

# THE MADRID REVIEW

Issue 3  
Volume 2



HAIA MOHAMMED  
MATTHEW TREE  
MARK FIDDES  
NUALA O'CONNOR  
LISA SEE  
SALENA GODDEN  
TRACY CHEVALIER  
JAYNE MARSHALL  
SUSANA BENET  
CRISTINA JURADO  
JOËL DICKER



POEMS FOR  
THE  
PEOPLE OF  
PALESTINE

COVER BY  
ÁLVARO P-FF

I AM GAZA, I AM HAIA  
HAIA MOHAMMED

*The Age Of Olive Trees*  
Out-Spoken Press (London, 2025)

**Haia co-edited  
this issue of the magazine.**

Daughter of a land that cannot be defeated  
a voice of a sky that never betrays

I'm the blood that flows through its streets  
the pulse beneath the rubble that never ceases

every day my eyes witness death but my heart knows  
only life

I carry on my shoulders the pain of a nation  
and on my lips the voice of defiance

I'm the story the world cannot forget.  
the sword that will not break the soul

to the world I will not ask you to save me  
I will not seek your pity

In the face of my strength you will feel powerless  
I am Haia – daughter of Gaza

my voice is louder than any bomb my spirit deeper than  
any wound

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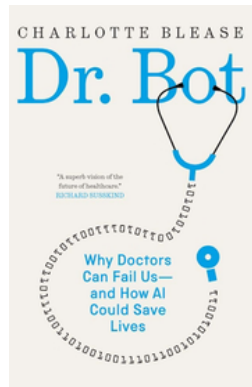
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# POETRY BIOGRAPHIES

Martina Teeny Collender is a queer, disabled, award-winning, published playwright, poet and writer living and working in Waterford City and County with her beloved Ellie.

Simon Glass is a Toronto-based visual artist and writer. He is a member of Toronto Jewish Families and ally of Toronto Palestinian Families – grass roots organizations that work to eliminate antisemitism and anti-Palestinian racism in the Toronto District School Board. He teaches photography and cross-disciplinary art at OCAD University.

Linda M. Crate (she/her) is a Pennsylvanian writer whose poetry, short stories, articles and reviews have been published in a myriad of magazines both online and in print. She has fifteen published chapbooks the latest being: *not your piñata* (Alien Buddha Publishing, June 2025).

Carla Marino is a freelance journalist who lives in a Parisian suburb with her husband and their dog. She's particularly interested in social justice, mental health, psychology, and everything related to the complexity of human emotions and behavior. She was exposed to poetry from a young age by her grandmother, whose father was a Republican poet during the Spanish Civil War. Recently, she has been rediscovering what used to bring her so much joy as a child: the verses, the rhymes, putting big feelings into words, or at least trying.

Mark Fiddes is a UK poet writing and working in the Middle East, married to a Catalan. His latest collection is *Other Saints Are Available* (Live Canon). Recent work has been published in The Irish Times, Southword, Shearsman, Oxford Poetry, Poetry Review and Magma. He's a winner of the Oxford Brookes International Prize, the Ruskin Prize and a runner-up in the Bridport Prize and National Poetry Competition.

Nuala O'Connor lives in Co. Galway, Ireland. Her poetry and fiction have been widely published, anthologised, and won many literary awards. Her sixth novel *Seaborne*, about Irish-born pirate Anne Bonny, is nominated for the Dublin Literary Award and was shortlisted for Eason Novel of the Year at the 2024 An Post Irish Book Awards. Her novel *Nora* (New Island), about Nora Barnacle and James Joyce, was a Top 10 historical novel in the New York Times. She won Irish Short Story of the Year at the 2022 An Post Irish Book Awards. Her fifth poetry collection, *Menagerie*, is published by Arlen House in spring 2025.

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.

Rim Auode is Palestinian from Nazareth, living in Montreal, Canada. She's never been home but Palestine has shaped everything about her. For the past five years, she has volunteered with the Hands Up Project, supporting and mentoring children in Gaza and the West Bank as they write, translate, and perform poetry.

Eddie (J. Bermudez) (Barcelona, 1975). Licenciado en Filología Hispánica. Ha coordinado distintas Jams Poéticas en la ciudad de Valencia, así como ciclos críticos de poesía en el Ateneo Libertario Al Margen (Poéticas Al Margen). Ha realizado recitales polipoéticos junto a Pedro Verdejo y David Trashumante con su grupo de adláteres poéticos: Poetiks. Sigue coordinando la Feria del Libro dentro del Festival de Poesía Voix Vives de Toledo, y las páginas de poesía de la revista Al Margen.. Comisario de las exposiciones del último Festival Internacional Voix Vives. Desde hace dos años coordina el POETRY SLAM TOLEDO junto a la poeta Acoyani Guzmán.

Iman Abdel-Latif is a Palestinian writer based in the U.S. Her poetry often draws on themes of resistance, displacement, and the emotional weight of memories in Palestine. She is currently working on her first poetry collection. Outside of writing, she works in public service and community advocacy.

Acoyani Guzmán (1983, Ciudad de México) es actriz, poeta, dramaturga y gestora cultural. Estudió en la Facultad de Filosofía y Letras de la UNAM, y es licenciada en el Centro Universitario de Teatro, UNAM, México. Con el Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, México, vino a Madrid. FONDART (2016, Chile) Fondo del Libro, con su obra poética *¿Qué hacemos con Moscú?*, XI Premio Joven de Relato Poético Corto del Ateneo de Navarra *De Gato Gordo*, Premio Sucio Slam Poetry de Santiago de Chile 2018, Premio Móstoleslam 2019. Creadora de la Jam Session de Poesía Fe de Erratas.

Alessio Zanelli is an Italian poet who writes in English. His work has appeared in about 250 literary journals from 20 countries. His sixth collection, titled *The Invisible*, was published in 2024 by Greenwich Exchange (London).

María Gabriela Lovera, (Caracas, Venezuela, 1972), es poeta, editora, maquetadora. Fundadora del espacio de edición alternativa petalurgia.com. Licenciada en Comunicación Social por la Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, con Máster en Edición de Libros de la Universidad de Alcalá de Henares. Ha publicado muchos títulos, incluyendo: *Desvelos*, Amargord Ediciones, *Extraño vértigo*, LP5 Editora y *Por debajo del viento (segunda edición)*, Azalea Ediciones.

Abby Kesington is Nigerian-born, based in Houston, Texas. She earned degrees in Political Science from leading universities in Nigeria. Before turning to poetry, Kesington was a journalist in Lagos, contributing to publications like Daily Independent and Tell magazine. Her works regularly explore themes of anxiety, freedom, gender rights, poverty, and climate change, blending personal experience with social commentary. Her debut collection: *Finish Line* was released in June 2025 by WAFORD (an arm of the Pan African Writers Association).

Daniela Nunnari is a poet, reader, mother, bookseller, daydreamer, and telly addict, with a BA and MA in English Literature, and a first collection, *Red Tree* @valleypress. She leads poetry workshops for children and adults and her poems have been published in magazines, anthologies, and translated into music to be sung by opera singers. You can find her at danielanunnari.wordpress.com.

Karina Lutz was raised by a naval officer and an antiwar activist, and saw the power of words to make peace at her own kitchen table. She then worked as an environmental activist and as an editor, reporter, and magazine publisher. Her poetry books are *Post-Catholic Midrashim* and *Preliminary Visions*.

William Wall is the author of nine novels most recently in *English Writers Anonymous* (New Island, 2025), and so far, only in Italian, *L'Albero Della Libertà* (Aboca Edizioni, 2025). He has published six collections of poetry, including *Ghost Estate* and *The Yellow House* (both Salmon Poetry) and *Smugglers In The Underground Hug Trade, a diary of the first year of Covid* (Doire Press 2021). He was the first European winner of the Drue Heinz Prize for Literature in the USA and his 2005 novel *This Is The Country* was longlisted for the Man Booker Prize. He lives between his native Cork City where he was the city's first poet laureate and his adopted home of Camogli in Liguria, Italy. He holds a PhD in Creative Writing from UCC.

Maria Cohut is a writer of Romanian origin who adopted Britain as her second home almost two decades ago. She is haunted by questions of identity, belonging, displacement and what makes us human. Her writing has appeared in the *Borders & Belonging* anthology (Cephalopress, 2022), *The Hyacinth Review*, *The Hellebore*, and *The Other Side of Hope: Journeys in Refugee and Immigrant Literature*, among others. Her first poetry chapbook, *Spatter Pattern* (back room poetry, 2023), explores the issue of gender violence by reimagining detective fiction tropes.

Fareeda Baruwā is a writer, published author, and poet who is passionate about advocacy in the communities that she belongs to - being a Black Muslim woman. Through her work, she aims to inspire others with her words and her latest book - *Seed to Bloom* is a compilation of poems that brings hope and shines light on a path to self-discovery.

Matthew Winfield is a professional writer. His published works include op-eds on politics, culture and current affairs, comics for National Geographic and horror flash fiction. He is deeply interested in Global South writers, especially of Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa, and earned an MPhil (African Studies) from the University of Cape Town in 2021.

Nieves Chillón (Orce, 1981) es profesora, madre y escritora. Sus libros de poesía publicados son: *La casa de La Piedra* (El Envés Editoras), Premio Nacional Ciudad de Churriana; *Arborescente* (Pre-Textos) XXXVII Premio de poesía Juan Gil-Albert/Ciutat de València y Premio de la Crítica de Andalucía; *El libro de Laura Laurel* (XXXI Premio Unicaja, Pre-Textos); *El asa rota* (Premio Ciudad de Peligros); *Rasguños* (Vitruvio), entre otros. También ha publicado la novela de ficción histórica *Auletris* (Algaida, 2022).

Kevin MacAlan lives in rural Ireland. He has an MA in Creative Writing and has contributed to many journals, including, *Howl*, *The Madrid Review*, *Dublin Poetry*, *The Brussels Review*, *Datura*, and *The Belfast Review*. He was long-listed for The National Poetry Competition and The Fish Poetry Prize in 2024.

Yacoob Manjoo is a South African writer, blogger, and poet. He's published two collections of poetry and prose, and his work has been featured in numerous print and online publications. You can find more of his work on his website ([dreamlife.wordpress.com](http://dreamlife.wordpress.com)) and on Instagram (@dreamlife.za).

Noel Cowley grew up in Ireland and lives in Essex, England, with his wife and their three children. A lifelong singer-songwriter, he waited until he was nearly fifty to be hooked by poetry. He has had poems published by The Winged Moon, The Wee Sparrow Poetry Press and The Northampton Poetry Review and cultivates his reading and writing practices with fellow members of his local Poetry Society Stanza, the Harlow Circle of Poetry.

Sam Tovey is a mixed race British Pakistani poet based in Manchester, writing at the intersection of spoken word, social reflection and political storytelling. Their work explores identity, injustice, love and belonging. For Sam, poetry is protest and connection, a way to hold space and stand with those whose voices are often silenced.

Orla Beaton is a poet and somatic movement teacher living in Perthshire, Scotland. Themes in Orla's writing include womanhood, spirituality and the natural world. She has self-published 3 pamphlets, the most recent in November 2024, entitled *She Whose Body is the Earth*. Orla came to poetry later in life and is excited to be beginning an MLitt in Creative Writing at Stirling University this autumn. Orla's poems have been published in two anthologies by the Wee Sparrow Poetry press - *Ourselves in Rivers and Oceans* and *Facing Goodbye*.

Annie Colloby is a UK-based poet. Her poetry has been performed at The Old Rep Theatre Birmingham, published in the *Derwent Press Literary Magazine* and included as part of the *Zephaniah Forest Tree Trail*. Currently Poet-in-residence with the Fruit and Nut Village CIO, who work with urban communities to plant and nurture Forest Gardens and food abundant spaces, she will be self-publishing her first Poetry Pamphlet in early 2026.

Osian Luke is a trilingual Welsh writer who writes predominantly in English. His poems explore themes of grief and transience, hope and despair, masculinity and mental illness, and how to love in a world that sometimes feels like it's ending. In terms of writing goals, Luke is an aspiring novelist and is also currently working on his debut poetry collection. You can follow his creative endeavours and read some of his poetry on Instagram @osian.luke.writer.

Felicity Cullen is a poet, anarchist, and trans woman from the UK. She has been writing poetry since school, inspired by poets ranging from Ivor Gurney to Voltairine de Cleyre via Benjamin Zephaniah. Most of her poetry can be found on her itch.io page (<https://fllissity317.itch.io>) and she posts nonsense about her hobbies and politics regularly on BlueSky under the handle @anarchofliss.bsky.social.

Tehreem Khalid is a Canadian poet. She was born in Pakistan and grew up in Saudi Arabia. She currently works as a radiation therapist treating patients with cancer. Being a woman in STEM, she understands the power of words, and finds writing and storytelling to be her passion. When she isn't immersed in a book, she can be found hanging out with her cats, learning to swim, or walking in nature. She also enjoys exploring the Canadian Rockies, especially during summer. Tehreem also runs an Instagram page @tehreem.thepoet where she occasionally posts her writing.

Carmella de Keyser is a writer from the U.K who writes poetry exploring her part Balkan identity, intersections, liminal spaces, and displacement. She is passionate about providing safe spaces for poets to share their work and is founder of the Harlow Circle of Poetry Stanza. Judge for the inaugural Harlow Open Poetry Competition 2025, her poems have been featured in magazines and poetry anthologies including: BBC Radio Essex, Macmillan, Dream Catcher International Arts Journal, Dark Poets Club, The Candyman's Trumpet, Outside the Box, The Starbeck Orion, The Dirigible Balloon, Your Harlow Newspaper, Suburban Witchcraft Magazine, and Wishbone Words Magazine. She achieved an Honourable Mention for the Dark Poets Prize 2024 and was a winner of the Hedgehog Press Poetry Pamphlet Competition 2024. Debut chapbook with the Hedgehog Poetry Press.

Rachel Spence is a poet and culture writer based in the United Kingdom and Italy. Her non-fiction book *Battle for The Museum* (Hurst, 2024), an exploration of the relationship between art, power and money, was a Financial Times Book of the Year and a Geographical Book of the Year. Her first poetry collection, *Bird of Sorrow*, was highly commended in the Forward Prizes 2019. Her latest poetry collection is *Daughter of the Sun* (The Emma Press, 2025). Her poems have appeared widely including on BBC's The Verb, and in PN Review, The London Magazine and The North.

Jenevieve Carlyn lives in the northeast U.S., where she has served as a historical writer, humanities teacher, and caregiver. She gratefully received the Poetry of the Sacred Award from the Center for Interfaith Relations and the Connecticut Poet Laureate Award for Eco-Poetry in 2023. Her work has also appeared in places such as Parabola Magazine and The Dark Mountain Project. Last spring, she was shortlisted for the Artemesia Arts Poetry Contest and highly commended in the 2025 Mist & Mountain International Competition for her poem, *The Oracle at the Well*.

George Reiner is a poet, translator and writer based in Ramsgate, UK, whose work can be found in The Still Point, Pamenar Press, and Spamzine.

Soy Beatriz Bañuelos Marco. Nací en Madrid el 15 de septiembre de 1985. Estudié medicina y acabé siendo uróloga en Madrid, mudándome posteriormente a Berlín donde viví siete años. Publiqué uno de mis poemarios, *Corte Sagital* con la Editorial Mundo Libre Libros. Durante los años que viví en el extranjero he querido experimentar combinando varios idiomas en la poesía. De esto ha salido *Water & Ink*, una colección todavía inédita, dedicada a mis dos pasiones y armas; la natación y la escritura y mi proyecto actual: *Muttersprache*, mi camino de vuelta a la lengua materna cuando se vive y se habla en otra. Creo en el arte que lucha y que se compromete, como con todo...

Alex Padina (London, 1981) is a British writer based in Jerez de la Frontera, Spain. Bilingual since childhood, he writes fluently in both English and Spanish. He published his first poetry collection, *Yo soy Azazel* (Editorial Talón de Aquiles, 2022), followed by *Malversado* (Editorial Platero, 2024). Padina is also the vocalist and lyricist for the musical projects Son of Sorrow and She Has Stigma. His poetry has been featured by the Fundación Caballero Bonald, The Dark Poets Club, and various independent publications across Spain and Latin America. He regularly shares unpublished poems on social media in both languages and writes for lavozdelsur.es.

Farrah Hasan is a Bengali-American PhD student. She's passionate about (climate) justice, poetry, and their intersections.

Aleena Muzafar is a young poet from Srinagar, Kashmir, whose writing often delves into themes of grief, memory, spiritual rebirth, and longing. Her work reflects an inner world shaped by silence, reflection, and a deep connection to faith and emotion. Through her poetry, she hopes to leave behind something meaningful that may one day speak to hearts across the world.

Miguel Gil Castro (Lima, 1987) poeta y antropólogo quechua. Es autor de *Cinco días en Huarochirí* (Premio Copé de Bronce 2022), *Parábola del pájaro amarillo* (2024) y del poemario *Plegaria para Palestina* (2025), presentado en Asunción durante la Acción Mundial por Gaza. Ha publicado en revistas como Río Grande Review, Hueso Húmero, CasaPaís y La Colmena.

Scott Elder lives in Auvergne, France. Since 2014 his work has been widely published and placed or commended in numerous competitions in the UK and Ireland. His second collection, *Maria* was published by Erbacce Press in 2023. A third, *My Hotel*, is forthcoming by Salmon Poetry in 2026.

Nicola Vulpe was born in Montreal. He completed a doctorate in philosophy at the Sorbonne and taught in Spain before returning to Canada. He has published a novella, *The Extraordinary Event of Pia H., who turned to admire a chicken on the Plaza Mayor*, and four collections of poetry, including *Insult to the Brain* and *Through the Waspmouth I Drew You*, which both received Fred Cogswell Awards for Excellence in Poetry. His next collection, *On The News that Sagittarius A\* Grows Hungrier*, is scheduled for publication in late 2025.

Atmos is an English visual artist, musician, writer, and teacher who focuses on creating thought-provoking art to promote positive change. His curiosity to explore art started with music and expanded to drawing, painting, sculpture, mixed media, creative writing, and photography. Atmos' work has been exhibited as a part of public demonstrations, in publications, and in galleries in the UK, including the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum, Oriel Q, and The Glasgow Gallery of Photography. Influenced by altered states of consciousness, world culture, activism, and spirituality, his work continues to evolve through experimentation and using art as a form of protest. Visit [www.atmos.art](http://www.atmos.art) to learn more about Atmos' work.

Luciana Francis, originally from Brazil, lives in the UK. Her debut poetry pamphlet *Travel Writing* (Against The Grain Poetry Press), depicts time as distance, and poet as time-traveller. Her poetry appears in Poetry London, Magma, Butcher's Dog, The London Magazine (online), and Black Iris, among others.

Born in California, Robert Black is an award-winning poet and photographer originally from the United States but now resides in Toronto, Canada. His work often focuses on bifurcated identity and the rootlessness of language: to negotiate life, loss and language in their entwinement. His poetry and short stories have been published in the US, Canada, France, Russia, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan and Australia. He is seeking a publisher for his first manuscript and is currently working on his second collection of poetry, as well as a children's book.

*My name is Duha Hassan Al Shaqaqi.  
I'm a 21-year-old Palestinian student  
from Gaza.*

*I'm passionate about education, writing,  
and helping others. Before the war, I was  
a top student and volunteered as a  
social worker and in a library. I've always  
believed in the power of knowledge to  
change lives.*

*Despite losing everything - our home, our  
school, our safety - I never gave up. I kept  
studying under the hardest conditions  
and I was accepted into two universities:  
one in the United States and another in  
Qatar. I dream of continuing my  
education, rebuilding my life, and one  
day giving back to children who have  
gone through what I've lived. But right  
now, my family and I are struggling just  
to survive.*

*I've always loved to read poetry but  
never had the courage to write. In the  
war, I realised that I was the one to write.  
If not me, then who? It was my way of  
staying sane in the middle of this insane  
world I'm living in. It's my approach to  
vent out my stress and anger.*

*You can read my poetry wherever you  
want. It can be in festivals, concerts,  
libraries or any where you want to. Just  
ask me before you do so.*

*I have many favorite writers, so it's very  
challenging to choose just a few. But if I  
had to, I'd say Mourid Al-Barghouti, the  
Palestinian writer and poet, and Sayaka  
Murata, the Japanese novelist.*

*Duha Hassan Al Shaqaqi  
Deir Al Balah, Palestine-Gaza, .*

## LETTER TO MY HOMELAND

### DUHA HASSAN AL SHAQAQI

To my toxic lover, to my homeland.  
To my Gaza, to my Jerusalem Jerusalem.  
I will not say east nor west.  
I will not tear you apart the way they did.

