@yahoo.co.uk

Afterlife and Other Multitudes

Polly Clark on poetry, animals, silence and the long conversation of a writing life

By James Hartley

Polly Clark's new volume, *Afterlife: New & Selected Poems*, arrives not as a victory lap but as a reckoning: a book that looks back across more than two decades of work and discovers, with a kind of quiet astonishment, that the earliest poems are still speaking with the most recent ones. It is, she says, a conversation across time, and one that has surprised her as much as it will her readers.

Afterlife is both the title of the opening section and the name given to the whole collection. The poems that comprise it were written over a decade, "right up to very recently," and they became, she explains, a lens through which she could see the continuity and evolution of her work. "It showed me that the way in which I examine the themes that drive my poems continues to evolve." Those themes - identity, human connection, our fraught intimacy with the natural world - have been present since *Kiss*, her debut collection from 2000, but they have not stood still. In *Kiss* there are poems such as 'My Education at the Zoo', rooted in Clark's teenage years working as a zookeeper, already circling questions of power, freedom and captivity. In *Afterlife*, those early preoccupations return in altered form. 'Tiger, Tiger', the long poem at the heart of the new book, "distils those ideas, examining the nature of experience itself and the part that language plays."

Clark is disarmingly candid about the shape of a writing life. "I realise that I have, like many other writers, only a handful of subjects, but they are endlessly revelatory, and remain the engine of all my writing." The task of assembling a New and Selected, then, was less about pruning the past than about recognising its persistence. "There were not that many poems that I felt I'd outgrown: the themes are reimagined in every book, rather than made redundant." What she could not have known at the start of her career was "how much work you have in you, how many books you really have the unanswered questions for." The pleasure - and the relief - of the process lay in discovering "the early poems speaking across time to the later ones."

Clark did rearrange some poems "with the fresh eye of time" and she removed a few that "didn't add to the overall picture." The stricter test, however, was applied to the present rather than the past. "The challenge was more to the new poems - I left out a lot more of those than I culled from earlier books. I felt I'd set myself a high bar!" The result is a volume that resists nostalgia and instead insists on coherence: not a greatest hits, but a sustained argument.

One of the most striking features of Clark's poetry is its range of voices. For Clark this multiplicity is not a technical flourish but an accurate account of consciousness. Quoting Whitman - "I am large, I contain multitudes" - she adds, "I have never experienced myself as a stable, singular identity. I feel an affinity and ease with animals especially. They have taught me a great deal about how much communication exists outside language, and how some experience is beyond it. My job in my writing is to express what lies outside and beyond language in words."



That sense of language straining towards what exceeds it is inseparable from her early life in a zoo. Clark was sixteen when she left home and began working as a zookeeper, an experience she describes as formative in the deepest sense. "I was only 16, had left home and was somewhat adrift. I was in that sense an innocent and I was forever imprinted by what I came to understand about our relationship to animals, and to each other." A zoo, she insists, is "an unsentimental place, and a kind of purgatory of our hopes for our natural world." Her description is characteristically precise and unsettling: "It is a cacophony of silence - all the animals that belong elsewhere, or nowhere, trying to communicate."

Displacement is the common condition. "Every creature in a zoo is displaced, eternally outside their world, while captive in ours." It was there, among those animals, that Clark recognised something fundamental about herself. "Among the animals I discovered my own intrinsic displacement, my own lifelong longing to return somewhere I don't even know. I discovered, or had branded upon me, my template for my poetry." It is hard to imagine a more succinct account of how biography hardens into vocation.

Clark's poems are often praised for their vivid imagery and symbolic charge, but she is wary of mystifying that process. "I write to communicate, as simply and clearly as I can." What she finds difficult is not poetry but everyday speech. "I find ordinary speech, small talk, and everyday chat fun but completely exhausting because these modes of speech feel designed to obfuscate rather than communicate." Human language, she suggests, is overloaded. "Where an animal might use hackles, tail, stance and vocalisation to communicate, we have packed language with everything, and pure communication, human to human, mind to mind, is lost in the noise."

