

# THE MADRID REVIEW

ISSUE 7



POETRY AND  
FLASH FICTION

FREE SUBSCRIBERS ISSUE

# 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 *Mslexia* 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.

# 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.