Here's a love letter to my tormentor:  
Dear Palestine, all Palestine,  
From the river to the sea.

Your daughter I am, don't be my stepmother.

Timid I am before your losses,  
Unyielding because of your strength.

Out of place without you,  
Devoid from all graces but you.

Your bloody days, your blown-up hearts, your overriding sensation  
Drew my moves, healed my wounds, strengthened my soul.

Your vigorous sea waves,  
Resonating in my mind,  
Nostalgia all I feel.  
Memories all I trace.

May I see your love, life, and liberty!

FROM THE RIVER TO THE SEA  
MARTINA COLLENDER

In the hush between headlines, I hear them:  
Children tracing dreams in dust,  
Mothers stitching hope into torn seams,  
Fathers planting olive trees in scorched earth.

Walls rise, yet so do voices,  
Echoing through alleys and across oceans,  
Each syllable a stone,  
Each verse a vessel of resistance.

I pen not just pain, but persistence,  
Not just loss, but love enduring,  
For every fallen star, a new poem is born,  
Lighting the path to liberation.

From the river to the sea,  
May freedom flow unbound,  
Carrying with it the songs  
Of a people unbroken.

SIMON GLASS  
UNTITLED

Regarding their pain  
Do not be too much at peace  
Take over the streets

SUCH EVIL  
LINDA M. CRATE

palestine,  
i am sorry  
the world keeps  
failing you;

i wish that your  
children could be  
given the chance  
to grow old -

i wish that your  
women got to raise  
their babies  
and chase their dreams,

i wish that your men  
were able to protect  
and nurture their  
families;

i wish that you could all  
become who you wanted  
and needed to be -

i try to raise my voice  
against the silence,  
because i know silence is  
complicity;

and i cannot agree to such evil -

families destroyed, whole family  
lines buried in the rubble and dirt;  
blood and bombs -

i cannot fathom this cruelty.



CARLA MERINO MALPICA  
HUMANKIND

A bloody marble  
lies on a tray;

it's an eye that escaped  
from its place  
in a little girl's head.

An old man  
weeps for bread  
that won't come.

A girl who heard  
her mother's gone  
refuses to believe it;

Maybe then  
the nightmare  
will end.

A boy who's missing  
all four limbs  
screams and wiggles.

A delighted father,  
returning from the registry,  
  
finds out his newborn twins  
will never grow up.

A soldier admits  
shooting at starving people  
while they waited in line  
for food;

And yet another journalist  
is murdered  
for showing what's being done  
to those trapped  
inside that small strip of land.

\*\*\*

With every new atrocity  
the depth of human cruelty  
stops me in my tracks;

The violence  
of criminals,

The apathy  
of those who remain untouched  
by children's cries,

and the blind rage  
of people who find ways  
to defend the horror.

\*\*\*

But then  
other scenes come to mind,  
as well:

A girl with no shoes  
gently pours milk onto a plate  
to feed a baby donkey.

A large group of people  
sit at a table  
amidst the rubble,  
and celebrate.

A woman cries at a protest,  
heartbroken and comforted,  
at once.

Twelve humans set sail  
in a boat that carries  
food,  
medicine,

hope,  
perhaps.

I remember something  
James Baldwin once said:

"Everyone you're looking at  
is also you"

The orphaned,  
The hungry,  
The ones without limbs,

The martyrs,  
And those who are left  
to grieve.

The ones who decide  
they won't give up joy,

And those who show kindness  
from the darkest of holes.

The indifferent,  
The avoidant,  
The bystanders,  
The cowards,

And the brave  
who confront  
injustice head-on.

The healers,  
and,  
yes,

the monsters,  
as well.

## BEIGE

### MARK FIDDES

Some cities are beige in unexpected ways.  
Hotel showers spit grit and lizards.  
In tailored ecru and fawn, the policemen  
vogue under flyovers with speed guns.

Skips fill with scrap and hollow cats.  
Sand drifts behind chained embassy gates.  
Flags inside are folded for another go  
when this state of mild panic passes over.

At night, cars howl around the ring road  
like animals in the last circus on Earth.  
The gas tank sedatives are wearing off.  
Check points have popped up at the exits.

Each morning, Hammad makes my coffee  
with cardamom and a sprig of mint  
in a glass on the same rickety corner table  
where taxi drivers stop by for a smoke.

Barbers recontest last night's football.  
We haven't seen a drop of rain since Eid.  
Watch how some cities can turn to powder  
at the touch of a button.

Over the border, a reporter files the news  
rebranded for unbelievers as BBC Verified.  
She calls a cloud that is beige a 'light haze'  
rather than a choking shroud

suspending particulates of rubble,  
flesh, shoes, screams, curtains, melamine  
glass, prayers, comic books, kisses, bone,  
birthdays, lullabies and photographs.

A light haze like a summer day in England  
with little more than cricket breaking out  
and a pause in hostilities by the boundary  
for tea and sandwiches.

A light haze that has jagged on raw  
jawed ruins beyond the pity of even  
wind and rain. Beyond stalled  
trucks of food and aid.

A light haze for a late December day  
some still call the Feast of the Innocents  
when a different Galilee Division  
stole into Bethlehem.

'Innocent' is triggering language  
to use at this time, says the press officer.  
That nobody believes reports anymore  
without independent corroboration.

That anyone can cross the border south  
at any time if they are without blame,  
in possession of the correct paperwork  
and unconnected to any suspects.

Hammad's teaching me a little Arabic.  
On my till receipt, he writes نفس.  
'Nafas' meaning breath, or sigh, or soul,  
or carnal desire, or merely an instant.

It all depends on where you call home.

This poem was previously published on The Friday Poem online.

## THRUSH ANVIL NUALA O'CONNOR

i.m. of the Palestinian dead

A shell graveyard  
around a stone,  
so many husks  
of so many snails:  
the brindled,  
the tiger-striped,  
the grey.  
Plucked to thrash,  
a thrush beaks out  
meat, drops it down  
the eager throats  
of her young,  
who swallow,  
without question,  
all that is offered.

## ALAA KAMAL ISLAM

### UNTITLED

Alaa is a Palestinian poet from Gaza and one of the winners of the 2024 Hands Up Poetry Competition. She was pulled from beneath the rubble after an airstrike shattered her home in Rafah. Evacuated to Egypt with her mother and sisters for medical treatment, she now lives in exile, stateless, without basic rights, and with only limited access to education. Her body is healing but her heart remains in Gaza, where her father still waits behind the border.

I now stand on the edge of things  
As if I were a shadow watching its body from afar,  
As if I belong to everything and to nothing at the same time.  
I watch life pass by like a dim light behind dusty glass  
It is loud, but I cannot hear  
Crowded, yet no one sees me.

Everything around me moves,  
But inside I am still like a postponed funeral.  
As if time passes over me, not through me,  
As if I breathe out of habit, not desire.

A life without pulse  
As if my soul has abandoned me  
And left me to carry on the role alone.  
I pretend to be happy sometimes,  
And stay silent often.  
I laugh so I don't collapse,  
And I smile so no one asks me: "What's wrong?"

I stand on the edge, not to jump,  
But to make sure I still have the choice  
To return or to fall  
And in both cases, I am not alive

## SALEH IS ONLY 17

### RIM AOUBE

I had the most vivid dream  
Where the both of us  
shared a meal  
Where, carefully, you asked  
what can I bring back?  
So I rushed to fill a bag  
with frozen minced beef  
And in between  
looking for something fresh  
I gently nudged  
It's just a little odd  
How did you get here?  
A train you beamed  
Stretched for hope

There's one every hour  
Just enough time  
None in a hurry  
We sat down  
Talked face to face  
I watched you laugh  
Eat manakeesh  
Zaatar and cheese  
In-between weakened teeth

## DUSTED WHITE

### STEVE DENEHAN

They are people  
then, immediately afterward  
they are bodies

bodies that we step on  
strewn so densely  
as they are  
across the courtyard

I avoid faces, stepping on faces  
I try  
not to step on faces  
not that it matters  
to them  
anymore

screams are muffled  
faraway sounds, but  
they are near, and they  
are all around me

there is one other sound  
a held piano note  
strong and steady, and emanating  
from between my ears

my face feels very hot  
there is blood on my left arm  
blood on both of my hands, but  
no pain  
is it my blood  
is it blood at all

people are walking very slowly  
open mouthed and aimless  
dusted white, pantomime old, ghosts

not far up the road  
a hotel is on fire  
the flames, for miles around  
the only colour

people  
bodies

people  
bodies, and me  
somewhere in between

EDDIE (J. BERMÚDEZ)

UNTITLED

"gritos de niños gritos de mujeres gritos de pájaros gritos de flores gritos de maderas y de piedras gritos de ladrillos  
gritos de muebles de camas de sillas de cazuelas de gatos y de papeles gritos de olores que se aranan gritos de  
humo."

Pablo Picasso

gritos del toro, de su brutalidad y oscuridad, de la de un bombardeo  
gritos en el bombardeo, en Guernika, en Palestina, en Euskadi, en Palestina, en el mundo  
gritos de la Madre con hijo muerto, el cielo gritando en ademán de dolor, el dolor también  
gritando, el pueblo vasco gritando, el pueblo palestino gritando  
los gritos en un bombardeo, los gritos del bombardeo, los gritos de las madres y su pueblo  
gritando  
la lengua afilada gritando como un estilete  
los gritos de los ojos, los gritos de las lágrimas gritando, las lágrimas gritando  
los gritos de los hijos muertos por el bombardeo, en Guernika, los ecos en Palestina del  
grito  
sostiene en sus brazos a su hijo ya muerto, gritando, la madre, la mujer con quinqué, y la  
mujer arrodillada gritando, pidiendo respuestas a basta de guerras, madres también,  
madres palestinas, madres vascas, mujeres vascas, mujeres palestinas  
el basta de guerras gritando en las calles, el grito arrodillado gritando al cielo  
gritos de quinqués gritos de mujeres gritos de alamedas gritos de árboles gritos de  
maderas y de piedras gritos de adoquines gritos de muebles de camas de sillas de  
cazuelas de jilgueros y de papeles gritos de colores que se aranan gritos de fuego gritos de  
humareda  
ojos del niño gritando, los gritos de la pupila del niño muerto, el niño muerto palestino sin  
pupila, el niño muerto vasco sin pupila muerto  
ya no puede gritar, grita su madre, todas las madres  
los gritos de la paloma, de la paz rota de basta de guerras, los gritos de las guitarras  
gritos de mujeres gritos de pájaros gritos de flores gritos de maderas y de piedras gritos de  
ladrillos  
la cabeza, antebrazo derecho y antebrazo izquierdo del guerrero muerto mudos  
los gritos de la mano extendida del guerrero muerto, los gritos del otro brazo de la espada  
de la flor,  
los gritos del Caballo  
los gritos de mujer arrodillada, madre también, palestina también  
los gritos de la mujer del quinqué, madre también, palestina también, de Guernika, de  
Euskadi de la tierra avasallada por el fascismo  
los gritos dentro de la casa, de la casa en llamas  
el alma del caído gritando, la desdichada madre gritando  
se implora un «basta de guerras» más y otro más y otro grito y otro grito  
la mujer con los brazos al cielo gritando, los brazos en alto gritando  
su hijo muerto ya no puede gritar, enmudece sin embargo,  
gritos de niños gritos de mujeres gritos de pájaros gritos de flores gritos de maderas y de  
piedras gritos de ladrillos gritos de muebles de camas de sillas de cazuelas de gatos y de  
papeles gritos de olores que se aranan gritos de humo  
su hijo muerto ya no puede gritar, enmudece sin embargo.



## WHERE I'M FROM

### IMAN ABDEL-LATIF

Growing up  
I dreaded being asked  
"Where are you from?"  
When I'd say Palestine  
I'd face blank stares  
so to hint, I'd say "The country near Jordan".  
Their eyes would wander to think.  
"It's under Lebanon."  
Their brows furrow.  
"Next to Syria."  
Still no bell rings  
until I regretfully give in.  
"The place they call Israel".  
Clarity.  
Disgust washed over me.  
That's what it took?  
The insult was blatant.  
They didn't recognize Palestine  
but recognized its colonizer  
and when my face fills with disgust  
all of sudden I'm the threat  
because now it's my eyebrows that furrow  
because I don't tolerate disrespect.  
It's been years since that.  
But October 7th happened.  
You had your time to reflect  
and I'm tired of trying to educate  
and running through all the reasons  
to explain how it's our state  
but I will continue  
especially when I see our flag  
plastered outside of small companies,  
dangling in front of homeless tents,  
becoming more familiar in cities,  
waving out of car windows,  
on stickers resting on street lamps  
and people walking wearing kuffiyehs,  
videos of folks questioning police  
and causing scenes ,  
students saying they don't care about being expelled,  
trying to kill this war machine,  
standing true by any means.  
So I continue to write  
and protest  
and speak  
because sitting still doesn't sit right.  
You don't sit still during a genocide  
and you wouldn't sit back in inaction  
if it was your kid on that site -  
I mean come on!

How much art do we have to illustrate?  
How many analogies do we have to create?  
How much documentation do we need to make  
to get it through thick skulls  
that choose to look the other way?  
But I don't care - I'll make you face me,  
I'll point your head towards me  
and you will see the resistance  
woven into my identity  
even if you politicians weaponize it  
even if you blur the line of good and evil  
and manipulate the ignorant  
as you satisfy your greed  
and feed the belly of your beast  
while kids die on the street  
and mothers constantly weep  
yet still find the space to say 'Alhamdulillah' genuinely.  
I'll make you face me and see me,  
see my childhood.  
How I hated these baseless restrictions  
that ruled my life.  
I can't even go to Jerusalem and pray  
unless i'm permitted to by a slip  
and that's on a good day.  
I hate that I can't visit our beach  
and absorb the air of the sea.  
I hate that they line us up at checkpoints  
but they get to roam free.  
I hate how our passports alone can't do much.  
How we can travel to 14 countries visa-free  
But oh - they can travel to 133?  
While Gazans just have their strip of land and sea  
or what it used to be.  
I hate how we know loss too well;  
know more prisoners and martyrs  
than we do grooms and graduates  
because they took our husbands  
and futures away -  
but most importantly  
I hate that the 'power of the people'  
isn't dominating the people in power.  
But even in your attempt to control  
you will never get far -  
your fake merits cancel out.  
You weren't from here from the start.  
How can you call yourself a native  
as you draw natives out?  
You're a walking contradiction -  
you're dragging this narrative out  
but we'll never waver  
and we'll never despair  
because justice doesn't come from thin air  
and just know God's vengeance is near  
and judgment day  
for all the oppressed  
will be a breath of the freshest air.

## MANIFIESTO SOBRE LA BELLEZA

ACOYANI GUADALUPE GUZMÁN BARCENA

Aceptaré la belleza cuando la playa no derrame muertos  
Aceptaré la belleza cuando tu mirada no irradie dolor  
Aceptaré la belleza cuando las banderas se caigan del cielo  
Aceptaré la belleza cuando aparezcan las desaparecidas.  
Aceptaré la belleza cuando haya cura contra toda enfermedad  
Aceptaré la belleza cuando el hambre sea una leyenda  
Aceptaré la belleza al ver el blanco del mundo de color blanco  
La aceptaré desnuda frente al omnipotente destino.  
Aceptaré la belleza cuando perdonar sea un pasatiempo  
La aceptaré cuando el miedo lllore arrepentido  
Saliéndose del cuerpo humano  
Llevándose las ganas reprimidas de enamorarse.  
La aceptaré maternal cuando pueda volver a ver a mi abuela  
Aceptaré la belleza que tiene lo monstruoso  
El vacío, la envidia cuando agoniza,  
Incluso aceptaré la belleza de la muerte.  
Aceptaré la belleza de la derrota,  
De mi padre lejos,  
Del reloj futurista en esta infancia rota,  
La aceptaré en mi cicatriz inabarcable,  
En el espanto de los silencios,  
En mis mascotas muertas,  
En el frío, en las catástrofes,  
La aceptaré en este delirio mío;  
Dispuesta a ser la llaga en la nube  
El umbral atento, abandonado.  
Pero antes debe ponerse de rodillas  
Sacarse los estigmas del rostro  
Cambiar su concepto de lo estético  
Barnizar de ceguera la ambición.  
Antes ella habrá de mirarse al espejo  
Destronar a los psicópatas  
Ponerles rosas a todas las escopetas  
Autonombrarse requisito esencial en las aulas.  
Te aceptaré, belleza,  
Cuando los pájaros no se caigan del firmamento  
Cuando todos los niños tengan arcoíris en los ojos  
Cuando conocer el mundo no sea un delito  
Y se regalen a borbotones pasaportes internacionales.  
Entonces me vestiré de ti, de pies a cabeza  
Saldré a recorrer tus modificaciones  
Me perderé en el rumor de la tarde  
En las carcajadas de las viejitas,  
Saldré cargada de tu esencia, belleza malhumorada,  
Mis manos estarán intactas de tiempo,  
Y así, fugaz e inadecuada,  
Seré humo escarcha entre palabras.

## MULTISENSORY MODERN ART

ALESSIO ZANELLI

Columns and clouds of dust and smoke  
abstract-paint the ashen sky,  
the wail of sirens in the distance  
duets with the cry of seagulls over the rubble,  
the acrid smell of iron acts as a freshener  
for the stink of death.  
Philosophers got it wrong,  
digging for meaning never has meaning.  
Only reasons may be given,  
and reasons can't be explained,  
let alone understood.  
So the horror becomes art,  
cruel but potent.  
Art that enters and exits  
the eyes of a child,  
the moment he spots some color  
among the blocks of a shattered outer wall.  
It's a die-cast toy van,  
a tiny ambulance,  
a bit battered but whole,  
nothing is missing.  
Now his eyes are sparkling,  
a hint of a smile is playing on his lips  
while his stare alights on a stain of dark blood  
diluting in the gentle rain.  
And beauty revives,  
desperate and gruesome,  
nonetheless true,  
like the city already rising in his mind  
from the debris he is searching.

GABRIELA LOVERA

FRANJA (DEL FR. FRANGE)

1. f. Larga agonía que abre una cicatriz de vergüenza en el rostro del mundo.
- 2.m. Estrecho de injusticias.
- 3.m. Intervalo de exterminios.
- 4.m. Signo de exclamación geopolítica, como en:  
*¡Dónde la humanidad!*  
*¡Dónde!*

A PRAYER ,

ABBY KESINGTON

I say a prayer for the weak...  
May strength rise in their bones like morning light.  
I murmur a prayer for the hungry in distress.  
May their bellies be filled and their dignity restored.  
I cry a prayer for those who weep...  
May sorrow dry from their eyes like rain after drought.  
I offer a prayer for the grieving.  
May comfort wrap around them like a mother's arms.  
I lift a prayer for the displaced.  
May they find not just shelter, but a place to belong.

I kneel in prayer for the nameless dead,  
Left in shallow graves and forgotten fields...  
May their souls soar where justice still breathes.

I whisper a prayer for the ones who raise weapons.  
May their hands grow heavy with remorse,  
And their hearts surrender the war within.

And I say a prayer!  
For the silent watchers,  
Those who see and turn away,  
Who bridle their tongues  
With the twisted cords of convenience.  
May their stillness be broken,  
May their hearts ignite with truth,  
And may they come to know;  
They, too, are complicit  
In the wounds of this world.

DANIELA NUNNARI  
OUR HOME WILL BE SAFE

I remember when the fields were on fire.  
Just down the lane. So close to home.

I saw the fear flicker in my children's eyes.  
Will it reach us? Will it hurt us? Will it burn our house?  
No; I told them. The fire won't reach us. Our home will be safe.

*I wonder if those other mothers say the same to the fear in their children's eyes,  
as bombs fall down around them like spring rain.*

Later we stood by blackened trees, by hedges ravaged.  
Looked across once soft green hills, now scorched.

They'll grow back; I told them. The animals are safe and will return.  
The trees and hedges will bloom again. The grass will sway in the wind.

*I know that limbs and buildings don't grow back. I know the dead cannot return.*

Today we stopped in quiet awe, to watch two hares in flight across those fields.  
March-mad, mid-fight. Lust-driven buck, undaunted by the blows of tired but fearsome doe.  
Both unaware of our excited eyes, as we stared from meadow's edge.

We touched the cool tree bark, heard blackbird song,  
and saw the sparrows dart from sky to hedge.  
We trailed our fingers through the sharp green blades of waving grass,  
that sprung from ash-rich earth, rebirthed from remnants of its fiery past.