Her longing is direct and unapologetic. "I long to speak, and to be heard. I long for others to speak and to hear them." Metaphor and symbolism, in this account, are not decorative but essential. "They always land. I find expressing myself in this way easier and more natural than deploying the endless camouflage of everyday speech." Poetry becomes not an art of evasion but of necessity: "a necessity for human connection: clear, truthful, and beautiful."

When Clark talks about process, the body comes first. "Writing is very physical for me, in that I feel the whole process in my body." The intellect has its place, but later. "It is not an intellectual process - that is reserved for editing."

The Woman Zoo

We're as common as the improbable fold and
fold again of the sea's grey hide;
common as muck, with its guts of ochre, that clings
to your tyres, your boots, your fingers.
See our flanks anytime, without binoculars, stamping,
primordial. You need only demand,
or spy us in our reservation, coughing in a haze
of ginger steam and Dulux Savannah.
We lumber from room to room, from year to year,
dumb, slightly drunk with amazement.
We woke up in a world we don't recognise, that's all,
that watches patiently, like extinction.
On the radio today, the urgent call for conservation.
We say nothing, chase the birds
into the sky, then turn back to our patch of lawn.
Observe us snort, breed, weep.
We know everything there is to know about survival.



A poem begins as “a physical longing to bridge some kind of emotional gulf,” often accompanied by an image or, more often, “a ‘voice’ or tone that is starting to gather momentum.” The challenge, as she gets older, is restraint: “Allowing those things simply to emerge is my challenge as I get older – without vigilance, the intellect and the weight of experience can lead you to start to corral thoughts and feelings with an inner cry of, *aha!* I know what this is, I know what to do!”

For Clark, a poem must retain the power to surprise its maker. “Whereas, for me, a poem works when it shows me what to do; it answers my longing in its own way.” The warning is sharp and quietly funny. “An aversion to surprise is a feature of maturity that must be guarded against.”

Recognition has played its part in sustaining that openness. *Take Me With You*, shortlisted for the T.S. Eliot Prize and chosen as a Poetry Book Society Choice, marked a turning point. “That particular shortlisting shot me into wider public notice, which made a good deal of difference to my sales and confidence.” Clark is clear-eyed about what prizes do and do not do. She was “grateful for it, and others that have come after because it brought me a wider audience.” The reason that matters is simple. “I write to reach readers. Readers mean I have accomplished my job, which is to communicate.”

Afterlife also gestures forward. Alongside the poems, Clark is currently working on a new novel, provisionally titled *Muse*. “A poem in *Afterlife* also called ‘Muse’ gives some insight into the territory I’m venturing into.” Her fiction—she is also the author of acclaimed novels—has always been in dialogue with her poetry, and the traffic continues to run both ways.

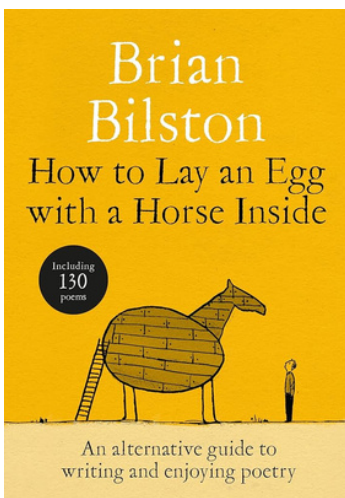
Asked to look ahead to 2026, Clark speaks as a reader as much as a writer. Her favourite contemporary poets are Anne Carson and Selima Hill. Hill’s latest collection, *A Man, A Woman and a Hippopotamus*, she calls “astounding.” Hill, Clark says, “takes the short epigrammatic style of poem and imbibes it with meaning and narrative force, so that cumulatively you feel like you’ve read a series of novels. Every book of hers does something new, while retaining her essential voice and preoccupations.”