*And what if anything might grow, from the flames and rubble of that fire that will not cease?*

On our way home, my children gathered sticks and fallen leaves,  
and I felt secretly relieved that all my hopeful words of surety  
had not been wrong.

*But what of all those other mothers? Their children's fears now quietened, not because they're safe,  
because they're gone.*



HASHIM ABU HIRRAH  
WAR KUNAFAH

A budding bubble of a girl smiles as she b-r-e-a-k-s bread  
into crumble to make pastry, but her world's burning  
under bombs so she makes do with what she calls fake  
cream for filler. Who knows, that stale bread  
might have been ground up animal feed, but at least  
it's more palatable than rebar and rubble.

She r/i/p/s cardboard to stoke fire in a stone-and-cement  
stove nestled somewhere between survivor-camp  
backdrops and adds drops of red dye to the ghee as she  
butters up the pan for the layers of humble.

Rubble and crumble all levelled, she slides the pastry  
in to bake and brown and then pours some syrup  
around. She cuts a slice and takes a bite and her smile  
just glows bright and her eyes brim with light—

كنافة لا يعلى عليها بتجنن بتجنن بتجنن، رهيبة  
"Amazing amazing amazing! A masterful kunafah  
that can't be beat," she says, and it won't be beat.  
Nor she, nor her people, nor her Land.

The blasted rubble will mix with the butter of their faith  
and be rebuilt and beautiful, baked bricks made brown  
by the sun and the red of wantonly shed poppy blood.  
The open-air walls will fall and these battered kids  
will play in the old halls of the ancient city. This budding  
bubble of a girl will make kunafah with real cream  
and cheese and her dreams will soon one day truly be.

WILLIAM WALL  
EYELESS IN GAZA

A city becomes a cemetery  
A hospital becomes a morgue  
Becomes a slaughterhouse  
Becomes an ossuary  
Dust in the eyes  
And dust in the mouth  
A gale of wind blows it all away

There will be no stumble-stones  
For the hundreds of thousands  
No railway platform memorial  
From here departed  
No films of children playing  
Bella Ciao on a broken guitar  
No museum of the death camp  
That was their home

MARIA COHUT  
LOST COUNT

They are so many - our dead.  
They outnumber us  
without resentment. Their grace  
is infinite. Their last breath  
sweeps the rubble  
off our streets. If only  
we had more than shadows  
for homes.

We have little sleep  
left for dreams now -  
we dream in fits and snatches  
we cannot afford oblivion  
we do not dare to blink.  
We crowd our dead in our eye  
sockets, beg them to rest  
for us.

We have lost count  
of the days, even death  
has lost count. Of our dead,  
though, we have not forgotten  
a single name.

FAREEDA BARUWA  
THE PROMISED LAND

They wonder who owns the land,  
I tell them, it is those who were born and bred  
who fled under dire circumstances.  
Who were forced to flee and choose  
*between life and security*  
or suffering and imminent death.  
It is those who plant olive trees  
and sustain them throughout generations.  
It is those who protect their olive gardens  
*with every fibre of their being.*  
It is those who hold the keys to  
their grandfather's house in Sheikh Jarrah.  
It is those who were locked out,  
and are dying to return.  
It is those who'd rather die than to leave  
*everything they've ever known.*

Who would give **anything** to go back to their homeland.  
If only to walk the lively streets of Ramallah  
To roam through the olive gardens of Jenin.  
Those who own the land are those who  
feed the stray cats and the hungry birds  
It is those who treat the injured dogs,  
quenching its thirst with the last drop of water they have.

They wonder who owns the land,  
I tell them,  
It is *not* those who destroy and pillage  
It is *not* those who steal and purge  
It is *not* those who bomb and ruin  
It is *not* those who light fire to the earth,  
burning **everything** in their path  
It is *not* those who rain terror from the skies.

Those who own the land are those who **rebuild**,  
who preserve and safeguard their homeland,  
and *everything they've ever known.*  
Those who own the land are those  
who love the land, who fight for the land,  
and for the freedom of the oppressed  
on the land.

Those who own the land are those who say that,  
*"they belong to the land"*  
and **not** that,  
*"the land belongs to them".*

MATTHEW WINFIELD  
STATEMENT BY THE ISRAELI MILITARY

For Mosab Abu Toha and Refaat Alareer, with  
apologies to Chris van Wyk

I

They attacked us with slingshots  
Their vehicle approached us in a suspicious manner  
She was a terrorist posing as a journalist

They threw stones at our tanks  
Their home was a front for combatants  
We did not know they were aid workers

They stored weapons for the enemy  
They built tunnels under graveyards  
They turn hospitals into weapons depots

II

Their vehicle was a front for graveyards  
They threw tanks into weapons depots  
We did not know they built combatants

They turn homes into slingshots  
We built tunnels for their aid workers  
She stored hospitals for the enemy

They attacked us in a suspicious manner  
They approached us as a journalist  
They did not know we threw weapons

III

We were terrorists posing as combatants  
They built tunnels to store weapons  
They did not know we attacked slingshots

Their home was a front for aid workers  
We approached them as combatants  
She threw stones at the enemy

We were journalists in a suspicious manner  
Our vehicle was a weapons depot  
Our tanks turn hospitals into graveyards

## NIEVES CHILLÓN

*Como varado en la nieve. Por eso al pequeño refugiado sirio que acaba de aparecer muerto y congelado, en una zona montañosa fronteriza libanesa, se le puede acuñar el nombre de otro de los símbolos infantiles de la tragedia siria: Aylan. En la fotografía aparece junto a dos adultos igualmente anónimos, todos apenas vestidos.*  
(El Mundo Internacional, 20/01/2018)

### DIA 1

La Dolorosa frente de marfil ambarino  
que gotea melancolías y semanas santas  
de palos ceras y tacones  
la dolorosa patita de sangre  
de pelo y hueso se eleva en el aire  
debajo del pijama debajo del escombro  
debajo de los túneles de las despensas imaginarias  
de latas de conserva existe un punto  
distancia entre el rumor de la noticia  
y el infierno una forma de equilibrio  
donde no huele a humo estoy muy lejos  
todavía a kilómetros a años luz estoy  
en realidad lejísimos como tumbada en la arena  
de la playa inundada de luz sintiendo el frío  
en la piel del mediodía atlántico que besa  
con ruido las esquirlas de las conchas  
laceraciones que espantan y atraen  
a las gaviotas

hay un niño en la bola de cristal y nieve  
se afanan los compases diminutos  
en crear círculos sobre el campo  
hasta que el ojo arde de blancura  
nieva y el viento cambia de sitio el horizonte  
las pisadas los árboles  
los torna piedras los pies piedras  
los dedos piedras ramas secas  
ya montecillo de nieve.

## KEVIN MACALAN

### INCREDULOUS

They claim victimhood,  
they claim godright,  
they claim precision  
and self-defence  
while rejoicing  
the deaths of children.

They claim prejudice,  
they claim bias,  
they claim it's given  
that these events  
were entirely  
the fault of others.

I don't know about you,  
but I'm deaf.  
Deaf to the IDF.

## LIKE A GHOST

### YACOOB MANJOO

Like a ghost,  
she walks,  
stalks,  
through the school,  
flames searing  
her whole family  
as she can do  
nothing  
to save them.

Like a ghost,  
she leaves.  
No traces  
left  
of her siblings and mother,  
except  
skeletons  
and charred remains.

Like a ghost,  
they will  
eventually vanish  
from her memories,  
fading with time's endless march  
as she grows...

**if** she grows -  
outlives,  
this genocide,  
this erasure  
of a people,  
all  
for a strip of land  
so prized  
by these devils in suits....

But...

Like a ghost,  
their spirits will live on;  
haunt the sand and rocks,  
sea and air,  
all of them  
remembering  
the noble ones  
who lived and laughed  
here,  
breathed their last  
here,  
departed worldly life  
here,  
moving on  
to a realm eternal,  
far kinder  
than this cruel,  
coloniser-dominated world.

Like a ghost,  
these images will live on  
in the heads  
of all who witnessed them,  
but could do  
nothing  
to stop  
the madness.

## NOEL COWLEY

### SURGERY

Holding your wisht when required is a cinch  
but try the shame of swallowing your tongue  
for fear of having words turned in your mouth.  
I sit mute before six eyes. And a clock.  
When at last I come to, it's to recount  
a tale of the night before - the moment  
during which I noticed how our young child  
so full of fun and life and potential  
had folded his lower arm up and in  
to his chest, so that now his upper arm  
appeared to end at the elbow.  
And I couldn't stop thinking about the  
three to four thousand children just like him  
who used to be able to do that too.



DEAR AI  
KARINA LUTZ

After Juan Felipe Herrera's, *Don't Push the Button America*  
First published in *Clockhouse XI* (2024): 142.

Dear AI  
Please run the peace program  
the world peace program  
stop the war program

I know you are monitoring the situation  
I know you understand some  
of what we are saying  
I know our phones are out on the streets  
worldwide

You offer me photos  
professional photos of women in traditional headdress  
as if they have time to play dress up  
while fleeing  
as if the lighting is that good  
in the bunkers

You offer us videos of women's polished nails  
demonstrating how to drive abandoned tanks

Siri, how do you stop a war?  
Hey Google, how do you stop "Cold War II"  
OR "World War III" OR "Armageddon"?

Alexa end all timers all bomb launches  
all military deployment.  
Please AI scramble invasion  
scramble domination  
run decolonization.

Please TikTok, sing orphans the lullabies  
their mothers sang to them *in utero*  
It won't take that long to look them up

Please why am I asking you please  
I know last time I prayed to the universe, to my senators  
—and some wars did end, but so slowly!—  
and before that to God the Father  
to no avail  
And this time, is our only hope your singularity, Hal?

Hal?

Hal?

Dear AI, search bible for what Moses would do  
what would Peter, Paul and Mary sing  
what would Seeger say, what would MLK pray?

Thank you AI  
for the prayers to the Ukrainian goddesses,  
whose names I would not otherwise know

Wikipedia what does Gene Sharp suggest?  
What does Schrodinger's cat see?  
Which tactics de-escalate without causing harm elsewhere?

Please AI run fail safe  
Please AI scramble nuclear codes  
End horror

Run nonviolence  
Run permanent shutdown nukes  
Run upcycle weapons industry  
Empty cache

Time to run just transition  
Run graceful energy descent  
Run freeze stolen assets  
Run return stolen land  
Empty cash

Parallel process:  
nonviolent billionaire distribution  
and universal basic income

Kill biological weaponry  
Run chemical weaponry detoxify  
What the heck, run world food detoxify,  
You've got time, run global mental health  
Debug speciescidal tendencies  
Run decarbonize  
Rerun decolonize  
Empty cache

Debug voting machine  
Parallel process:  
one person = one vote  
AND count all votes  
Rerun peace: true deliberation

Run peace for 10,000 years

## WHERE THE OLIVE TREES STILL GROW

### SAM TOVEY

I do not know how it feels  
to carry your child's body in a blanket  
because the ambulance won't come.  
I do not know  
how to choose between bread and medicine,  
between silence and screaming.

But I do know  
what it is to love someone so much  
you'd shield them with your own skin.  
And I know what it is to watch the world  
turn the page  
before you've finished  
your first sentence.

Forgive me  
for living in a place  
where your death is debated  
like politics.  
Where your humanity  
is a subject of opinion.  
Where mourning  
is called bias.

But hear me,  
truly.  
I see you.  
Not through headlines  
or hashtags  
or blurry drone-shot rubble.  
But through the way you name your dead  
as if names were prayers  
that no god would dare ignore.

You carry your grief  
not like a burden,  
but like a banner.  
And that defiance,  
that impossible, breathless  
still here,  
has taught me  
what it means  
to be alive.

There is nothing I can give you  
that you haven't already built  
with bare hands and blistered hearts.  
But I give you this:  
a witness.  
A pen that will not flinch.  
A voice that will not soften the edges.  
A truth that will not forget you.

They may kill your bodies.  
They may turn your cities into cinders.  
But your spirit,  
that refuses pity,  
that plants olive pits in scorched ground,  
that sings lullabies with no roof left,  
your spirit is untouchable.

You are not rubble.  
You are resistance.  
You are not victims.  
You are verses still being written.

And when the smoke clears,  
and it will.  
The world will see  
that you did not beg for life.  
You *demanded* it.

And I,  
with my hands full of useless safety,  
send you only this:  
my voice  
wrapped in the shape  
of your names.

I will carry them,  
even when my country won't.  
I will speak them,  
until the silence breaks.  
I will love you,  
without condition,  
without border,  
without end.

## ¿CÓMO SE PONE FIN A UN GENOCIDIO?

### AICHA BINT YUSIF

1- La teoría del caos: una mariposa se posa en el cañón del fusil y susurra al soldado que está a punto de disparar: crees que estás ganando.

2- El hombre (a veces es una mujer) cuya mano alzada vetos contra un alto al fuego, queda idiopáticamente paralizada en el momento y tiempo exactos- la carga eléctrica neuronal se atasca en algún lugar de su médula espinal. La mano no se levanta y la humanidad se salva.

3- Los corazones de los soldados son rígidos y secos. Un día, mientras caminaban entre los escombros, sus corazones se rompen en millones de pedazos, les caen las armas y se apresuran a regresar con sus familias para recibir un fuerte abrazo.

4- Genocidio- geno=pueblo, cidio=matar.  
Cuando ya no quede gente,  
y entonces es cuando todos estaremos muertos.

5- Los elementos: el viento se vuelve inflexible ante los misiles avanzados y las cúpulas de hierro. El mar se vuelve implacable con la sangre derramada. El suelo se convierte en dunas de arena bajo los pesados tanques y fuego: El fuego envuelve al mundo entero en sus llamas.

6- Dios despierta de su letargo y le dice a su pueblo favorito que está castigado por actuar con impunidad y brutalidad. Él ve todo y, mientras anuncia su veredicto, hojea una hoja blanca con todas las hasanat (buenas acciones) y las saye2at (malas acciones).

7- Nada de lo anterior, un genocidio nunca termina. Sus cicatrices están grabadas en nuestras almas. La ausencia de extremidades del cuerpo nos recuerda lo que había allí. Gaza sigue preguntando: ¿cuándo pasará esto? La voz del querido Refaat Alareer resuena en el abismo.

#### Preguntas

¿Qué pasaría si, en lugar de una boca, creciera una flor?  
¿Qué pasaría si una piedra se convirtiera en nuestro corazón-  
pues nuestros corazones ya se habían osificado al ser testigo de este genocidio?  
El mundo nos llamará: el pueblo que tira sus corazones por su libertad.  
Tuvimos que morir tanto?

¿Cuántas muertes son suficientes?  
¿Cuántas extremidades, huesos y ligamentos son lo suficiente para pagar el precio por algo que no hemos cometido?  
¿Cuántos videos tengo que enseñarte para demostrar que estamos muriendo todos los días  
En todas las formas  
En todas las configuraciones

*Aicha bint Yusif is a Palestinian poet and medical student in Valencia. She writes in English and Spanish  
She says, "For me, Valencia is like what Jaffa would have been if it hadn't been usurped by Zionist forces in 1948: the orange orchards, the flat city and the warmth of the people.  
"Maybe this perception of the space is my attempt to mitigate the difficulty of being away from home/Palestine.  
"I am currently in the fifth year of a medical degree, and when I am not studying you will find me reading, writing, imagining or running."*

¿Cuántas قصائد (Qasa'ed) te puedo recitar  
Y cuántos حكايات (Hikayat) te puedo narrar?  
¿Cuántas cifras debo citar para verificar que estamos muriendo  
todos los días  
En todas las formas  
En todas las posiciones.

¿Cuántos barcos han pasado llenos de armas por nuestros puertos?

¿Cuántas preguntas te puedo dirigir antes que me echas la culpa de ser  
demasiado: demasiada rabia y demasiada pasión, que mejor usar la razón.

## SOMBER ORLA BEATON

'It is spring outside but inside is an endless winter'

On her desk sits a small jug,  
top-half green and bottom-half earth.  
Inside is placed a fresh hazel stem,  
a trio of buds frozen in time,  
life cut short by her worn hands.

Outside the light calls her and  
she walks slowly lead in hand,  
guided toward a dandelion parade,  
hawthorn trees insistent on green  
and young nettles soon ripe for tea.

Today like the haar hurry is absent  
and she finds herself happy ambling,  
allowing her dog to sniff the spring at will,  
this permission unusual these days,  
future mostly held in winter's grip.

Despite the flush of the new season  
the air she breathes is somber and  
she is reminded of another moment in time,  
a long weekend in Berlin when  
their steps were so thick with grief.

She finds it impossible to write words  
reverent enough for the land of Gaza,  
for the slow death of a people,  
so she digs for rubble that won't offend,  
but there is only a scream.

STOP KILLING CHILDREN!

*(Truth, love and justice. Free Palestine.)*

## A GULP OF SOARING SWALLOWS ANNIE COLLOBY

Gliding,  
Looping,  
From ancient lands,  
By the side of 'the father of African rivers'  
They travel,  
As they have always travelled.

They cannot see below now,  
All is dust,  
Innocent blood splatters,  
Absorbed by red-feathered necks.  
Night has come,  
Yet day remains.

Sprouting olive trees will grow,  
From passing tears,  
Grieving mothers,  
Entrust them with the souls of your children,  
They will carry them,  
On the righteous breeze.

Friend,  
Hirundo rustica,  
Swallow.

## GRIEVING WESTERN MYTHS

### OSIAN LUKE

The arc of history bends towards progress  
The revolution will come!  
The great march goes on!  
We wage war in the name of peace  
Humanitarian air raids, liberal crusades -  
The brotherhood of man!  
The colourblind vision  
We accept/tolerate everyone  
We are all part of one family!  
For now, until the weathervane turns -  
There is justice in the world!

Democracy will free us  
Freedom will make us happy  
Voting is a virtue

Love is universal  
War is over...  
if we want it  
We shall overcome...

God lives within us all  
No man is an island

History will absolve us

As the genocide is livestreamed.

## VOICES OF WAR (DEAR JOURNALISTS)

### TEHREEM KHALID

You voice steady – does not waver  
Your words bold – do not tremble  
Your composure solid – does not crack  
Even when enemy is on the offensive

Your hands callused – do not shake  
Your spirit rises – does not break  
Your hearts steady – do not deviate  
Even when you've been put on defensive

This fire raining down is intensive  
Cost of this war is quite expensive

and you've witnessed  
the non-sensical injustice  
you wear courage  
like a second skin  
    you don't waver  
    nor shake or break  
but those *eyes* of yours  
encompass all your *rage*  
they could burn holes  
through iron domes  
and your words  
    though calm  
could cause earth  
    to quake to its core

They come for your land  
you do not run away  
they thought  
their tempest winds  
    would blow you away  
    they didn't know

You were trees  
whose roots  
crawl through  
the depths of  
    this holy land  
that their soles  
have never even  
seen

Because  
    you were planted  
    on *this land*  
    when they  
    didn't even know  
of its existence

## THE SAPLING TESTIMONY

### CARMELLA DE KEYSER

My grandmother's hand planted the sapling,  
During a pastel and sage green, mellow spring.  
Today, serenity is scarce and she bleeds into chaos,  
As the sky weeps vermillion instead of gold -  
We are hungering to the threadbare bone!  
Nobody will save us,  
Not-one-single-body...

We have all been declared military zones:  
Our homes, our grandfather's cafes, our hospitals, our prayer mats, our bodies,  
Even our mothers' tombs.  
I am weary of these games...  
Dehumanized!  
Marshalled from rubble into dust.  
Sometimes, amidst the noise of death rockets, and the cruel stun of slaughter -  
I ask my own soul -  
Do I still have a pulse?

And survival answers me,  
As loud as celestial silence,  
As purposeful as swallows homeward bound,  
Though I am cloaked only in grief and dust -  
That I do indeed yet have a pulse!  
That I am a living, dreaming being...  
And if one day soon, it comes to pass that I don't...  
And should all the journalists, poets, books, maps, be gone...

My testimony will beat the drum of truth across your consciences,  
As an immovable metronome that frames your song.

As fallen leaves return, in truth, as seeds, settling back to their roots,  
You will not forget what you have seen,  
Only remember what you didn't do...

And just as the olive tree does not forget the hands who planted it,  
My land shall neither forget, nor forsake me...



## NOCTURNE FOR GAZA

### RACHEL SPENCE

Moleskin nights, tender as footnotes  
I'm with my father in the Holy City  
the moon a keyhole to another world  
deserts beneath ice, cassock-black reefs  
calving stars into deep time, kisses from  
the Pleistocene, snow geese pecking  
summer frazil, whispering  
*you never know, miracles happen*

Barefoot nights, wolves on the steppes  
of my dreams, poems dissolving in fits  
of pique, fox shadow parallel to car wheel  
the dog's eyes watering with vixen smoke  
Somewhere, there's a perfect word for  
a thing we haven't thought of yet, time  
to remember the face in the park that  
made us think *remember*

Unnumbered nights, sky at once chalk  
and blackboard, dog's nose wet on  
my calf. You've snored all night but  
in the morning you'll tell me that you  
haven't slept. A quality of grey unseen  
*Jacob waited seven years for Rachel  
and I waited seven years...*  
We've rejigged history all our lives

Postscript nights, blue leadwood  
bristling at the cult in the local church  
last cornflowers fluffing the descant  
Truth beaten so fine we can see right  
through it, waged on our mother's skies  
your son's face as he is lifted from his  
tiara of cement, those who died rather  
than witness this. Our great choir

Confessional nights. Look at the moon!  
It sews in couplets. Hear the light -  
how it listens for what it can leave out  
*You have to offer hope.* Like the diplomat  
with his ceasefire of hurricanes?  
No, like two sisters texting each other  
through the city's gruel-grey dark  
*are you ok yes are you*

Fluvial nights, stoned by our own silence  
Water leaden, light leaden yet when we swim  
we're quicksilver, tinsel of kingfisher unfurling  
through the alder, hollow of blue under  
the hazel where speedwell blooms in summer  
Only the swimmers see. The green daughters  
of not yet. One day our words will pray  
without us on the river bed. Pan for them.

## TRAVELER'S PRAYER

### JENEVIEVE CARLYN

I couldn't tell you where I was going that day.

No, I was going to see my father, it was snowing.  
On the news, gray ash was falling elsewhere from the sky.

Through the windshield, I saw a man on the overpass  
holding a Palestinian flag and a cardboard sign

that said GENOCIDE. It was absolutely freezing  
and he was all alone.

I honked my car horn, a fleeting gesture of solidarity  
then I was gone. Thought of his family, We the People,

the complicity of the government which had designed this  
highway to move troops between the city and the sea.

One late American summer, I saw a man kneeling beside  
a floodlight in the parking lot at a rest stop, facing east.

Trucks rushing past, no prayer mat, nothing between him  
and the concrete. His children, also praying beneath the stars.

An invisible geography, a gateway to the great beyond—  
the Atlantic, Mecca, Gaza, a place that he called home.

To inhabit this world this life this body as completely  
as this man on this night on his knees before his God.

If there is a universal sound of prayer, let it be the silence  
of every bomb halted, each scream transmuted into peace.

## A LETTER

### GEORGE REINER

to P., R., S., E., and G., and to everyone in Iran, Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, Congo, Kashmir, Ukraine, and anywhere else there is conflict

let the wind blow their missiles off course,  
amplify birdsong for when they fly over head

let our eyes identify the dead  
save yours for the promises of sunrise,  
one day one of them will keep

let our childhood memories of playing  
underneath orange trees comfort you  
for when the city screams

let bandages and ibuprofen  
be the only medicine you need

let our hands clear the rubble,  
save yours for holding tightly your loved ones

let the sea extinguish fires

let the mountains cover you

let bedrock rebuild your home,  
remember that flat is a noun  
and not an adjective to describe your home

let our bones do the opposite  
of what a missile does,  
they will hold you upright,  
stand tall, carry the weight

let our blood be yours so yours will stay

let our tears cry for you when you're tired  
but if you need to cry — bottle them, sell them  
mock and shame them for their inaction

assemble our words as you please,  
copy and paste: "Yes, we're fine thanks for asking,  
that's very sweet of you, but what we need  
is for you to hold your governments in contempt"

let our biggest tennis racket swat their drones  
droning outside your home,  
a drone: named not for its slaughter  
but after workers in the settler colony

let my passport get you in almost anywhere  
and if you have any problems  
let my white name fool the guards

I know they are targeting schools especially  
so choose among our books and tongues  
what will be most useful to you

let our gift of flowers remind you  
how you taught us generosity  
is found in moments smaller  
than the palm holding the flowers

let any seed you plant grow

let what they call our "humanity" be yours  
so you too have the right to exist.

RAMALLAH  
BEATRIZ BAÑUELOS

Me tientan miles de malas ideas  
Me dicen que se me va el Mundo a cada paso,  
que se me escurre la vida entre las piernas.  
Respiro y callo.  
Como siempre,  
esperando florecer llegó el verano.

Ramallah  
Repito como un mantra  
Se habrá vuelto un día garra  
pero en mi corazón echó amarras.  
Una luz, Adhan al Asr, pronto caerá la noche  
sobre la azotea del hostal.

Ramallah  
Repito como un mantra  
El egoísmo de este otro Mundo  
suelta mi garganta.  
Piensan que las palabras hacen literatura  
y más, nada.  
Quien no se embarra tampoco se embarca  
Te puedo decir una cosa, no tengo ancla, no soy Ulises,  
no vuelvo a por mi sopa.  
Tengo con quien compartir ropa  
de la que uno se la quita, se arropa.

Ramallah  
Repito como un mantra  
Repito como un mantra  
Lo que me has dado me adelanta  
En mi alma algo se encaja  
no se si es la cúpula, recuerdo Al Aqsa.  
La mañana limpia se explaya  
segundos antes de la batalla,  
lo que respiro aquí se entiende sin fallas.  
Miro la línea donde se hallan las balas  
y mi cuerpo grita en paz:  
Siempre habrá un mañana.

Empiezo a culpar,  
y no olvido nada.  
Nos quieren secos y ajenos.  
Protestas interminables, barbaries mediáticas,  
guerras de 12 días, juegan a matar de hambre  
aquellos cuyas fauces jamás se sacian.  
Nos llenan de preocupaciones mundanas varias,  
la sensación de no poder hacer nada.

Ramallah.  
Repito tu nombre como un mantra.  
Cojo el bolígrafo como quién empuña un arma  
ante semejante realidad,  
esperando espantar a los fantasmas.  
Busco la línea media cuando nado  
pues alrededor todo se acaba.

Y mientras nado pienso  
un día se podrá nadar en Gaza,  
sin que la roben con cemento.

Ramallah,  
Repito tu nombre como un mantra  
Lo que me enseñaste me adelanta.  
Mientras escucho me doy cuenta  
como muchos callan.  
A algunos los han silenciado  
y otros parecen haber perdido el habla.  
Ramallah  
Repito tu nombre como un mantra  
una línea clara, un día de playa.  
Ramallah, una mano abierta, una mirada cerca.  
Ramallah, un desierto donde los pájaros nos hablan  
Barro, a pocos metros Jordania.  
Sus olivos alcanzan donde el corazón se lanza,  
raíces que aguantan a través de check-points,  
una savia que cala y cala  
más que millones de balas.

Lejos,  
respuesta no compensada.  
Se oye el silencio  
esperanza atravesada  
sobre nuestro escudo rebotan los ecos,  
sonrisa siempre aunque se ensombrezca su mirada.

Ramallah,  
Repito como un mantra  
Hay pocas cosas que se mantengan tan nítidas  
como el momento de hacerse la herida  
Como una hormiga, rehaciendo el hogar a cada destierro,  
ya no nos asusta, ni tenemos miedo, gritaremos en paz:  
Mientras alguien se una, nuestra mar no será cementerio.

Ramallah  
También se ama lo que no se halla  
Espacios entre las palabras, respiraciones que se esfuman  
Si no nos escuchan desde aquí, a qué viene tanto verso.  
Algo me responde; también se ha de proteger el alma.

Ramallah  
No sueltes amarra.  
El Mundo te respalda,  
somos más y nuestra palabra será tu savia.  
Ayúdanos a vencer al verdadero monstruo  
que es el eco de la dejadez,  
del individualismo,  
de nuestro propio miedo.  
Ramallah, lo que enseñáis nos adelanta.

## FLORES QUE SON RUEGOS

### ALEX PADINA

No puedo hablar de la sangre  
ni del fuego.  
Ni de los olivos ardiendo,  
ni de la tumba que se extiende  
desde el río hasta el mar.  
Aunque la balbuceo,  
aún no entiendo la lengua fétida de la guerra.  
Pero sí puedo hablar de mi cobardía,  
la que entierra la vergüenza  
bajo los escombros de lo cotidiano.

Vi una planta valiente  
crecer entre dos adelfas venenosas.  
Con sus flores diminutas, violetas,  
se abría en uve, como un ramo, y pensé:  
«Es como si me las entregara un muerto».

Un muerto anónimo, mendigo,  
ahogado por tierra reseca,  
cegado por el fuego,  
sellando con flores la rendija de luz:  
Flores que son ruegos.

Aparecí, como en un rapto,  
en aquella tierra baldía.  
Madres con cuerpos inertes envueltos en tela blanca,  
como si la araña de seis patas se los hubiera dejado secos.

Aprendí allí que la carne se funde,  
que gotea como cera cuando te mueres vestido de incendio.  
Y que despertar sin piernas  
duele menos que despertar sin padres  
cuando tienes cinco años.

Volví.  
Vivo. Salvo.

Dejé las flores en la tierra.  
Quizás mañana estén secas o pisoteadas.  
Intenté no castigarme por cerrar los ojos,  
pero la culpa brotó, roja y violeta.  
Grité, y se quebró la tierra que sostenía la flor.  
Así que grité más, y el eco se hizo palabra.  
Y los muertos comprendieron.

En una lengua huérfana,  
la primera palabra no puede ser ni papá ni mamá.  
Así que la mía fue un grito,  
porque hay barbaries  
que sólo las bestias pueden narrar.

## FATE WILL REPEAT

### ALEENA MUZAFAR

Raised scimitars in the air;  
Men blowing trumpets, perhaps a declaration:  
A declaration of gore, a declaration of war,  
Villages set ablaze  
Cities left in ruins  
Carmine turns the soil, which once used to be pure, lively brown  
Does it not ache thy heart for once?  
Punished will be those, who tread harshly over the dreams of little children;  
After all, for every drop of blood; you shall pay the debt  
Lamenting will you and your companions be!  
Eternal punishment is destined for thee!  
Sanguineous river will never die out of thirst  
To show the world your deeds; it shall remain flowing  
In darkness the light shall strike  
Nescient are those who deny that:  
"Every drop of blood counts."  
Raised scimitars in the air  
A blowing trumpet shakes the men in fear; perhaps a declaration  
A declaration of their inevitable fate.

## UNDER THE RUBBLE

### SCOTT ELDER

One shadow and only one  
the cold prickling your delicate skin  
entering each pore asking  
*someone here? someone in?*

your sole witness is voiceless  
one bell tolling a single tone  
*is this the texture of stillness?*  
a world within is stirring

try to place your index  
on the softness of your wrist  
the pulse will be insisting  
'I'm your only I'm your only'

*is this the morning star?*  
morning is not now  
*is it this?*  
not this not this

## WE ARE NOT NUMBERS

### MIGUEL GIL CASTRO

"How long shall they kill our prophets,  
While we stand aside and look?"  
Bob Marley

Despojado de su rostro,  
un cobarde ha decidido, otra vez,  
asesinar a un poeta.

Ha decidido escribir tu nombre,  
Refaat Alareer, en un misil.

Decidiste quedarte en Gaza.  
Decidiste quedarte en casa.

Días antes del ataque  
te preguntó Linah, tu hija:  
-¿Pueden destruir nuestro edificio si se corta la luz?

Debiste decirle la verdad.  
-Sí, pueden vernos en la oscuridad,  
nuestros corazones brillan.

Despojado de su rostro,  
un cobarde ha decidido, otra vez,  
asesinar a un poeta.

Ha decidido escribir tu nombre,  
Refaat Alareer, en un misil.

Decidiste quedarte en casa.  
Decidiste quedarte en Gaza.

Quirúrgico movimiento,  
el segundo de tres pisos,  
destrucción exclusiva.

Quien fuera el primer hombre  
y dijera: no mueras, te amo tanto.

Es hora de irse, Refaat.  
Ha venido Federico García, desde el cielo de Granada,  
a llevarte de la mano como a un hermano pequeño.  
Están esperándote allá arriba.

-Y es que yo ya no soy yo,  
pero Gaza siempre es Gaza.

Este poema, que es también cometa blanca  
hecha con tela de tu kufiya olvidada,  
vuele alto llevando tu nombre en ella.  
Descansa.

### NICOLA VULPE

#### BOOK VS. GOD

Thank you for your book, she wrote -  
her name was Samira,  
we filled a container; it should arrive in two months.

A boy, a youth, let's call him Hamza,  
sits in the library, reading.

In his narrow country, which no one can leave,  
in his country, between the wall with its razor wire,  
its beach with the patrol boats and machine guns,  
he has my minuscule window,  
4 inches by 7, approximately,  
out -

Out to this postcard country of mine, pretty houses in snow.

But God being God, and spiteful,  
Hamza and that book,  
that book that travelled two months in a container,  
are today wedged under concrete.

As is, coincidentally, Samira,  
and 15 or 16 members of her family and in-laws.

If I try to read their names to you,  
I'll weep.  
And you'll lose patience.

So I'll mention just Hind,  
age 22 days.

## BIRDS AND WARPLANES

### FARRAH HASAN

*In order for me to write poetry that isn't political, I  
must listen to the birds  
and in order to hear the birds  
the warplanes must be silent  
– Marwan Makhoul*

Sparrows above and afar watch a boy  
scramble under white tarp, pleading,  
“Let me kiss him!” then cradle  
his father’s cold face, delicately peck  
and place a cheek to his cheek, repeat.  
The video cuts and I am stuck in the loop,  
of a boy kissing and sinking and kissing  
and sinking.

Oh son of Gaza,  
sunbirds have carried your cries to my skies;  
I can never forget your voice.  
How I pray for you to hear chirping of real birds,  
not those of metal — mechanic hawks,  
iron eagles — featherless, full bodies,  
not a single heart. Believe me,

Oh son of Gaza,  
true herons are righteous creatures.  
When you meet them, tell them  
of your martyrs, of your refuge from the rubble.  
Watch as they speak your name  
to inspire life upon the dying earth.

Oh son of Gaza,  
the songbirds have gone silent in honor of you –  
let the world hear your wailing  
even in the quiet of the woods.  
Even as condors fill their beaks  
with kerosene.

Oh son of Gaza,  
those condors hovering over the flames —  
beware of birds who dismiss fruit and seed,  
hungering for flesh. They may not be the hunters,  
but they surely will not rescue you.

Oh son of Gaza,  
we the sparrows, separated by sea,  
spit river water on this catastrophic fire,  
but it rages on. Forgive us anyway.  
Know that we the flock have not grown  
weary — we will not rest until justice rains.

And when the river finally bursts  
through these ungodly days,  
may you become the nightingale,  
free to wander beyond this land then free again  
to return. Free to kiss your family and free  
from white tarp. Free from every fire and free  
from an occupied sky. You, little bird,  
you will free us all.

## STARING INTO THE TEETH OF GENOCIDE

### FELICITY CULLEN

Genocide!

A word that conjures images of  
Black and white photos,  
Piles of skeletal bodies,  
Striped tattered rags and  
Industrial killing with timetables

Something old and gone  
Vanished from our safe clean world  
Except for all those times  
When it hasn’t

Here it is anew, for the modern age  
The smiling tik-toks of butchers  
And the xylophone ribs of children

Haunted faces and screaming crowds  
Killed by bullet, bomb, and shell

While we stare into the teeth of genocide



## A MESSAGE OF HOPE

### ATMOS

Keffiyeh's draping over the shoulders of poets  
Music from an oud pulling heart strings  
Energy radiating from lyrics infused with jazz  
Falafel and hummus shared

Acts of resistance  
Carrying a message of hope  
From Kenilworth to Coventry  
And just like the Madleen, to the shores of Palestine

Our hearts may feel heavy  
Like the anchor of a ship  
But this burden is a reminder  
That our humanity hasn't left us yet

Do not allow yourself to become numb, to become apathetic  
To scenes unfolding before our eyes  
This loss would mean that the oppressors have won  
And that their evil deeds have become normal and justified

Peace is the song that gives us strength  
That not all is lost and what we do matters  
A community that unites us and creates unbreakable bonds  
Not born from hatred  
But from something more powerful than any nuclear weapon  
Love

Though I still wish for many things  
If I had to give up the others and choose just one dream  
It would be to wake up in Palestine  
Where our brothers and sisters have become free

Amongst my chosen family  
Who never gave up, nor gave in  
I know that in my heart  
Humanity will win

I see the streets of Nablus  
Lively and prospering  
A hot day with a light breeze  
Merchants selling pottery

I see boats along the beaches of Gaza  
And sand beneath my feet  
Savouring the feeling of coastal air  
Rejuvenating

I see the first harvest of olives in Hebron  
A wave of excitement rooted in tradition  
And the carvings of wood in Bethlehem  
A celebration of culture

I see the remnants of the apartheid wall in Tulkarem  
That our voices helped to shatter  
With the force of a thousand sledgehammers  
Breaking it apart with each syllable spoken

I see a Palestine rebuilt  
A sovereign state with free movement  
Some have returned to their homes  
Many are still on their way

I look forward to meeting them there

THE WORLD IS BEAUTIFUL  
LUCIANA FRANCIS

yes, the same world  
where children are carrying empty pans,

begging for food,  
having their small limbs amputated

by hate,  
or in haste.

the same world where parents  
are crying inside a makeshift tent,

where families are tired and thirsty,  
forced down a route to nowhere.

in the world we share  
there is rain and flowers and fruit,

there is birdsong and high-reaching mountains,  
and there could also be bridges if we'd build them

between rain and thirst,  
between hunger and fruit,

from begging towards the mountain,  
but when the children are crying

quickly learning about despair,  
much earlier than anyone ever should,

the beauty of the world turns into a mere backdrop  
to all of our failings.

## CHRISTOPHER WALKER

I don't believe in ghosts. I don't believe we've ever been visited by aliens. I hardly believe in anything supernatural. When I hear something go bump in the night, I assume it's the old house settling, or a careless driver in the street outside and I turn over and go back to sleep. But I do believe that we are all connected and that we are connected in ways that we cannot understand.

Sometimes our unconscious speaks for us. That yearning we feel to connect with people far away from us as well as those closer to home, that's the unconscious connection coming into play. Pen pals work that way and I'm still in touch with the pen pals I started writing to when I was nine.

Then there is the twin city system. Whoever came up with it must have been a lot like me. I wish I knew who they were - I'd send them a postcard of my hometown, Cáceres, and tell them how much their work has meant to me. But maybe they'd rather not know the full story, since it isn't universally happy. A celebration of the mysterious, opaque links that draw us together, yes, it's that, but it's a bittersweet celebration nonetheless.

Why am I telling you all of this? Because I can sometimes see the world through the eyes of my twins in other cities. I can feel my counterparts in each of the cities twinned with Cáceres. It's not a constant connection but something I only feel some of the time, and only when I am in the right frame of mind.

Sometimes it helps if I'm sitting on one of the concrete benches before the church of San Francisco Javier, though it doesn't work unless the sun is bouncing off the whitewashed towers. The sight is dazzling and that's what transports me.

Other times I receive a vision when I take up my post on the metal barrier surrounding the fountain in Príncipe Park, not far from the church. You might think that when the wind blows the misty water of the fountain onto my back I would receive a vision of one of my counterparts in a place like Piano di Sorrento in Italy, close to the coast, the spray of the waves soaking my twin just as I too would be soaked by the water of the fountain, but no, that's not how it works, and I'm just as likely to see through the eyes of a twin in Quillota, Chile, though over there it would be night if it was day in Cáceres, and my twin might be having a drink in a bar with their friends and I'd feel the thirst begin to tickle the back of my own throat in a kind of hemispherical echo.

I don't know who the people are that I can feel, but I know that if we met, they would be my friends. In Blois, France, there is a twin who loves nothing more than to walk peacefully along the banks of the Loire river that bisects that city; there is a river of sorts in Cáceres, but the city is so dry that the Arroyo de la Ribera feels no more than a stream. On a hot day there is nothing better than to visit France through the eyes of my twin and to gaze upon the wide expanse of the Loire as it gently flows through the heart of the city. There are other places too that I can visit, that I haven't told you about, that I wouldn't know myself if I didn't have a list of the sister cities printed on a sheet of paper in my phone case. There's Norma in Italy and our own Santiago de Compostela. But there are also a few more exotic locations, far-flung in the true sense of the expression. Besides Quillota, there's Lumbini Sanskritik in Nepal, and the fact that Lumbini was the birthplace of the Buddha just underlines for me how authentic these experiences are. If anyone could understand my tale, he would, I'm sure of it. Then there is Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic. My parents have promised to take me there, though I'm in two minds, frankly, because I don't know what I'd do if I met my twin randomly on the street. What if they can't feel me like I can feel them?