Anne Carson’s influence runs deep. Carson was “the first woman to win the TS Eliot Prize with *The Beauty of the Husband* in 2001, causing a storm of protest that it wasn’t ‘really poetry.’” For Clark, the effect was liberating. “But it opened my eyes to the possibilities of poetry, to the ways narrative and metaphor intertwine, and, though I didn’t know it, it paved the way to my writing novels.” That book, she says, “set me on a path of lifelong admiration for her work.”

Brian Bilston: Making Light of Heavy Things

The serious pleasures of not taking poetry seriously.

By James Hartley



You've probably encountered a Brian Bilston poem online, scrolling past it between a news headline and a cat video, only to pause when the ordinary suddenly tilts into something unexpected. One of his spreadsheets becomes a meditation on loneliness. A simple list turns into a quiet confession. The needles of a Christmas tree fall to the bottom of the slide. Often, the visual layout functions as a kind of pun, an oblique way of approaching the mundane or the everyday, turning familiar words into rebus puzzles.

Bilston's work sits comfortably within a long English tradition of humorous verse. Chaucer's pilgrims trading ribald stories on the road to Canterbury showed wit could be a vehicle for social observation as sharp as any sermon. In the eighteenth century, William Cowper's *The Diverting History of John Gilpin* offered narrative comedy that delighted in mild chaos and recognisable human folly. Victorian nonsense verse, from Edward Lear's limericks to Lewis Carroll's exuberant wordplay in *Jabberwocky*, revelled in the sound and shape of language while quietly parodying literary seriousness.

The twentieth century brought figures such as Spike Milligan, whose *On the Ning Nang Nong* remains one of Britain's most beloved comic poems, and Ogden Nash, whose compressed, lopsided lines demonstrated how wit could coexist with emotional acuity. Dorothy Parker's barbed couplets and Edmund Clerihew Bentley's compact biographical clerihews proved that brevity itself could be a joke.

What links these writers is not frivolity, but an understanding that humour can be a mode of truth-telling. Bilston, with his fondness for visual forms, contemporary speech and mild absurdity, is very much their descendant.

That lineage, however, has been updated for a digital age. Bilston began sharing poems online in the early 2010s, joining Twitter in 2013 at a moment when the platform still felt hospitable to short, formally playful writing.

His poems appeared in feeds alongside photographs, cartoons and memes, and were often encountered by readers who were not seeking out poetry at all.

"I'd been struck by the fact that my poems were surrounded by all this visual content," he says, "and it made me think a lot more about how my poems might look, as well as what they might say."

Out of this environment came poems shaped like Venn diagrams, flow charts and spreadsheets, where form is not a gimmick but part of the meaning. "The form needs to add another layer of understanding," he says. "For a lot of what I write, it's not appropriate nor necessary. But I do always keep an eye on opportunities to play with form."

The audience followed. Over time, Bilston amassed hundreds of thousands of followers across social platforms, earning nicknames such as 'Twitter's unofficial Poet Laureate' and, more cryptically, 'the Banksy of poetry', a reference to his early reluctance to show his face or reveal his real name.

He initially wrote under a pseudonym, and although his identity as Paul Millicheap has since become known, the persona of 'Brian Bilston' remains part of the project.

"There's very little that separates Brian from the 'real' me," he says, "but I still draw some help when I adopt his persona."

The distinction between Paul and Brian is particularly useful on stage, where performance becomes part of the poem's effect.

Perhaps it's also a form of protection for a naturally shy person. You get the impression from Bilston's poems that his is a gentle, knowing humour - more Peter Kay, perhaps, than Jimmy Carr (to name two current comedians doing the rounds in the UK).

Bilston tours regularly, reading to audiences that range from intimate pub rooms to theatre halls and literary festivals.

From Aberdeen to Cardiff, Sheffield to London, these performances are as much about the conversational energy between poet and audience as the poems themselves.

"Part of me thinks that if the evening doesn't go well, that's Brian's problem, not mine: he should have written some better poems," he smiles, but the warmth of the crowds, the laughter at well-timed absurdities, and the occasional silence after a line hits just right, make the distinction between shy author and stage persona a liberating one.