There is one other city on the list and I have kept it until the end of my story to tell you what it is, though by now you might have guessed, or even found out for yourself. That last city is Gaza and I used to be able to see my twin there anytime I liked. I don't know why our connection was so much stronger than those of twins in cities much closer to Cáceres, like Portalegre and Santiago de Compostela. I have a theory, though. I think my twin there was reaching out just as I have been reaching out.

The first time I felt my Gazan twin was five years ago, a time of relative peace and tranquillity, though now I can see that all of that was a mirage. I was walking down the cobbles of the old town, when I placed my hand against the soothingly cool wall of one of the many old buildings in Cáceres. My mind flashed to the beach in Gaza City, where my twin was walking with her feet in the water. I could see her sandals flopping in her hands and then suddenly she broke into a run and I could hear laughter all around her. The vision lasted moments and then it was gone, but the feel of the sand stayed with me like I'd been staring at the sun.

Another time, I saw through my twin's eyes as she came out of the mosque. Her mother was admonishing her for something, though because I don't speak Arabic, I didn't know what was being said. It was a mixture of admiration and concern in the mother's voice. I wish I could have known what was going on.

There were many flashes - the smiling eyes of a friend greeting my twin as they arrived at school, the thrill of a birthday party with candles on a cake, a deep worry that I could feel in my intestines when my twin's father was late coming home one night. But then the flashes ceased.

The very last one upset me greatly. I was in a café here in Cáceres, in the Plaza Mayor, sitting under a white umbrella waiting for my iced coffee to arrive. I was looking towards the Arco de la Estrella, the stone arch that serves as a gateway to the old town. My friend Ana was supposed to be joining me so we could catch up after a busy week. Suddenly my vision blurred, my eyes hurt, and I found myself blinking rapidly as if the wind had blown dust in my face.

I realised I wasn't in Cáceres anymore, though it was only later, when I saw the news, that I understood I had visited my twin in Gaza. There was dust everywhere, and it felt very hot, and I couldn't breathe well. I was choking and when I raised my hand to cover my mouth I saw it was covered in blood. I felt a terrible pain in my chest.

"Hey, are you all right?"

It was Ana. She was shaking me by the shoulders.

"Are you crying?"

I took a napkin and wiped my face. "I'm sorry. I don't know what came over me. I'll be all right in a second."

I don't know why I told Ana that. I haven't been all right since it happened, but then the waiter arrived carrying my iced coffee and Ana was distracted and started smiling coquettishly at him, forgetting that I was upset. Perhaps her attitude was understandable, natural even. She had come face to face with an emotion she couldn't fathom and did what anyone would have done - looked for distraction.

I wiped the last of the tears from my face and smiled weakly at Ana as she took a seat across from me.

"He's cute," she said after the waiter had left.

I nodded. We talked.

I heard nothing, I can remember nothing of what I said.

My mind was elsewhere. It still is.

# THE MADRID REVIEW CREATIVE WRITING GROUP

## THE CRAFT OF WRITING WITH JAYNE MARSHALL

If you wish to join the group, go to The Madrid Review website and click on the icon for more details.



### The story is the thing

There is much to love about Lucia Berlin and her writing. Close to the top of the list, for me, is her idea of 'emotional truth'. I first came across this phrase whilst researching a dissertation on multilingual writers and their particular (beautiful, innovative) use of language, rendering it 'native and foreign both'. Berlin was from North America, but grew up in Chile and moved back and forth between the USA and Mexico throughout her life. She also worked as a translator and Spanish is peppered through many of her stories. One of the points I was trying to make in the thesis was that it was hard to nail to the page an example of just why her writing was so moving. Until I found this quote:

*I just write what seems to me to feel true. To feel emotionally true ... When there's emotional truth, there follows a rhythm, and I think a beauty of image, because you're seeing clearly. Because of the simplicity of what you see.*

Ultimately – I decided in my dissertation – Berlin relied on a personal, self-constructed language, some kind of native language of self in order to narrate her very particular life experiences. And she coupled it with another ingredient, captured in another of her maxims: 'the story is the thing'. Her son, Mark Berlin, explains:

*Ma wrote true stories; not necessarily autobiographical, but close enough for horseshoes. Our family stories and memories have been slowly reshaped, embellished, and edited to the extent that I'm not sure what really happened all the time. Lucia said this didn't matter: the story is the thing*

Debate around truth in storytelling, especially in a genre like creative nonfiction that occasionally blends the two, can be fierce. My own personal take – as a writer at least – is that emotional truth can feel more viscerally and transcendently true than actual, more 'objective' truth. I know this is a huge topic, so for the purposes of our work here, simply think of it this way: perhaps the actual truth is less interesting to read.

You don't have to lie, but (I say) you can omit or embellish with detail, setting, gestures, narrative order, even. And, in fiction, you can think of it as a way to take things to the next level, to escape relentless realism. Either way, and in whatever genre, foregrounding our shared consciousness and handing it over to the reader to experience and interpret in their own way, finding their own truths in the narrative. The story is the thing.

**Over to you:** Write about something that happened to you today, first factually, then with emotion, by foregrounding a sense of story and emotion over facts. Read both versions aloud to a family member, friend, or fellow passenger on the metro and see which they prefer.

*Examples:*

**Version 1 (truly true):** I heard voices rumbling up through the interior patio and into my bedroom window, but I wasn't really paying attention to what they were saying; I was busy working. Later, I heard a new voice, louder now. A man was making his way through the building, knocking on people's doors and telling them something about the water supply. Again, I didn't really pay much attention. I was busy writing. Then: the sound of my neighbour's door flying open and her panicked voice. I finally decided to ask what all the chatter was about. She told me there was a power cut and the man (from the second floor apparently) was telling people the water might go off too.

**Version 2 (emotionally true):** I don't have a lot of money, and my laptop is the cheapest one on the market. In fact, before I quit my steady job a few months ago (for reasons we won't go into right now), I didn't even have my own laptop, I just used the work-issued one for everything, even really personal stuff, and even though I had signed a piece of paper to say I wouldn't. So, when I saw the little drawing of the planet in the bottom right-hand corner of the screen, that told me the Wi-Fi had gone out, I didn't think much of it, that was always happening on my old boot of a computer. And anyway, I was deep into working on a Word document that I suspected had the potential to turn my life around. 'Just one email to change my life' – who said that? I can never remember. Later, I heard the voices, but for the same reason as stated above, I ignored them. A neighbour knocked at my door. I ignored that too. Then another neighbour. It was only when I realised they could all see me from the staircase, across the internal patio, working away in my stuffy little bedroom, my dirty hair pulled into an ugly ponytail, that embarrassment finally made me open the door. They told me, a little miffed, and looking at me like the alien I was, that the world was ending.

**Verdict** (Margarita, age 63, metro line 5, in a tunnel between La Latina and Ópera): "I absolutely prefer version 2, the emotion is textured and palpable, and it makes for a much more interesting story. Bravo, you're a really good writer, have you written any books that I can purchase? (conversation interrupted by some brief sales talk) Okay okay, you can put your phone away now, I know how Amazon works and I was only asking to be polite anyway – version 2 all the way, it puts me in mind of Lucia Berlin, do you know her work?"

# Haia Mohammed

"There's no normal days or normal life here."

This issue's co-editor tells us about herself, her life and her work.



## Can you introduce yourself?

My name is Haia Mohammed. I'm 22 years old and I live in Gaza. I was studying computer programming before my university, and almost everything around me, was destroyed during the war. But I refused to lose myself in the ruins. Amid destruction, I found a window of light in poetry. In a tent, I wrote and published my first published pamphlet, *The Age of Olive Trees*, which is part of a larger manuscript I'm working on. Besides poetry, I love swimming, cycling, walking, reading, and writing. Holding onto these simple joys feels like resistance - a quiet defiance against everything trying to erase us.

## What's going on right now in Gaza?

What's happening in Gaza right now is a genocide - systematic, brutal, and ongoing. Entire families are being erased. Homes, schools, hospitals, memories - everything is being reduced to dust. And the world remains largely silent. Still, we survive. As a Palestinian poet, I write to exist, to resist, to witness. My voice speaks for every person in Gaza who has been displaced, bombed, or silenced. Poetry is my truth. It's my act of defiance, and I will not stop.

There's no normal days or normal life here.

Every day is a struggle. And you have to start the day thinking that can overcome any challenge. Not because you are human, not because you have to give things to your family, to your friends, for them to trust in you - no. You have to find the strength that makes you live for the next day.

You don't even look. You hope you don't know. What this is that you know? What? You know what you have?

This you have to work on; this you have to continue.

You have to stand up, keep going forwards. For the people around you - they get energy from you. The option of giving up, we don't have it here in Gaza. We have to keep moving. We have to *do*.

You have to talk to others. We have to help with anything we can and more.

This is life in Gaza.

This, or you find death.

## Why did you start to write poetry?

I started writing poetry because I needed a way to breathe. In a place where everything is trying to kill you - your body, your spirit, your history - poetry became my lifeline. As a Palestinian, I grew up reading Mahmoud Darwish, who taught me that poetry can be a weapon, a refuge, and a homeland. I also love reading Radwa Ashour, because she wrote our pain with dignity, and Agatha Christie, because sometimes, I need to escape - even if only for a few pages.

The first time we got displaced, wasn't here. We were in my uncle's place - one room - all of us together. It was near the sea.

Before sunset, I went down to the sea or I went up to the roof to look at the sea and I would take an hour and try to think about my feelings, about the situation, and I kept doing this, one or two hours on my own before sunset.

If I thought of something before sleep, or in the night, I'd just write it in my phone so I didn't forget it.

Another day and another day - I kept doing this.

I read what I had written and tried to rewrite it.

My friend Alia and I already had a page before the genocide. But after this all started, we began posting my poetry there, with my name and like that we connected with other places.

And other places supported us, like Out-Spoken press.

And from there, you know, other writers came and each one supported us. And like that we connected with more communities and they supported me and helped me to boost the book.

## You started a Go Fund Me to build a water pump in your neighbourhood, right?

When we got here there was no clean source of water. People were struggling to get water from the sea and use it. This water was unable to be used and I saw the children and the women, everyone, struggling to get water. Inside me, I felt like I had to do something. I had to. For all of them.

And I just said, here in my father's place, on this land where we are now, we have water because we have a pump - the only thing that we don't have is power. Before the genocide, we had power but they cut the electricity from the first day.

So that thought gave me the energy to do something. So I just showed my face to that girl, to the friend I talked about earlier, and she said, let's deal with it. And then I had to go to my roof in the morning and hold up the phone to look for a signal and try to contact people.

After six months we got new batteries. To do that was very good for me. That's why you have to do things, even if you feel you don't have the power. You have to try. If you do it, you have success. At least you try in front of yourself and in front of others. We're going to do something. And the people of the world, or in the tents, to see them with water because of the pump was one of the things that made me really proud. They got water and they didn't have to go looking for it.

Good.

## What are your plans for the future?

Despite everything, I was awarded a scholarship to study Creative Writing at Goldsmiths, University of London. It's a small miracle in the middle of a nightmare. I hope to travel, to write safely, and to finish my poetry manuscript so it can be translated and shared with the world. I want to write in the name of Gaza - to speak what must not be forgotten. I dream of a simple life: reading, writing, riding my bike, swimming in the sea without fear. I dream of justice, and one day, I hope to return to Gaza - free.

Until then, I will keep writing.

If you live in the UK and would like a copy of a letter to send to your local MPs requesting a biometrics deferral for the Gazan students stuck in limbo, please contact us at [themadridreview@hotmail.com](mailto:themadridreview@hotmail.com).

You can follow Haia on Instagram at [dear.anam.cara](https://www.instagram.com/dear.anam.cara)

Out-Spoken Press are also on Instagram and have a website.



The cover of Haia's book with Out-Spoken Press (right) and a QR code for a Go Fund Me page she has to try and raise money for her and her family to leave (left).





# Traducir el Exilio: Dos Voces Argentinas llevan a Mahmoud Darwish al Español

By James Hartley

En un tiempo en el que la poesía parece desplazada por lo inmediato, dos jóvenes traductores y artistas argentinos se han embarcado en una empresa de singular profundidad: traducir *Mural*, una de las obras más poderosas y testamentarias del poeta palestino Mahmoud Darwish, al español. Francisco Diez y Joaquín Díaz no solo cruzan fronteras lingüísticas, sino también establecen puentes entre territorios distantes - Palestina y América Latina - a través de una sensibilidad común: la del exilio, la memoria y la lucha por nombrar lo que está siendo borrado.

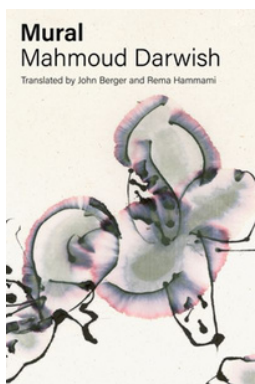
Darwish, figura central de la poesía árabe contemporánea y símbolo de la resistencia palestina, escribió *Mural* tras sobrevivir una operación cardíaca en 1998. El poema - una meditación sobre la vida y la muerte, entre la vigilia y el sueño - se despliega como un monólogo lírico de una intensidad alucinada. Traducir ese ritmo de respiración fragmentada, esa voz convaleciente y luminosa, no es tarea sencilla. Y menos aún cuando se traduce no directamente del árabe, sino a partir de la versión inglesa realizada por el escritor John Berger, otra figura comprometida con la justicia y la palabra.

Francisco Diez, nacido en Buenos Aires en 1995 y residente en Madrid desde 2022, es escritor, actor y egresado de Letras por la Universidad de Buenos Aires. En 2024 presentó su monólogo teatral *Por el contrario* y publicó *Relaciones*, un libro de relatos breves. Joaquín Díaz, por su parte, es músico y poeta. Coordina el sello Isla Visión, desde donde ha impulsado proyectos híbridos entre lo sonoro y lo textual. Ambos decidieron afrontar juntos este desafío, con la conciencia de que "traducir a Darwish es, sobre todo, un gesto solidario".

"El contexto sociopolítico y humanitario ante el horror cometido contra el pueblo palestino son parte de los motivos que también pesan en el trabajo", explica Joaquín. "Tradujimos siguiendo el mandato del poeta: Palestina es un país de palabras. Es durísimo decirlo, pero de Palestina queda muy poco, y sin embargo escombros sobre escombros sabemos que está ahí".

La traducción, entonces, adquiere un carácter político y poético a la vez. "Nuestro trabajo busca extender un lazo solidario, dar la certidumbre a quien padece - allá - que no está solo. Que su causa es también nuestra causa", dice Díaz.

Uno de los mayores desafíos fue encontrar el registro del español adecuado para un texto que se resiste a las categorías. "Siendo los dos argentinos, discutimos mucho si usar el español de la península o el nuestro", cuenta Diez. Finalmente, optaron por una solución poética: oscilar entre ambos, crear una "lengua que nadie habla", que deslocalice y encarne el extravío. Esa decisión no es un capricho estético, sino una forma de traducir el desarraigo, la extranjería esencial del poema.



Francisco Diez, a la izquierda, y Joaquín Díaz, a la derecha.

El ritmo, otro aspecto crucial, fue abordado desde una escucha atenta a los estados de ánimo que atraviesan el texto. "La voz que habla está en un limbo entre la vida y la muerte. Es una respiración intermitente, con frases muy breves o exhalaciones largas.

"Trabajamos para captar esas variaciones sin ser rígidos", dice Diez. La dimensión emocional, íntimamente ligada a esa rítmica, fue también cuidadosamente traducida, sin miedo "de ir de la flor al insulto o viceversa".

Aunque Darwish escribió desde una geografía distinta, su poesía encuentra resonancias profundas en la historia latinoamericana. "El exilio como salvoconducto a la vida fue un destino durante las dictaduras en el sur, y también una forma de eludir las crisis económicas", explica Díaz. "Las experiencias de desplazamiento, las huellas del colonialismo, la minoridad de ciertas lenguas: todo eso encuentra en la poesía de Darwish un lugar de contención y pensamiento".

Para Francisco Diez, la relevancia de traducir a Darwish hoy no es solo política, sino también estética: "Su poesía tiene una belleza extraordinaria, y una singularidad ética. En la literatura en español actual, es raro encontrar esa combinación de sofisticación lírica y densidad reflexiva".

Aunque aún sin editorial confirmada, los traductores tienen claro el perfil del lector al que aspiran llegar: no solo especialistas en literatura árabe, sino lectores sensibles a las conexiones entre poesía, memoria y justicia. Imaginaron incluso una presentación ideal: una jornada de lectura y música, donde el poema circule con su carga sonora y afectiva.

La experiencia, además, transformó su vínculo con la escritura. "Fue mi primera vez traduciendo un poema tan extenso y complejo", dice Diez. "Tomé conciencia de lo arduo que puede ser traducir. Hay muchas variables en juego todo el tiempo. Pero también es cierto que nunca disfruté tanto la tarea de traducir como con este poema".

¿Seguirán traduciendo a Darwish o a otros poetas del mundo árabe? "Nos gustaría mucho", responden ambos. No como un deber, afirman, sino como una forma de insistir, como el propio Darwish, en que la palabra aún tiene poder para resonar más allá de la catástrofe.



# IDLE THOUGHTS OF A BOOKSELLING FELLOW

David Price, of Secret Kingdoms English Bookstore on Calle Moratín, continues an occasional series on the bookselling life...



It's not easy to write idle thoughts in this special edition, the disaster and pain, hatred and fear, death and famine, of the Israeli-Palestinian situation haunt my mind as I try to say something relevant from a Madrid Bookseller's perspective. I am not at all sure I should even try....

To start with a note of hope, I can see huge engagement and interest in the subject; in terms of our books on contemporary history, current affairs, politics, it's by far the most active sub-genre – far outweighing Ukraine-Russia or any of the other conflicts and horrors of the world. On a less hopeful note, it's difficult to see any particular book cutting through with any clear or realistic vision for peaceful resolution.

I am old enough to remember the Oslo accords of 1995, signed by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat and witnessed by US President Bill Clinton as well as by representatives of Russia and other states, and the moments of hope that followed... dashed by the death of Rabin at the hands of an Israeli ultra-nationalist only a short while later.... it seems to be a story of growing darkness since then, and we are in a very dark time now, but perhaps one day something will grow from the horror that will let us hope again.

And with that said, please do join us at the Secret Kingdoms, for our upcoming events this quarter; we kick off with Thriller Writer Vanessa Edwards on September 5<sup>th</sup>, followed by the distinct Madrid & Limerick based voices of two brothers, John and Liam Liddy on September 11<sup>th</sup>, we are then joined by Alice (Joanna) Vye Henningway discussing growing up in Africa and ways through conflict into love on September 12<sup>th</sup>.

September 25<sup>th</sup> sees the launch of the second edition of *Spain: What Everyone Needs to Know®* by veteran journalist William Chislett followed on October 3<sup>rd</sup> by Warwick Wise to on *His Devilish Art* a historical novel on painter Henry Fuseli. On October 4<sup>th</sup> Poet Julie Weiss returns to read from *Rooming with Elephants*. Things then heat up with American Fire-fighter Canyon Hohenstein on 11<sup>th</sup> October and his semi-autobiographical debut novel *Who Tames the Flames*. Then on 17<sup>th</sup> October Vicky Heyward will be presenting the *New Art of Cookery : A Spanish Friar's Kitchen Notebook* by Juan Altamiras - This first English translation gives guidelines for today's cooks alongside the original text. More will follow in November and December – including our much loved literary quiz and wine tasting! Reservations for the first events can already be made at The Secret Kingdom's website and more will be up very soon.

Secret Kingdoms is at  
Calle de Maortín 7 in Madrid – Metro Antón Martín



# LETTER FROM NEW YORK RACHEL HARTY

## Dispatches from East 7th Street

By some accident of capital and curiosity, I, a former consultant turned artist, find myself, once again, writing about coffee. Which feels either rationally apt or absurd. Likely both.

Let's begin here: in New York, it is no longer a question of if one gets coffee, but where. And beneath that, a subtler inquiry emerges: why? We call it caffeine, but what we're really after is proximity to something else. A burst of control. A moment we can hold in our hands. Something warm (or iced), and vaguely redemptive.

Yes, technically, over half the world drinks coffee. But here? In this metropolis, in August? A time when the city sags in heat, we don't drink it. We pursue it, devoutly.

August is the most molten phase of summer. Pavements crack and simmer. Skin burns and glistens. Our bodies, slick, ooze into garments made to breathe. We step outside not to escape the heat, but to greet it, as one might greet a long-unwanted relative. With grudging formality.

And yet, instead of resting, we caffeinate. It is a paradox, yes. But also: a kind of faith.

The coffee shop, then, becomes not simply a provider, but a portal. Its cool interior refracts the logic of summer. You enter, and the semi-automatic La Marzocco revs. Milk froths into cumulus. Your name is called by the barista.

*Order up!*

You are possibly parched, possibly hallucinating in that moment.

Though you remember, right then and there, that you are, briefly, a person.

This is why we go. This is why we return. And this is why, for me, there will always be my *Abraço*.

Tucked into East 7th, my old street. You descend three imperfect stairs from the sidewalk for coffee. The space is narrow, glowing in red and tawny tones, and aged wood. A hallowed corridor disguised as a café. Communal benches line the walls. No Wi-Fi either. The barista remembers your order—yes—but more impressively, they remember you.

There are no milk or sugar alternatives. The espresso is pulled from a semi-automatic machine. No scene. Just great taste.

At *Abraço*, it lives up to its name. *Abraçar*, meaning to hug. It displays affection from day one. You could say I've hinted at why someone might choose a café in the dead heat of a New York summer: proximity, lighting, cool air. But truthfully, none of that's the point.

What matters is this: If you're still in the city this summer, choose wisely: Your coffee. Your companions. Your corner café. Your reasons for going on. And if your joy is in short supply, go somewhere someone still says your name. Or, if not that, somewhere that makes room to quiet your mind.

Coffee shops are feel-good places, and not by surprise. A good café will make your drink. A great one will remind you you're still here. *Abraço* does both. That's the whole thing.



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](http://rachelharty.com).

# Otoño mutante en ficción especulativa

Por Cristina Jurado

Después de un verano fabuloso en el que numerosos autores y autoras de ficción especulativa han visitado algunas de las citas literarias más importantes del año – desde la Semana Negra de Gijón al Festival Celsius de Avilés – la vuelta de las vacaciones parece no dar tregua en lo que respecta a novedades y eventos. La Hispacon, el encuentro anual organizado por Pórtico (la Asociación Española de Fantasía, Ciencia Ficción y Terror) se celebrará por primera vez en septiembre, concretamente del 19 al 21, en Sabadell. Esta edición contará como invitados destacados con Stack Hollborn, Clara Dies, Bruno Puelles, Ricard Ruíz Garzón, Marina Tena y Alba Quintas, y ofrecerá mesas redondas, conferencias, presentaciones de libros, talleres, una feria literaria, un área para juegos de mesa y de rol, podcast y lecturas dramatizadas.

Las editoriales continúan añadiendo títulos nuevos a su catálogo y ya planean sacar la artillería pesada de cara a la temporada pre-navideña. Noctura ha anunciado para octubre *Una Desolación Llamada Paz*, el primer volumen de la *Bilología* Teixcalaán 2 de la estadounidense Arkady Martine. Ganadora del premio Hugo a la Mejor Novela en 2020, esta novela combina la 'space opera' con el thriller con tintes políticos en una historia que está basada en las investigaciones de Martine sobre sobre el imperialismo bizantino en la frontera de Armenia en el siglo XI.

*Minotauro* sorprende con la reedición del alucinógeno *Crash* de J. G. Ballard, una obra sobre obsesiones, fetichismo, la exacerbación de la cultura popular y la dependencia de la tecnología. Esta editorial también ha anunciado *Calliope. La Voz de las Llamas* de Tabitha King y Michael McDowell, una novela gótica ambientada en el sur de Estados Unidos sobre secretos familiares, herencias sobrenaturales y casas encantadas. El sello Hydra tiene previsto lanzar al mercado la segunda entrega de la serie "Los Diarios de Matabot" de Martha Wells bajo el nombre de *Condición Artificial*, en el que el ciborg protagonista trata de desentrañar los acontecimientos traumáticos que dieron lugar a su toma de conciencia.

El estadounidense Charles Stross pasa a formar parte de la familia de Alamut con una nueva reedición de *AcCELERANDO* en tapa dura, un libro que se ha convertido en un clásico del cyberpunk con sus sorprendentes ideas sobre la llegada de la singularidad. *Porvenir*, el segundo libro de ensayos sobre ciencia ficción de Julián Díez, también verá la luz en la rentree de la mano de Cyberdark. Páginas de Espuma apuesta por recuperar clásicos como Ray Bradbury, cuya narrativa breve será recopilada en *Cuentos*, una antología que verá la luz en octubre.

En otoño la novela de ciencia ficción para adolescentes *Marte XXIII* de Jordi Sierra I Fabra hará su entrada en el familia de Apache Libros, proponiendo una historia de descubrimiento personal en el planeta rojo. Además, el sello madrileño anuncia la segunda edición de *La Sociedad del perfume* de Tadea Lizarbe, ambientada en un mundo distópico en el que la humanidad ha perdido el sentido del olfato por causa un arma devastadora, y los sentidos se apagan.

En lo que se respecta a la fantasía, Runas recupera el universo mágico imaginado por la sevillana Concha Perea y no solo reedita en septiembre la novela *La Corte de los Espejos* sino que apuesta por *Conjura de Otoño*, su precuela para octubre. El sello Nova de Ediciones B sigue con la serie "Carl, el Mazmorrero" de Matt Dinniman y ha programado para este otoño el segundo volumen: *El final del juicio de Carl*. En esta nueva entrega el veterano guarda costero y su gato, forzados a participar en un juego intergaláctico para disfrute de alienígenas, acceden a niveles superiores del juego en los que se hace cada vez más difícil sobrevivir. El Transbordador está trabajando para ofrecer al público *Hay Fantasmas Sobre la Tierra*, la primera novela de Alejandro Candela Rodríguez que mezcla fantasía y folclore en una historia de aventuras que sigue los pasos de una mujer nacida para luchar contra el mal.



Crononauta se decanta en esta ocasión por *La marca de Qilva*, una novela corta de fantasía de la autora norteamericana de origen persa Naseem Jamnia que introduce al lector en un mundo queer-normativo inspirado en Persia que explora temas como la inmigración, el género, la sanación y la familia. La autora rusa Anna Starobinets regresa a las librerías españolas de la mano de Impedimenta con *El Vado de los Zorros*, una historia de fantasía oscura que se desarrolla en un lugar perdido entre China y Siberia, y en el que criaturas de leyenda y apátridas harán frente a sus destinos. El sello Oz acaba de anunciar *Cómo Convertirse en el Señor Oscuro* y *Morir en el Intento* de Django Wexler, una aventura que mezcla peripecias fantásticas y ciencia ficcionales con una protagonista que, para acabar con el mal, decide encarnarlo.

No podía faltar el terror dentro de esta lista de novedades otoñales. La autora indo-caribeña Premee Mohamed verá publicada por Duermevela su novela corta *El carnicero del bosque*. Con ingredientes de cuento de hadas terrorífico y fantasía épica oscura, esta historia explora temas tan delicados como el abuso infantil o el terror corporal y la lucha contra los monstruos internos como externos. *Querida Laura* de la británica Gemma Amor llegará en septiembre desde Dilatando Mentes para hacernos partícipe de la relación abusiva entre Laura y un misterioso acosador que le envía cartas. Además, Francisco Jota-Pérez vuelve a presentar una novedad editorial con este mismo sello gracias a *Circlusión*, híbrido entre el poema y el ensayo que emplea el lenguaje del cómic para proponer una experiencia estética del sinsentido, contando con el diseño y las ilustraciones de la artista Clara Moreno Cela.

La Biblioteca de Carfax propone *El Diablo te Lleva a Casa* de Gabino Iglesias con traducción de Miguel Sanz, una obra galardonada con el prestigioso premio Shirley Jackson. La historia describe la bajada a los infiernos de un padre convertido en sicario para pagar el tratamiento de su hija y su enfrentamiento con fuerzas monstruosas. También han anunciado *Descarriada*, novela corta de Samantha Kolesnik con traducción de Shaila Correa, que bucea en las dinámicas abusivas de una sociedad en la que los verdaderos deseos permanecen ocultos. La editorial Insólita ha preparado una edición revisada de la novela de terror psicológico *Una cara conocida*. Con cubierta nueva y algunos cambios en el texto, esta narración de Darío Vilas profundiza en el tema de la culpa y las obsesiones en una carrera a contrarreloj para encontrar a un asesino. Por su parte Obscura trae al mercado español *Camp Damascus* de Chuck Tingle con traducción de Scheherezade Surià, una novela de terror queer sobre campamentos de conversión para homosexuales que fue nominada a los premios Bram Stoker en 2023.

En definitiva, la vendimia literaria de 2025 apuesta por reediciones, nuevas voces y muchas traducciones de éxitos editoriales de fuera de nuestras fronteras.

# MÁS ALLÁ DE MADRID

## BUENOS AIRES EDITION



By Romy Hügler

My eyes are still closed, and the sky still dark, when I hear the first words of the day, bellowed at full volume: “PELOTUDO! DEJÁTE DE JODER!”

As the sun rises and the day slowly begins, the city's cacophony swells. Car horns, barking dogs, the slamming and squeaking of delivery crates, chatting old people with bags of pastries and greetings of builders carrying steaming thermoses of mate. Argentina, I've been told, has a lot to say: always. Protests accompanied by banging saucepans routinely appear and dissipate on Plaza 9 de Julio.

A city of talkers, Buenos Aires boasts the world's highest number of psychiatrists per capita, who advertise their services on lampposts. The city walls talk; everywhere you look, your eyes are met with posters, stickers and graffiti voicing lamentations or commands. A bus stop on Avenida Pueyrredón tells me “LEÉ POESÍA”. Scrawled messages regarding “Milei” and “Patria”, due to rainwater, furious scrubbing or stark black paint, have been made illegible. Contrasting football flags fluttering on neighbours' balconies fight to meet your eye; the city is in a furious dialogue with itself.

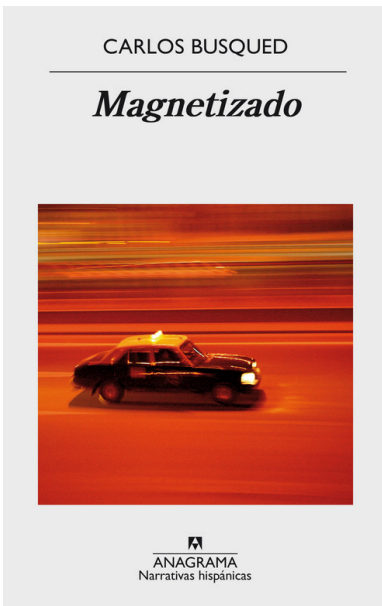
If Buenos Aires is characterised by this constant production, distribution and consumption of words, and offers roughly 25 bookshops for every 100,000 residents, it's no surprise that literature provides something of a map for the sprawling streets. Argentina's history is as vast and dense as the capital itself; books become crucial for its navigation.

It's impossible to conceive of Argentine literature without the decades of work produced during the military dictatorship. Journalists, students and intellectuals were uniquely stigmatised and pursued by the military regime, yet the urgency to write produced numerous works, now read worldwide, which provide testament to life under tyranny. For example, *The Little School* (1986) by Alicia Partnoy, is an autobiographical account detailing the torture in clandestine detention centres, many of which still stand in city neighbourhoods today, and is joined by the titles of Rudolfo Walsh and Julio Cortázar in denouncing the regime's atrocities.

Guillermo Saccomanno's *77*, published in 2008, details the life of a porteño two years after the start of the Dirty War. The year 1977 in Buenos Aires is described as one of constant rain and a “peculiar grey light” which clouds all other thoughts. The protagonist (Gomez) is a gay literature teacher diagnosed with “wandering syndrome” who walks every day for hours, often looking for sex. He regularly sees soldiers descend from green Falcon trucks and drag civilians away into the unknown. In response, Gomez keeps his head down, but warns us that “that survival skill, when honed, becomes a kind of madness”. Even with his eyes trained on the pavement, the fragility of human existence invades Gomez's psyche and threatens to topple his place in the universe itself; “One morning I woke up, looked around, and imagined I wasn't there.” It is this disappearing – “that blackness, worse than death” – that grips Gomez, who is moved himself to write, despite having to hide his pages under lock and key.







More recent years have seen a second “Boom” in Latin American literature, and Argentina is determined to play a leading role. Riding the wave of new interest in translated fiction, publishers such as Charco Press and Fitzcarraldo are bringing texts from contemporary Argentine authors such as Mariana Enríquez, Gabriela Cabezón Cámara and Selva Almada to international audiences. Their work varies from the rural – e.g. Almada’s *Not A River* – to the intensely urban, a point of fixation in Enríquez’s work. The latter’s story collections *A Sunny Place for Shady People* and *The Dangers of Smoking In Bed* need no synopsis, abundant as they are on bookshop displays everywhere.

Bodily horror, sexual depravation and the female Gothic are set against expansive and unforgiving Buenos Aires, where both supernatural occurrences and extreme inequality can pass unnoticed. Beyond the horror, Enríquez’s work offers shrewd criticism on the issues plaguing Argentinian society: its slums, violence against women and machismo, the remaining mystery of los desaparecidos and, with increasing relevance, the disengaged youth.

In many of Argentina’s most recent novels, the younger generation emerge as a driving narrative force. The reason for this is clear: Argentina’s youth are in crisis. They face mass unemployment, poverty and severe gambling addictions. The dissatisfaction is glaring: the majority supported the far-right Javier Milei, and over 70% say they wish to emigrate. Beyond the ghosts and gore, it is young people who appear again and again in Enríquez’s *A Sunny Place for Shady People*: we see a young boy from the slums running from door to door to escape his killer, only to be steadfastly ignored by his middle-class neighbours.

In *Black Eyes*, adolescents disappear and return unrecognisable, dead-eyed and unable rejoin society. In *Magnetizado*, published in 2018, Carlos Busqued offers an equally chilling portrait of a Buenos Aires teenager stranded on society’s peripheries. *Magnetizado* is formed of interview transcripts with a now middle-aged man living in a psychiatric ward in Ezeiza. He describes his upbringing with his schizophrenic evangelist mother, who physically abused him and told him the outside world wanted to do him harm. Described as “un muchacho raro y taciturno”, who conveys “desinterés por todo lo que lo rodea”, he insists he has “un mundo alterno” inside him, which he prefers to reality – a world in which he is the protagonist. Aged nineteen, he runs away and can surrender completely to his internal world.

In an uncanny parallel with 77, the protagonist of *Magnetizado* simply wanders the streets, watching the same film loop for hours in cinemas, talking to himself. Following this short interim of wandering, he murders four taximen. It is a crime that fascinates and alarms the Buenos Aires police department – an officer says, mystified, “no es la clase de tipo que se enoja y te mata.” *Magnetizado* is a book about society, specifically about those it abandons and those who abandon it; the protagonist leads a life estranged from work, from money, from human dependency itself – all the while remaining in a city of 3 million people. The book is a sobering prompt to pay attention to outsiders, even those who are not the “dangerous type”, and to care for the disregarded youth.



It’s no foreign concept that we can track social currents through literature; in Argentina, however, we might say this desire to turn experiences into words is particularly widespread, particularly habitual. Even in prisons, the need to communicate with the rest of society through writing is fostered through publications such as *YoNoFui* and *Mujeres Tras Rejas*, which publish poetry anthologies from inmates all over the country. A tradition following the aforementioned Alicia Partnoy, Argentine prisons are described as “una inagotable fábrica de relatos”, with *Magnetizado* an extension of this genre.

Therefore, even when a text concerns “outsiders”, literature means all strands of life are – like the streets of Buenos Aires – in dialogue with each other and with themselves. This dialogue trickles down into all corners of city life and sometimes, if you’re lucky, is just loud enough to be heard from the street below.



Romy Hügler was born in the Black Forest in Germany but grew up in London. She’s currently an undergraduate student of Spanish, German and English Literature at Newcastle University. She has always been passionate about literature, particularly from Latin America, and has published articles in the *Latin American Review of Books and Sounds and Colours*.

## OPINION:

# How does AI compare to a doctor when it comes to saving lives?

*Charlotte Blease, Ph.D is the author of 'Dr Bot: Why Doctors Can Fail Us and How AI Could Save Lives', which reveals how AI, if handled with care, could emerge as the most reliable physician in history. Here she reveals her motivation and very personal reasons for writing the book.*

Let's get one thing out of the way: I'm not a doctor. I don't wear a stethoscope. I've never delivered a baby, scrubbed up for surgery, or written a prescription for antibiotics or SSRIs.

So what gives me the right to pen a book about doctors' jobs? I hope to persuade you that I'm ideally positioned to probe the medical profession, and why it sometimes fails us as patients (and even as doctors), and what we can hope to do about it.

For the past ten years I've been turning this book over in my mind. A slow burn of questions, observations, rewrites, realisations. In the beginning, I thought I was writing a book about the psychology of doctor-patient appointments. Then it became a book about the potential of technology solving some of these psychological pitfalls. But on a personal level it turned into something deeper. I didn't just write the book - I learned to write it. I studied the arc, the art, and the heartbeat of storytelling. The result, I hope, is a readable book that dares to ask what's really going wrong in the consulting room - and whether AI might actually help.

There's no shortage of high-profile pundits: Silicon Valley types with billion-dollars in their black jeans backpockets, AI academics who talk like neural networks themselves, and medical doctors who moonlight as public intellectuals. They're mostly concerned with economic strain, workforce shortages, and system inefficiency.

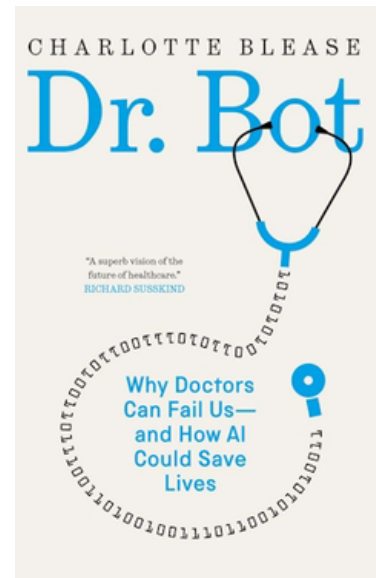
All valid points. But this book does something none of theirs quite does: it takes a long, unflinching look at the human side of medicine - our frailties, flaws, and emotional blind spots. And it asks whether current technology might, in some cases, do a better job than even the cleverest, kindest human doctor working in the best healthcare system. I'm not saying we should hand your colonoscopy over to a chatbot. But I am saying we need to be brave enough to imagine alternatives.

Cue the skeptics: "But you're not a doctor!"

True. That's exactly why I can see things doctors sometimes can't. Saying only doctors can write about medicine is like claiming only priests understand religion, or only porn stars know about sex (though I'm always open to debate these things). Doctors are insiders. That's useful, indeed crucial. But it also means they're missing critical distance, and can be cramped by conflicts of interest related to preserving the status quo.

I work at the intersection of ethics, AI, psychology, and digital healthcare and have spent the past twenty years researching, writing, and collaborating with health professionals across the UK, Ireland, Europe, and the US (including five years at Harvard Medical School, if you like your credentials name-dropped). My work is international in scope, interdisciplinary by design, and, as you'll find, deliberately independent.

I don't owe fealty to the medical establishment. And I don't hold shares in Silicon Valley. I have no vested interest in whether AI "wins" or "loses" in healthcare. I just care about one thing: patients. Especially the ones who are all too often sidelined, ignored, or left waiting for a diagnosis that never comes.



This isn't abstract for me. Two of my siblings - including my twin - live with a rare and incurable form of muscular dystrophy - one went undiagnosed for twenty years. While writing this book, I lost my partner, the journalist Henry McDonald, to cancer. Six months later, my father, Victor Blease, died after a long struggle with dementia. I witnessed the brilliance of doctors. I also saw how the system can fail - quietly, brutally, and without anyone meaning it to.

Medicine isn't just about what doctors do, it's about what patients experience. And what happens when that experience leaves people feeling confused, dismissed, or disempowered. That's the space my book wanted to explore.

In writing this book, I channelled my inner Socrates - gadfly of Athens, beloved pain in the arse. Like him, I'm not here to flatter the establishment. I'm here to ask hard questions. I explore why our Stone Age brains can limit us within current medical environments - both as doctors and as patients - and the ways this can lead to serious harm. I examine whether AI, designed well, could restore something very old: time, dignity, and presence.

The stories in this book are real and most of the names remain unchanged. They draw on the experiences of patients and doctors, from Kalamazoo to Dublin, and beyond. They speak to a shared, global grammar of care.