Print publication followed digital success. Bilston is now published by Picador, an imprint of Pan Macmillan, which has released a steady run of his collections, including *You Took the Last Bus Home*, *Alexa, What Is There to Know About Love?*, *Days Like These* and *And So This Is Christmas*, alongside books for younger readers such as *50 Ways to Score a Goal* and *A Poem for Every Question*.

Several of these titles have appeared on UK poetry bestseller lists, an unusual feat in a market where poetry is often assumed to be marginal. His forthcoming book, *How to Lay an Egg with a Horse Inside*, due out in April, is his most overtly self-reflexive to date.

"I've always enjoyed finding ways to bind my poems together in a book, to make them part of a larger enterprise," Bilston says. This time, the enterprise is a "how to write poetry" manual, complete with instructions, case studies and his own poems as examples.

It is, he admits, a gentle satire of creative writing classes and the snobberies of the poetry world. The conceit pushed him into unfamiliar territory. "Given the idea of the book, I was led into some areas where I had never ventured before: for example, forms such as the sonnet and villanelle." More significantly, it prompted a period of self-examination. "It made me think more deeply about why I write, what it is I like about the process, and how poetry should not be for the few but can be for everyone."

That democratic impulse runs through his work. In *A Poem for Every Question*, Bilston set out to answer the kinds of questions children ask, despite the oft-quoted maxim that poetry is about asking questions rather than answering them. The challenge, he found, was not philosophical but technical. "The harder questions – for me, at least – were the science ones," he says, citing queries such as 'Can fire cast a shadow?' and 'How do clouds work?'

"I always struggled with science at school so the actual explanations took some getting my head around." His solution was often to approach the problem obliquely. The poem answering 'Are bats the only flying mammal?' features his dog in a workshop, attempting to build an aeroplane. The answer is there – but it arrives sideways. Very Bilston.

Humour, he says, is not an add-on but a way of seeing. "I think my natural disposition is towards finding humour in a situation, or looking for the light even in dark times." That instinct is also where the emotional charge enters. "Humour can sometimes be used as a shield but it can also serve to open up those inner, difficult emotions and feelings." A poem without humour, he adds, "doesn't quite ring true with me."

Much of that truth is drawn from the ordinary. Bilston writes about bus rides, supermarket aisles, pets, mild social embarrassment. "Write about what you know," he says, "and I have a lot of ordinary moments in my day." What transforms those moments into poems is, even for him, hard to pin down.

"I do believe there is beauty to be found in the everyday, accompanied in equal measure by ridiculousness. I find the whole business of existence to be simultaneously beautiful and ridiculous. It's a wonder any of us can get anything done."

His influences reflect this balance of playfulness and seriousness. As a child, he loved Spike Milligan and Roald Dahl. As a teenager, he discovered John Hegley, Roger McGough, Ivor Cutler and Stevie Smith. Today, his reading is broader: Billy Collins, Carol Ann Duffy, Patricia Lockwood and Hera Lindsay Bird.

"My reading is far more catholic than it once was," he says. "Such poetry may not speak to me directly – but it helps me understand and engage with the wider world around me."

Music also left its mark. The Beatles, he says, were an early entry point into poetry. A line from *Eleanor Rigby* – "wearing the face that she keeps in the jar by the door" – struck him even as a child for its sadness and emotional rawness. More generally, it's the band's compressed inventiveness that continues to impress him: "the level of creativity and experimentation they crammed into such a short space of time completely blows my mind."

Bilston's relationship with social media has cooled in recent years.

"I find most of the online platforms to be problematic these days, both politically and practically," he says, though he acknowledges the friendships and opportunities they have afforded him. He now divides his time between the page and the stage, touring regularly and reading.

A new tour, sharing the title of his forthcoming book, will take him around Britain again later in the year (details below).

"It's a relief to have other outlets for my poetry," he admits. "I can see a time when I come off social media altogether." He pauses. "I suspect my publisher wouldn't like that thought."