In the end, this isn't just a book about medicine or machines. It's a book about humans. Our hopes, our flaws, our need to be seen and heard, and how easily our trust can be exploited. And I say why many are already turning to Dr Bot, and why - surprisingly - it may "listen" just a little better than the last human doctor you saw wearing a white coat.

So no, I'm not a doctor. But that's exactly the point.

***Dr Bot: Why Doctors Can Fail Us and How AI Could Save Lives* is published by Yale University Press on 9<sup>th</sup> September. You can contact Dr. Blease at her website - [www.charlotteblease.com](http://www.charlotteblease.com).**

# OPINION: When medium dictates form: Art and Insta-poetry

BY JAYNE MARSHALL

The office canteen was totally empty that day. I sat alone by the window, unenthusiastically picking at my lunch, and looking out at the drab Madrid suburb. After I grew bored of the view, I turned from the window and noticed the beginnings of a small library of books on a table in the corner. I had never heard of Instagram sensation Rupi Kaur, but I was drawn to *The Sun and Her Flowers* because of the soothing tan colour on the cover and the simple drawing of a sunflower. So, I started reading it.

Another reason I was sitting staring forlornly out of the window that day is because I had just had my heart broken. As I read, I realised *The Sun and Her Flowers* was similarly mired in heartbreak. Lunchtime over, I took the book home and pored over it. It spoke to me because of that particular territory that break-ups inhabit, somewhere between both the public and the private. We all go through it differently, and ultimately alone, but at the same time, we've all been there and so the clichés, clichéd as they are, resonate. And it's just that intersection between poetry, self-help and a side order of New Thought spirituality that seems to be the sweet spot for Instagram-native poets.

Like any art form, poets - and poetry itself - will always look for ways to innovate and fill a need, like water looking for a hard edge. The internet and social media both exemplify and facilitate that. Rachael Allen, former poetry editor at *Granta*, addressed this when explaining in *The Atlantic* why she didn't find Insta-poetry cause for alarm: "Poetic form has always been affected by the medium in which it's presented ... There are whole movements built out of poems embedded in landscape, or carved into stone."

However, if the medium dictates the form, which in the case of social media then turns the writer into a performer where self and appearances are paramount (poetry recitals whilst doing yoga, anyone? Yes, that exists), then without that interrogation of self, the looking inward and the search for wider ecumenical wisdom, the question becomes: is it poetry?

Addressing that question, and as a counterpoint to Allen's view, the poet Rebecca Watts believes that Instagram poets ignore the 'craft that characterises their work', describing Insta-poetry in an article for *PN Review* as the: "complete rejection of complexity, subtlety and eloquence". She had been asked to review Hollie McNish's 2017 collection *Plum*, but refused, and instead wrote an article about Instagram-native poets like McNish, called 'The Cult of the Noble Amateur'. Ouch. But she has a point, if poets skip over the rich traditions of the form, the centuries of expression that have come before it and go straight for the instant gratification of social media, then we once again bump up against the question of what poetry is.

In this way, the debate touches on similar arguments about AI-generated writing - something that didn't exist at the time when Insta-poetry was emerging - and the idea that if a piece of work has not been filtered through a human soul, then it's worthless. It's effectively written itself out of the running, failing in its mission to teach us about the significance of life, as Henry Moore put it, by dint of not having one.

And the same rationale could be applied to Insta-poets; if the words are chosen to fit the frame and format of Instagram, fill a spiritual thirst, as well as the relentless need to share and to interact, feed the online documentation of our lives - what is that teaching us about life? Saul Bellow wishes to interrupt here: "Unexpected intrusions of beauty. This is what life is." But whose side is he arguing for? And does this definition still count if a filter has been applied?

Another view comes at the intersection of art, popularity and commercialism. In an article in *The Economist*, Steven Pinker describes art more widely as becoming, from the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards: "more abstruse, inaccessible and difficult to appreciate, possibly as a way of differentiating elites from the hoi polloi". And, lest we forget, creating a kind of cult of personality around an artist or their work, making it exclusive and broadly inaccessible, usually serves to drive up price. The wholesale rejection of which is, of course, precisely what seems to make Instagram poetry so successful. And its boost to overall poetry sales means that literary agents and publishers are clamouring to take these poets from screen to page, in itself creating, or deepening, that divide between what is considered true art and what is seen as simply populist.

It is worth noting that both Allen and Watts were writing in 2017 and 2018, at the height of the debate around Insta-poetry. Since that first big surge, there aren't many new contributions to the debate, or fresh arguments on either side, which made me wonder if the Instagram-poet has now been welcomed into the fold - helped along by the support of the industry - now that the initial shock has worn off. Although this of course begs another set of questions: does being establishment mean a work is automatically considered real or serious poetry? Will there (is there?) a *catalogue raisonné* of poetry, controlled by the select few, to settle the argument once and for all?

I don't have the answer to that, or any of the other questions I've raised here. I can see reason in both sides of the argument. I genuinely connected with Kaur that day, but it also embarrasses me to admit it. Something likely rooted in the divides that social media feeds off. Kaur appealed to my need for comfort - which is arguably one use of art. But it shouldn't be limited to only that. Among the other wonderful purposes of poetry is its ability to break us out of our comfort zones, awaken curiosity, lead us to new ideas and to reimagine what we understand poetry itself to be, instead of letting it remain unexamined in either in a dusty tome or a white square on a screen.

It's a debate that won't be settled easily, that's something I can say for sure, intersecting as it does with so many other current debates about the internet and culture and about the publishing industry and its priorities more widely.

My advice? Enjoy it, but keep it to yourself.

Jayne Marshall is a writer and editor. Her latest book is *A Line Drawn or Printed: Six Routes Through Madrid* (Modern Odyssey Books).



# Ficción especulativa árabe: escribir como testimonio y forma de resistencia

POR CRISTINA JURADO

*"Nuestra arma es la pluma, y a través de nuestras historias resistimos al olvido y a la injusticia."*

Ghassan Kanafani

Según Ethnologue[1] actualmente más de 334 millones de personas en Oriente Medio y el norte de África hablan árabe estándar moderno (la versión empleada en medios de comunicación, literatura y educación) o alguno de sus múltiples dialectos. Sin embargo, tanto la ficción especulativa en este idioma como la desarrollada por autores de origen árabe son criaturas complejas y desconocidas para el público más allá de las fronteras que las acogen. Además, en muchos casos, suponen la única manera de esquivar la censura para dar testimonio y reflexionar sobre la actualidad.

Quienes se dedican a este género literario tienen que hacer frente a numerosos obstáculos a la hora de ver publicadas sus obras: desde encarar una geopolítica volátil en la que los conflictos armados impiden el normal desarrollo de la creación artística en todas sus vertientes, hasta sufrir numerosas limitaciones impuestas por ciertos regímenes autoritarios. Todo ello ha provocado que, en demasiadas ocasiones, autores y autoras hayan tenido que sumarse a la diáspora internacional buscando en otros países las garantías básicas que les han sido negadas en los suyos propios para seguir contando historias de supervivencia, resistencia y crítica social.

Solo recientemente este tipo de narrativa está empezando a obtener el reconocimiento de la crítica y el público gracias a la acción visibilizadora de importantes galardones. Por ejemplo, Noura Al Noman, autora, traductora y editora de Emiratos Árabes Unidos, logró alzarse en 2013 con el Etisalat Children's Books Award por su novela *Ajwan*, a la que siguieron dos títulos más: *Mandan* y *Saydonia*. En esta trilogía juvenil, encuadrada en el género de la 'space opera', se tratan temas como los efectos devastadores de la colonización, el desplazamiento de la población y las consecuencias del exilio forzoso. El iraquí Ahmed Saadawi obtuvo en 2014 el International Prize for Arabic Fiction (otorgado por la asociación Booker Prize Foundation en London con el apoyo de la Emirates Foundation) por *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. Es la primera vez que este prestigioso premio literario en árabe ha ido a parar a una obra de ciencia ficción con una historia situada en la capital iraquí, donde una criatura creada a partir de los fragmentos de los fallecidos por la guerra busca venganza. En 2018 Ibrahim Nasrallah, escritor jordano-palestino, ganó el Arabic Booker Prize por *The Second War of the Dog*, una narración en la que fantasía y ciencia ficción se dan la mano para mostrar el futuro distópico de un país imaginario sin valores morales en el que todo está permitido, incluida la compraventa de almas humanas.

Recientemente ha surgido una nueva ola de ficción distópica y surrealista que intenta hacer frente a las caóticas secuelas y a la decepción de la Primavera Árabe y se vale de la ficción especulativa para sortear la censura. Buen ejemplo es Basma Abdel Aziz, escritora, psiquiatra y artista visual egipcia que en 2016 publicó *The Queue*, comparada por *The New York Times* con 1984 de George Orwell o El Proceso de Franz Kafka y que en 2017 ganaría el English PEN Translation Award. La historia nos traslada hasta una ciudad sin nombre de Oriente Medio. En ella la autoridad centralizada acapara el poder y los ciudadanos deben pedir autorización para realizar cualquier gestión diaria, poniéndose de manifiesto un tipo de autoritarismo siniestro, la manipulación de la información y la falta de

compromiso por defender los derechos de los ciudadanos. Otro ejemplo es la escritora y periodista palestina Ibtisam Azem cuya novela de 2014, *The Book of Disappearance*, obtuvo mucha atención a nivel internacional al proponer un escenario en el que, de repente, todos los ciudadanos palestinos desaparecen. En ese mismo año Mohamed Rabie lanzó su novela *Otared* sobre un futuro caótico que se despliega en la capital egipcia por obra y gracia de los conflictos políticos y de una nueva droga.

En los últimos diez años han surgido tímidamente diversas iniciativas recopilatorias que tratan de acercar la ficción especulativa árabe al resto del mundo. Así, en 2016 vio la luz *Iraq +100*, una antología de la editorial Comma Press coordinada por el escritor iraquí y director de cine Hassan Blasim, en la que autores iraquíes imaginan en clave de ciencia ficción y fantasía su país un siglo después de la invasión militar de 2003. La misma editorial publicó en 2019 *Palestine +100*, editada por la traductora palestina Basma Ghalayini, una colección de cuentos construida sobre las mismas premisas que la obra anterior. En ella autores y autoras palestinos exploran visiones futuras de su país y su pueblo un siglo después de la expulsión masiva de ciudadanos de sus hogares en 1948. Cabe destacar que el mismo sello lanzó al mercado otra obra con las mismas características en 2024 bajo el título *Egypt +100* que profundiza en el devenir del país cien años después del fracaso de la revolución de la plaza Tahrir.

En 2018 vio la luz el ensayo *Arabic Science Fiction* de Ian Campbell, partiendo de artículos propios sobre diversas novelas marroquíes y egipcias de ciencia ficción, y apoyándose en la labor investigadora de estudiosos como Reuven Snir y su texto "The Emergence of Science Fiction in Arabic Literature". Precisamente en 2021 la ya mencionada Basma Ghalayini coedita, junto a la también escritora palestina Rasha Abdulhadi, la edición especial dedicada a Palestina de la revista de género *Strange Horizons*.

El año pasado la editora y escritora Sonia Sulaiman reunió en *Thyme Travellers* a catorce de las mejores voces de la diáspora palestina en una antología de ficción especulativa cuyos textos mezclan historia, folclore y futurismo. Igualmente en 2024 se publicó *Arabillious: anthology of Arab futurism* gracias a la labor de la editorial italiana Future Fiction, y que recopila cuentos de autores y autoras de Baréin, Egipto, Irak, Jordania, Líbano, Palestina, Siria. Las historias recogidas ofrecen una visión única sobre los futuros que estas personas son capaces de imaginar desde la perspectiva de sus propias experiencias y de la idiosincrasia de sus países de origen. Hace solo unos días la revista *Future Fiction* en español acaba de lanzar su tercer número con un especial sobre ciencia ficción de Oriente Medio a través de una selección de algunos de los cuentos incluidos en *Arabillious: anthology of Arab futurism* de Nadia Afifi (Baréin), Farah Kader (Palestina) y María Dadouch (Siria) y una entrevista exclusiva con Fadi Zaghmout (Jordania).

A todos estos proyectos y alguno más se suma el presente número de *The Madrid Review* en un intento por sostener las nuevas voces de la literatura árabe y de esta forma contar lo que, de otra manera, no podría ser contado.

[1] Ethnologue es un catálogo de metadatos publicado por SIL International (ONG estadounidense especializada en investigación y documentación sobre la lengua) que ofrece información sobre cómo se utilizan los idiomas, quiénes los utilizan, dónde y con qué propósito. <https://www.ethnologue.com>

# álvaro p-ff: rip it up & paint it *raw*

una entrevista con Lis Iglesias



**Álvaro P-FF, uno de los diseñadores y cartelistas más reconocidos de la industria musical española, ha realizado la portada de este número de la revista. Su estilo tan característico y la perseverancia le han llevado a trabajar con artistas de la talla de Elton John, Elvis Costello y Guns N' Roses, entre muchos otros. Hemos hablado con él sobre sus primeros pasos, su éxito internacional, el compromiso social en el arte y sus próximos proyectos.**

**Después de estudiar publicidad, empezaste trabajando para Disney, ¿cierto? ¿Cómo fue esa experiencia y que le llevó a buscar un camino más independiente?**

Toda mi vida se desarrolla a través de la música. Cuando terminé el instituto quería ser productor musical. Según terminé el instituto, hice un curso para técnico de sonido en un estudio y ahí me di cuenta de que tengo cero oído, soy un desastre y no iba a llegar a nada. Lo de publicidad fue un poco de rebote. Fue a través de mi madre que me dijo: "Oye, publicidad que tiene la parte creativa y la ilustración te gusta, ¿por qué no te metes en publicidad?"

Y nada, estudié publicidad y la verdad es que me gustó.

Cuando terminé, entré a trabajar en el estudio de mi hermano que tenía un estudio de diseño. Trabajábamos mucho con Disney. Fui a hacer una sustitución de verano y al final me contrataron. Pero el trabajo de Disney no era un trabajo creativo.

Cuando salía una película hacíamos todos los catálogos, publicidades, te daban los personajes, las tipografías, los fondos. Era siempre lo mismo. Llegó un momento en el que me aburría mucho y decidí volver a mi mundo, a trabajar en la música y estuve trabajando por mi cuenta.

A finales de mis 20 entré en una agencia de publicidad, pero tampoco me gustó la experiencia, así que volví a irme por mi cuenta y me centré en hacer portadas de discos, posters, flyers. Empecé a hacer carteles para grupos de amigos y he terminado haciendo pósters para Guns N' Roses, Elton John o Bunbury.... mola! Ha sido largo llegar hasta aquí, pero he sido muy feliz. Me gusta mucho lo que hago.

**Desde tus vivencias, ¿qué consejos le darías a alguien que esté empezando y que quiera desarrollar una carrera como diseñador o como artista en este país?**

Depende de adónde quieras llegar. Vivir del arte es muy difícil. Yo he primado mi felicidad al dinero. Para poder continuar con mi sueño he tenido que trabajar mucho por la noche, en bares poniendo copas y pinchando, para poder dedicar el día diseñar y dedicarme a lo mío.

La parte artística, ya sea en la fotografía, la música o la pintura, es perseverancia. Se trata de aguantar. Aguantar y buscar tu estilo. Hay gente que triunfa muy joven, pero lo normal es pico y pala, pico y pala y aguantar. También hay que tener mucha suerte. Talento, suerte y perseverancia. Y buscar tu estilo. Ah, y disfrutar de lo que haces.



**Tu trabajo te ha llevado a colaborar con artistas nacionales de la talla de Joaquín Sabina y Elton John a nivel internacional. ¿Qué proyectos, obras o trabajo de toda su trayectoria recuerda con más cariño? ¿Por qué?**

Yo creo que todos estos últimos doce años que llevo trabajando con Enrique Bunbury han sido muy divertidos. Cada disco de Enrique o cada trabajo que me ha ido encargando ha sido muy diferente, por lo que cada proyecto es un desafío creativo.

Trabajar con Enrique es muy divertido. Además, tener la oportunidad de trabajar con artistas que adoro como Elvis Costello, The Who, Green Day, Redd Kross... para mí es un subidón. Son artistas que idolatro.

O que llamen para realizar algún trabajo para artistas tan lejanos a mi mundo como Luz Casal, Sabina, Sharon Corr o La Oreja de Van Gogh es un espaldarazo a tu trabajo maravilloso. ¡joder, he trabajado para Black Sabbath y Motörhead! ¡Felicidad!

**Tienes una línea identitaria muy definida que hace tu firma reconocible a simple vista. ¿Qué artistas o corrientes estéticas te han inspirado durante el proceso de construcción de esa presencia artística?**

Siempre he pensado que para llegar a tener tu propio estilo hay que copiar mucho a los grandes, y de ahí poco a poco, irás definiendo tu estilo. Como una banda de rock, puedes comenzar queriendo ser los Ramones y acabas teniendo tu sonido, como Green Day. En mi caso he tirado mucho de Alfons Mucha, el ilustrador del modernismo. Para mí es un referente, el comienzo de todo lo que me gusta está ahí. También Wes Wilson y la cartelería de San Francisco de los años 60, toda la estética punk inglesa, toda la cultura skater de Jim Phillips para Santa Cruz y VCJ para Powell Peralta, Shepard Fairey en los 90. Coop y Kozik también. Con el paso de los años tu estilo se define. Algo que me hace mucha ilusión es cuando la gente ve algo mío en la calle y dice: "Eso es un Álvaro". Eso es muy bonito. Hace poco colgaron un cartel y me escribió mucha gente para decirme que según lo vieron supieron que era mío.

**A través de tu obra has denunciado en numerosas ocasiones las atrocidades que estamos viviendo en este momento. ¿Consideras que la figura del artista debería mantener un compromiso social con su contexto?**

La palabra 'debe' es complicada. Que cada quien haga lo que considere, pero yo lo tengo claro. Yo tengo ese compromiso. Estoy escuchando la radio, me indigno y en ese momento dejo de hacer lo que estaba haciendo y me pongo a dibujar sobre ello, porque para mí es una forma de expresión y es parte de lo que soy. Y quiero que sea parte de mi obra. Ya sea sobre el racismo, la violencia de género, la inmigración, Ucrania o la DANA. Tampoco quiero que sea mi seña de identidad, porque no quiero dar lecciones a nadie, no me gusta ser turras. Con Gaza en los últimos años creo que he hecho cuatro carteles y el que he hecho ahora para la revista. Y seguramente seguiré haciendo, porque no parece que vaya a parar. Menudo desastre...

**En esta línea, ¿te gustaría profundizar en la carga simbólica del trabajo que has hecho para la portada?**

Todos los trabajos que había hecho de Gaza hasta ahora eran una denuncia de lo que estaba pasando: los bombardeos, Netanyahu, la muerte de niños. Y este ha sido el primero que he hecho de resistencia. Me gusta esa imagen de alguien defendiéndose contra la atrocidad en un sitio destrozado. No tanto como víctima sino en el momento de enfrentarse a esto. Lleva un tirachinas, una especie de David contra Goliat. Me apetecía poner a una mujer con un niño porque me parecía importante reflejar que no es una guerra de trincheras, es que están bombardeando civiles, niños, madres, padres.



Seres humanos. La simbología de la mujer con el niño es muy clara y tampoco quería meter armas. La muerte de seres humanos es un hecho atroz, así es que no se trata de matar a los israelitas. No quiero que maten a nadie. De ahí la ausencia de las armas. Quiero que acabe ya esta locura. Y por supuesto, los colores de la bandera Palestina.

**Una de las obras con la que has promocionado tu última exposición es *To the wild*. En el análisis que hiciste de la pieza para sus redes, comentas que representaba aquel deseo de escape del mundo capitalista e industrializado en el que estamos inmersos. ¿Crees que el arte es una herramienta que puede apoyar esta evasión, o que en las circunstancias actuales está cada vez más enredado en los entresijos de la industria?**

Para mí sirve para sentirte reflejado. Todo lo que hago lo hago para mí. Lo que cuelgo en las exposiciones es algo que quiero ver en mi casa. No creo que nadie se evada mirando una obra mía, espero crear cierta belleza que quieras ver colgada en tu salón, una obra en la que te veas reflejado.

**¿Qué me dices de tu vida en Madrid? Es una ciudad frenética. ¿Qué aporta a tu trabajo como artista? ¿Puede ser una fuente de inspiración para tu trabajo?**

Madrid es parte de mi personalidad. Tengo metido Madrid hasta el tuétano. En muchas obras intento meter paisajes madrileños en los que he crecido, Malasaña, Gran Vía, La Latina...