Asked what question he would most like to answer definitively in a poem, Bilston resists the cosmic. The big questions, he suspects, might make him less happy, not more. Instead, he opts for something smaller and more persistently irritating. "Why is the alphabet in that order?" he asks. "Given it's something I use every day, it might be helpful to know." It's a modest question, delivered with a straight face, and it encapsulates his appeal: curiosity without grandiosity, humour without cruelty and a genuine wonder at the world and the details hidden in plain sight.

Brian Bilston is also taking his witty and thoughtful work on the road in 2026. He has announced a tour titled *How to Lay an Egg with a Horse Inside*, which will bring live performances, readings, and laughter to venues across the UK throughout autumn and early winter 2026, including shows in places such as Aberystwyth, Aberdeen, Harpenden, Stirling, Leeds, Chorley, Bristol, London and many more. Audiences can expect an evening that mixes humour with heartfelt insight as Bilston presents poems from his latest book alongside crowd favourites. Dates and venue details are listed on his official website and event pages for the tour.

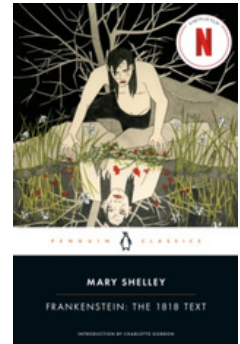
THE BOOK WAS BETTER...

A REGULAR COLUMN ROUNDING UP RECENT BOOK TO SCREEN ADAPTATIONS

By Cliff Shephard



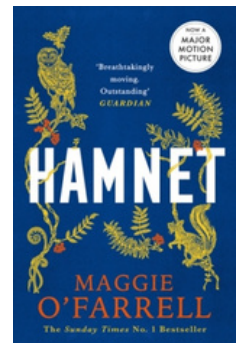
Celebrated filmmaker Guillermo del Toro had reportedly spent over twenty years trying to get an adaptation of Mary Shelley's 1881 gothic classic *Frankenstein* off the ground, so perhaps the anticipation and expectation of a life's ambition realised was always going to be doomed to fall short. Make no mistake, there are some strong performances and stunning set pieces up on the screen here, but it takes some patience and more than a little good grace to forgive the plastic looking CGI-ness of it all. Vitaly though, in relying heavily on Oscar Isaac and last minute fill-in Jacob Elordi to carry the narrative, the simplistic "perhaps...it is humans...that are the monsters after all!" message does no favours for Shelley's more nuanced and interesting source material. Far from the worst, this version sits somewhere under the 1931 James Whale Universal film, but definitely well above Ken Branagh's 1990s ham-fest.



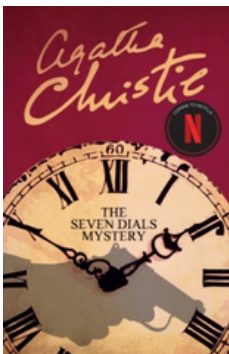
FRANKENSTEIN is currently streaming on Netflix



Maggie O'Farrell's superb novel of 2020, *Hamnet* focused on the life of William Shakespeare's wife and children away from the fame and fortune which the great bard attracted. The character himself is hardly present, instead the story is of Agnes and her struggle with loss and trying to cope without him. With a screenplay written by O'Farrell, the film version remodels things to allow in handsome shirtless Shakespeare for more screentime - the bones of the book remain, but this is now a love story tinged with grief...which diminishes the power that the original novel had: his very absence. Played with staggering prowess by Jessie Buckley (surely an Oscar winner for this), Agnes is the best thing in the film by a country mile - as uncomfortable as it is to watch her sorrow and agony, it pushes an otherwise disappointing film up a level to something memorable.



HAMNET is in cinemas and streaming on Apple TV and Amazon Prime



It's hard to go wrong with an Agatha Christie TV series these days, there's a set formula which can be played with and once you've added a few famous guest stars you have a very pleasant (if predictable) evening's entertainment. What sets this Netflix-branded adaptation apart is the standout performance of relative newcomer Mia McKenna-Bruce. Like a seasoned pro, the actress carries every scene she's in as she investigates an increasing pile of bodies in search of the conundrum of the Seven Dials. Martin Freeman's straight-laced detective and Helena Bonham-Carter's absent mother round out the cast in what is a surprisingly enjoyable few episodes of intrigue. It all goes a bit "should we make this a franchise?" at the end, but given the recent crop of film and TV dramatisations this ranks as one that sits easily at the 'better' of the spectrum.



SEVEN DIALS is currently streaming on Netflix

SECOND NOVEL SYNDROME

New novels from George Saunders and Asako Yuzuki highlight the difficulty of the follow-up - CLIFF SHEPHARD reviews them both.

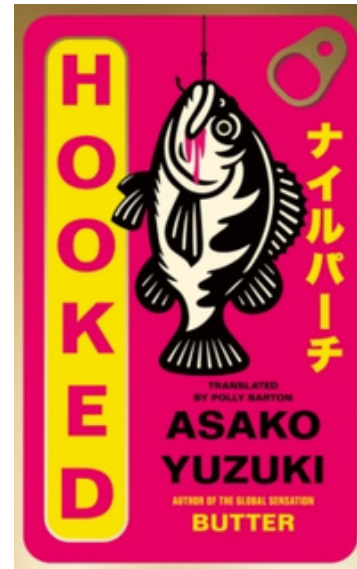
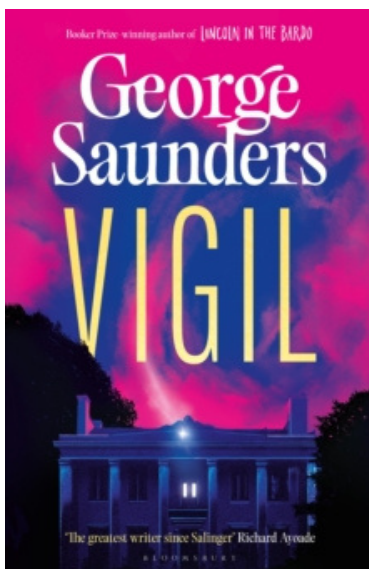
Although a hugely prolific short story writer, *Vigil* is only George Saunders' second proper novel. After winning hearts and minds with his Booker Prize-winning novel *Lincoln In The Bardo* in 2017, there was much expectation of another longform book by the celebrated author.

In *Vigil*, Jill Blaine, currently living in limbo, helps ferry the newly dead to the afterlife after they have faced up to some often uncomfortable truths. Her latest charge is a powerful unrepentant oil tycoon who, despite a throng of visitors from the past, refuses to go quietly. A battle of wills ensues, where we learn not only about KJ the man, but there are also revelations about Jill and the circumstances that led her to her current otherworldly role.

With a linear structure instantly recognisable to fans of *A Christmas Carol* or *It's A Wonderful Life*, Saunders is deliberately riffing on his last novel by situating it in a similar Bardo-verse which lies outside conventional reality where the dead live on as ghosts.

Whilst there's clearly an attraction with returning to his award-winning format, having read the wealth and diversity of his short stories, the reader can't help but feel slightly let down by the similarity of theme. Brief and entertaining though it is, we're still waiting for something juicier.

Vigil is in Hardback at £18.99 and published in the UK now



Hot on the heels of the publishing phenomenon that was *Butter*, Asako Yuzuki's second novel translated into English may disappoint the readers of her first.

Hooked concerns Shoko, a 'housewife blogger' who despite putting very little effort in, is rapidly on the way to becoming a success. Avid blog reader Eriko seeks her out in the real world, and manages to insert herself into Shoko's life with relative ease. Giving off single white female vibes from the outset, you can sense that something is off in the blossoming friendship between Eriko and Shoko. The author underplays their interactions subtly as time goes on, so that the story unfolds almost under the surface of their meetings, laced with delicious food dishes that are often described, eaten and discussed in the background.

Japanese fiction has never been hotter as a genre, but with the more murderous qualities of her previous novel proving part of that popularity, will that audience be sated with less of a bodycount? Less femme-gore more...friend-core? Less shocking and perhaps more serious than expected, *Hooked* is a fine would-be bestseller that poses some interesting questions around female friendship and loneliness...without any poisoning to speak of.

Hooked is a Flapped Paperback at £14.99 and published in the UK on 12th March

I LOVE HATE AND I HATE EVERYTHING ELSE

Fantagraphics recently collected 'Hate Revisited' comics returns the reader to a cult favourite, to find Seattle's Buddy Bradley has been growing old disgracefully (as expected).

CLIFF SHEPHARD gets out his flannel shirt...

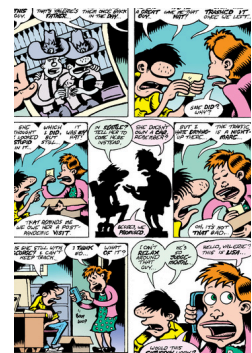
One of the most humorous and readable strips in the 1990s, *Hate* became an indispensable read amongst the high quality black and white strips which served as a perfect antidote to the dark superhero bloat of that decade. Buddy was lazy, crass, unattractive - a mirror of all of our worst qualities. He was unable to relate to his friends and girlfriends, and embodied a perennial loser so much so that he became a counterculture hero at the time. Deservedly winning Harvey and Eisner awards, Peter Bagge's *Hate* cemented itself firmly in a rich alternative US comic scene which allowed it to be as lauded in the same breath as *Love & Rockets*, *Eightball* or *Peepshow*.

Meanwhile, cartoonist Peter Bagge went on to work on bits and pieces, an abortive *Hate* cartoon series was floated, there was some work with Marvel before he started creating work for Dark Horse Comics. *Hate* comics would still pop up occasionally though, as if it were an itch impossible to scratch - perhaps it was only a matter of time before everyone's favourite bundle of self-loathing turned up again.

The newly collected *Hate Revisited*, which was originally serialised in 2024, picks up in the modern world with our hero in much the same state as he was left. He is still with Lisa, still sees Valerie, still the perennial slacker. Here in the modern world though, there are MAGA Trump supporters, disrespectful kids, and more awkward social situations than ever to navigate. Bagge cleverly mixes this modern world in colour but with flashbacks to the 90s in black and white as we see nuggets of the old Buddy's life, and some of the friends we used to watch him hang out with.

Diving back into the world of *Hate* is supremely heartwarming, entertaining and laugh-out-loud funny. The effortless underground style of art and characterisation (complete with Looney Tunes style elasticity) is still as dynamic and effective as ever, and watching a middle aged Buddy struggle with the nuances of the modern world is a stroke of genius. Despite the creator saying that this is the end of *Hate*, I have a feeling it won't be: I can't wait to see him as he shuffles into old age, still as cantankerous as ever.

HATE REVISITED is out in paperback in the UK at £18.99



RECOMMENDED READS



In Simon Maddrell's wide and bracing world, childhood orbits the voice of a distant and sometimes dangerous parent. Memories of sex parties, dead friends and estranged lovers straddle the spaces between feeling and thought, loss and fatalism. *lamping wild rabbits* (OutSpoken Press) is a brave and expansive multiverse, exploring sexuality, queer desire, memory recall and testimony. With poems that pay homage to the late Derek Jarman, to verses which situate themselves in and around the Isle of Man, exploring Britain's colonial presence through the subverted interplay of English and the Manx language.



El Último Montano de J. A. Menéndez-Conde (weRstories) es una novela audaz e inquietante que difumina los límites entre la vida, la ficción y la obsesión. Ambientada entre Berlín y México, sigue a Nacho, un escritor y diseñador de videojuegos cuyo mundo cuidadosamente ordenado se quiebra tras la aparición de una fotografía perturbadora. Diarios, manuscritos perdidos, narrativas de videojuegos y la vida cotidiana del inmigrante se entrelazan, borrando la distancia entre memoria e invención. A la vez oscura y cómica, la novela explora el duelo, la creatividad y la supervivencia a través de una imaginación metaliteraria inquieta.