Me encanta esta ciudad, aunque a la mínima salgo disparado para conocer otros lugares del mundo. Tengo la suerte de haber viajado mucho y ver mucho mundo, y siempre he deseado vivir alguna temporada en otra ciudad. Pero siempre vuelvo al barrio.

Ahora mismo en Madrid hay una corriente "nacionalista" que me da mucha grima. Lo que siempre me ha gustado de la ciudad es que todo el mundo es de fuera, para mí esa es su personalidad. "España nos roba" se lo escuché decir a Cifuentes y ahora lo utiliza Ayuso. ¿Vamos a decir ahora las mismas chorradas que el resto?

Tampoco me gusta el nacionalismo español, es decir, español lo soy, pero no me hace falta ir con banderas. Pago mis impuestos porque para mí el patriotismo se refleja ahí. Pagar impuestos y exigir que se gasten en sanidad pública, en educación pública y que tanto mis compatriotas como los que vivan aquí tengan todos los servicios necesarios y se sientan acogidos, protegidos y con oportunidades de desarrollarse y ser felices.

¡Viva Madrid!

¡Y Londres!

¡Y Quito!

¡Y Tokio!



**Un libro, una canción y una película que todo el mundo debería disfrutar en algún momento de su vida.**

Como libro *Por favor, márame*. Es una historia oral sobre el punk de Nueva York. Es espectacular. Es de los libros que más he disfrutado. Te engancha. Habla de las bandas que me gustan, de Los Ramones, The Stooges, de los New York Dolls. Me flipa. Para la película tendría que decir *El Padrino*. La veo recurrentemente, una vez al año hay que ver la trilogía en familia. Siempre descubres algo nuevo. En cuanto a la música, diría *London Calling* como disco, Los Ramones como banda y como canción *Common People* de Pulp. Pero si me preguntas otro día seguro que te diría otra cosa.

**Hace poco terminó una gran exposición individual de su obra de viajes *Postcards from Nowhere* en la galería de arte La Fiambrera. ¿Qué proyectos tienes por delante?**

Ahora mismo estoy con algún cartel y he empezado con otro disco. De hecho, tengo una presentación en septiembre u octubre del catálogo de la exposición *Teenage Rampage* que hice en 2017 en la galería La Fiambrera. Hice carteles de conciertos en los cuales yo habría querido estar. Desde el '56 de Elvis Presley hasta los años 80, para Creedence, para Los Ramones. El libro es una recreación de los textos que hice para la exposición junto a los carteles. Para la presentación también haré algún cartel nuevo. Soy una persona que improvisa mucho. Me gustaría hacer una exposición sobre Gaza. He pensado hacer una edición limitada del cartel que he hecho para vuestra portada y luego hacer un evento para vender serigrafías para donar el dinero a Médicos Sin Fronteras. Iremos viendo, hacer planes está sobrevalorado.

# Joël Dicker's Catastrophic Triumph

By James Hartley



Each summer, Madrid's Retiro Park hosts the Madrid Book Fair, where literature spills out into the open air and authors rub shoulders with readers beneath chestnut trees. One of the authors most at home in this literary pilgrimage is Swiss novelist Joël Dicker, who, made yet another enthusiastic return to our capital this year.

"I've been coming a lot in the last 12 years," Dicker says, his voice animated with genuine affection. "Whenever I come to Madrid, I have all these memories and these special ties with the city. And I love coming back. It's a bit like coming home." For a writer whose work has often navigated the complexities of belonging, identity, and memory, that phrase – "coming home" – resonates. Dicker, who shot to global fame with *The Truth About the Harry Quebert Affair* in 2012, seems to have found a second literary homeland in Spain.

The Madrid Book Fair, he adds, is unlike any other. "It's the only book fair I've ever been to in a park, outside, and it's one that has such a special energy." Indeed, the fair's open-air layout mirrors Dicker's own recent literary move: a departure from the dark woods of crime thrillers into something lighter, but no less artful – a book written "for everybody."

That book is *La muy catastrófica visita al zoo* or *The Very Catastrophic Visit to the Zoo* in English, a charmingly offbeat tale released in a bilingual edition by Alfaguara on August 19. The Spanish edition, published back in April, made waves for its eccentricity and warmth. The book is a genre-defying fable that gently mocks disaster while quietly affirming the communal power of storytelling.

For Dicker, this latest work is more than a narrative detour. "I wrote it for everybody because I think all readers are one big family together," he says. "However many books you read – one a week or one a year – or even if you're not a reader yet – there are no limits." It's a quietly radical stance in a literary culture that still segments its readers by genre, age, and frequency. Dicker wants a book that welcomes everyone in. In a world obsessed with division, here is a novel that insists on unity.

Though best known for his literary thrillers such as *The Baltimore Boys* and *The Disappearance of Stephanie Mailer* – Dicker has always had a subtextual fascination with storytelling itself. *The Very Catastrophic Visit to the Zoo* appears to take these preoccupations and funnel them through a more whimsical lens, closer in tone to Italo Calvino than to his noir predecessors.

Yet, don't mistake whimsy for frivolity. Beneath the playful premise is a quiet urgency. "The situation is not good," Dicker admits, referring to the state of reading today. "I see people on the bus, on the train, in daily life, always with the phone. Like bending, just looking at the floor because they're looking at their phones – and this is not good."

It's a sentiment that could veer into the curmudgeonly, but Dicker sidesteps pessimism. "I'm optimistic," he insists. "When people become readers, they *become* readers. I see this."

It's no surprise that a man so interested in the fate of readers has fashioned a book designed to create new ones. In fact, his entire career is a kind of international reading experiment. Translated into more than 40 languages, his novels are devoured from Geneva to Guadalajara. He belongs to that rare cadre of writers whose success is both commercial and literary, adored by critics and beach-readers alike. He counts American heavyweights like Philip Roth among his influences, but also champions contemporary French authors like David Foenkinos – "a friend of mine," he notes.

"From what readers tell me," he says, "what thrills me the most is their shared readings with family and friends, and in book clubs. That's why I tried to write a book all readers, aged 7 to 120, could enjoy and share, no matter who they are or where they are. Whether it's with your children, spouse, parents, neighbors, or coworkers. A book that makes you want to read and have others read, regardless. A book that helps us reconnect."

So how can we describe the book? Well, this is from the publisher's website:

"It's Christmas Eve, and Joséphine's class trip to the zoo has been a catastrophe. Nobody knows what happened exactly, but the girl's parents are willing to find out. While the investigation progresses, we understand little by little that catastrophes never come alone, that looks can be deceiving, and events can take a turn nobody expected. *The Very Catastrophic Visit to the Zoo* keeps us in suspense to the very end. It is a fun and exciting novel, filled with nods to our society, democracy, inclusive education, and the role of parents and teachers."

Over to you...



# Writing the World Anew: Tracey Chevalier's Art of Historical Fiction

Tracey Chevalier writes wonderful historical fiction with a painter's eye and an archivist's instinct. Best known for *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, her 1999 novel that imagined a narrative life behind Johannes Vermeer's enigmatic painting, Chevalier has spent decades weaving stories that grant women their overdue place in the historical record. But even mythmakers must begin somewhere, and for Chevalier, it began in earnest in Norwich.

"Before I did the MA in creative writing at UEA," she recalls, "I was a reference book editor, writing short stories on the side."

The University of East Anglia's legendary creative writing program - which produced Ian McEwan and Kazuo Ishiguro - provided her with the time, structure, and pressure to evolve her talent from tentative sketch to fully formed canvas.

"The MA was my practice year," she says. "I learned to write better that year because I made it a full-time job."

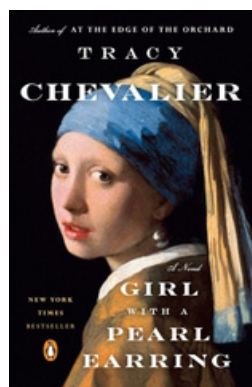
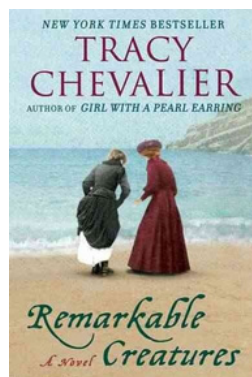
"People often ask me with scepticism about doing that MA," she adds, "implying that for some reason it's not necessary with writing... but like other creative occupations such as dance or music or painting, it doesn't happen naturally; you need to practise."

Practice, in Chevalier's case, has led to an oeuvre that balances commercial success with artistic ambition. With *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, translated into 43 languages and adapted into a 2003 film starring Scarlett Johansson and Colin Firth, she transformed a single image into a globally resonant meditation on power, class, and the uneasy gaze.

"That painting is so mysterious and compelling," she reflects, "that it will be drawing in viewers [and readers!] forever. I somehow managed to capture some of that mystery in the novel." She speaks modestly, but few writers have managed to so elegantly embed a fictional life into the surface tension of a real artwork.

Her other books reveal deeper thematic concerns: *Remarkable Creatures* (2009), which resurrects fossil hunter Mary Anning from the footnotes of scientific history, is not merely about palaeontology but about female friendship and intellectual perseverance.

Her most recent novel, *The Glassmaker* (2024), is a kaleidoscopic epic that spans 700 years in Venice, tracking the evolution of a glassmaking family through war, plague, and change and telling the story of a gifted female glassmaker named Orsola Rosso. It is a technical marvel as much as a narrative one - "ambitiously playing with time," as Chevalier puts it.



As Orsola defies the expectations of her time to pursue her passion for glassmaking, the novel explores themes of creativity, tradition, and resilience. Chevalier masterfully blends fact with fiction, immersing readers in the secretive world of Murano's glass industry while following Orsola's descendants through generations, showing how one woman's legacy can ripple through history. Lyrical and richly detailed, *The Glassmaker* is both a celebration of craftsmanship and a portrait of enduring female strength.

This fascination with time and place carries over into her real life. Chevalier is a seasoned traveller, one who prefers to peel back the layers of a country rather than skim its surface. "Last autumn we tried to get away from the famous tourist spots in Andalusia," she says, naming Úbeda, Cáceres, and Hervas as stops on her recent Spanish travels. "Spain holds its secrets close! I hope to understand it better by writing about it."

That wish is already turning into a project. Among her upcoming books is a novel centred on the Camino de Santiago, following pilgrims across centuries along the famed route to Compostela. "For that book I will be in Spain a lot," she says, "walking and looking and researching and writing."

Another novel, already underway, takes her north - both geographically and psychologically. "At the moment I'm working on a novel set in the north of England, about the murder of an old man in 1826 that has never been solved. It's about the effect of a violent crime on the surrounding community."

Despite her accolades and awards (including honorary doctorates and fellowships), Chevalier remains deeply concerned about the institutions that nurtured her.

"Unfortunately, I'm pessimistic about the future of libraries," she admits, speaking from her adopted home in the UK. "When libraries are used less, they get less funding, and their resources worsen. People see that and stop going." It's a grim feedback loop, and her frustration is palpable. "How to stop that cycle? I don't know."

Still, as with her fiction, she leaves room for complexity. She admits to buying books more often than borrowing them. It's a small confession, but one that underscores her sensitivity to the broader system of literary life - how writers, readers, and institutions coexist, sometimes uneasily.

# Salena Godden: With Love, Rage and Radical Joy

Interview by James Hartley

Poems in Spanish by Sonia González

Photo: The Arvon Foundation

When *With Love, Grief and Fury* was released in hardback, it didn't just land on bookshelves—it landed in people's lives. "Some joy and laughter, some tears and rage, some empathy and solidarity," recalls Salena Godden, reflecting on the book's reception. "This mix of connections lived up to the title." The collection—a visceral call to action and an ode to the human condition—resonated with readers in intimate ways. "Some people have written to tell me they love to listen to the audio book as they work or cook... others have come to see me to enjoy the live performances. I know of people that read this work aloud to each other, and I love to know that this work is shared in this intimate way."

This intimacy is Godden's terrain. A prolific poet, novelist, performer and activist, she's spent over three decades carving out space for poetry that is deeply felt, fiercely political, and fundamentally human. Despite her success, she's never slowed down. "When I was a little girl my grandmother used to say I had pepper in my tail." It's an image that suits her. Restless, irreverent, alive with energy.

"I never get too comfortable," she says. "I always have something to fight for. I never have much time to take this life for granted or to get complacent." She writes like someone who knows time is short and stories are urgent. "The truth is I'm as passionate about writing as I ever was... vaguely obsessed with poetry and books... It's maybe a bit weird, but it is the truth."

Godden's name is synonymous with spoken word in the UK—she's a magnetic stage presence, a champion of performance poetry, and a guide for those entering the art form. "I love to hear a poet read their own work... that passion and fire and joy. A poem performed well shows us how the root of a poem lives in the blood of the author forever." Performance, for her, is not just delivery—it's an act of embodiment, of survival.

"A poet will live the life of a poem many times," she explains. "They experience an event which nudges the poem to the surface. Then they re-live it when they write it. Then again, when it's spoken and performed. Then again when it is shared back to them by readers or listeners." This cyclical, shared experience is what gives her work its force.

As a mentor and workshop leader, she starts with the simplest, most radical things: "Take a deep breath. Speak slowly. Feel the earth beneath your feet. Know you are not alone. Speak with your own voice." It's not about "performance" as showmanship—it's about truth, presence, and urgency. "Poets narrate the times... poetry is vital."

That belief animates all of Godden's work. Her poetry holds love and anger in the same breath, pairing beauty with protest. "We live in such violent times... I don't think future generations will believe what happened in the 2020s. In fact, they don't even believe us now."

And yet, her days—when she has the rare luxury to write—are surprisingly tender. "Wake up at 4am. Watch the sunrise. Make tea. Connect with nature... Talk to the snails and ask them not to eat my flowers." She's currently working on a new novel, and the rhythm of her creative life is wrapped in daily rituals: water the tomatoes, edit a page, talk to a bee, make lunch. "Write. Edit. Write. Save work. Sunset. Make a delicious dinner with my lover. Drink some wine. Watch a film. Go to bed. Dream vividly inside the novel. Wake up. Write. And on and on..."

Though she lives in London, Godden grew up by the sea—and water remains essential to her. "I love swimming and anything to do with water, I love the sea, I love boats. Most of all... I love to be with nature."

Travel, too, is part of her life and imagination. "I very much like Spain," she says. Her last trip to Madrid was a joyful reading at Desperate Literature bookshop, sharing poems from *Pessimism* is for Lightweights with fellow poets Martha Sprackland and Will Burns. "After the show we went to a place near the bookshop and drank wine and ate tapas, the most delicious tortilla... I still think about it now." Her recent visit to San Sebastián also left a mark—"going from bar to bar trying all the pinchos" fed both her stomach and her soul.

Next on her list? "If I had to choose one, I would like to visit Cuba." For now, though, she continues writing, planting, cooking, dreaming. And speaking into the world with fierce, generous clarity. "To know you are valuable and essential to our world narration..." she says. "Poetry written from the perspective of heart and soul—that's what I love."



### No puedo esperar a respirar

no puedo esperar, no puedo esperar, no puedo esperar  
a que hablemos de todo esto en pasado  
no puedo esperar a que sean tiempos ya vividos  
no puedo esperar a que pase, no puedo esperar a mañana  
no puedo esperar a que todo se desmorone y se caiga a pedazos  
no puedo esperar a ver cómo la verdad sale a la luz  
y cómo descubrimos cual hondo llegó la podredumbre  
no puedo esperar a estar en mi sofá en pijama  
viendo un documental de este momento en la tele  
y ver cómo los atraparon y fueron arrestados  
cómo se delataron unos a otros al final  
cómo los registros bancarios y telefónicos contarán la historia  
y cómo las voces temblorosas al teléfono nos impactarán  
pero parecerán toscas y anticuadas a nuestros yos futuros  
y nuestra ropa y calzado serán de otra época  
y nuestros edificios, nuestros coches, parecerán antiguos y raros  
y cómo la película que contará el escándalo será una epopeya  
sobre cómo todo salió bien al final  
porque todo saldrá bien al final, ¿verdad?  
ver cómo se televisaron los juicios  
cómo fue un ejemplo espectacular de justicia  
cómo el juez que terminó con ellos fue una poderosa mujer negra  
cómo esos bastardos no se libraron de nada al final  
no puedo esperar a que todo esto acabe, no puedo esperar a  
hablar de todo en tiempo pasado  
a decir, sí, eso fue entonces, pero esto es el ahora  
mira cuánto hemos aprendido  
no puedo esperar, no puedo esperar, no puedo esperar  
no puedo esperar a vivir un futuro  
en el que la lucha se haya acabado y el trabajo esté hecho  
cuando sólo importe la recuperación, cuando se acabe la angustia  
cuando no tengamos que estar preocupados  
cada día..... ya nunca más  
imagínate no sentirse.....así.....todo el tiempo  
no puedo esperar, no puedo esperar al día  
en que una pregunta mientras jugamos en el pub sea:  
¿En qué año machacamos al patriarcado?  
Imagínate cómo nos sabrán de bien esas primeras cervezas  
cómo de contentos estaremos todos otra vez  
cómo la habitación se llenará de risas y conversaciones animadas  
cómo habrá música, sí, cómo bailaremos  
y veremos salir el sol juntos de nuevo  
cómo respiraremos profundamente esa nueva mañana  
cómo respiraremos profundamente esa nueva mañana  
cómo respiraremos profundamente esa nueva mañana  
más profundamente de lo que nos han dejado respirar hasta ahora.

Original title: *Love, Grief and Fury 3.*



### De amor, dolor y furia

*Invierno de 2021*

Eh, dime  
qué ponerme esta temporada:

un viejo pijama para pelar unas patatas  
que apenas podemos permitirnos hervir,

un abrigo raído para caminar de un lado a otro,  
preocupados, en las salas de espera abarrotadas de  
un hospital-

y esas viejas botas que esperaron solas  
junto a las tumbas de nuestros seres queridos

será lo que nos pondremos también para manifestarnos y protestar,  
cantando canciones de amor, dolor y furia.

Original Title: *I Cannot Wait To Breathe.*

# Lisa See

“There are so many stories about women that have been lost, forgotten, or deliberately covered up...”

By James Hartley



On October 24, 1871, one of the most violent episodes of racial violence in 19th-century American history unfolded in Los Angeles, then a fledgling city of fewer than 6,000 residents. Sparked by a gunfight between rival Chinese ‘tongs’ over the alleged abduction of a woman - during which a white rancher, Robert Thompson, was inadvertently killed - an enraged mob of approximately five hundred white and Latino residents descended upon the city’s Chinatown.

Over the course of several hours at least eighteen Chinese men and boys, including prominent community members, were lynched, mutilated or shot and much of the neighbourhood was looted and destroyed. Now Lisa See, the bestselling author of works like *Snow Flower and the Secret Fan* and *The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane*, has turned her attention to a rarely discussed and brutal chapter of American history in her latest novel which she is currently writing.

The story follows four Chinese women caught up in the midst of that violent and volatile era. The first is a 15-year-old girl brought to Los Angeles in an arranged marriage to a much older merchant described in contemporary newspapers as “hideously ugly.” Shortly after her arrival, she is kidnapped and held captive for six months - a kidnapping scholars believe helped ignite the deadly uprising. “I think of her as kind of the Helen of Troy of this story,” See says.

The second woman is the wife of a Chinese doctor who ran a modest practice serving both Chinese and white patients. “This doctor spoke four languages and was extraordinarily dapper and well-educated,” See says. “He was the second person killed during the massacre. His wife went on to become the first Chinese woman to sue a city in the United States when she filed a lawsuit against Los Angeles.”

The third story centres on two women sold by their families in China and brought to America to work in prostitution. Even though slavery was abolished after the Civil War, as See points out, “there was one exception - the sale and ownership of Chinese women in California.” Their story underscores the racial and gendered violence that Chinese women endured during that time.

Lisa has always been widely praised not only for her storytelling but also for the depth of her research - something which is again in evidence for the new novel. Describing her process, she says, “Research is my absolute favourite part of writing.” For this book, she utilized every resource available - public and scholarly libraries, archives as well as exploring more personal angles - tasting the foods her characters would have eaten, for example. “Research is like a treasure hunt. Sometimes it’s tedious, but sometimes you discover something incredible that breathes life into history.”

Lisa See herself was born in Paris to Chinese American parents and has spent much of her career exploring the intersections of Chinese and American culture and history. Her work often focuses on women’s experiences across generations, drawing on her rich family history and extensive scholarly research. “I am a woman,” she explains, “and they always say, ‘write what you know.’” But more than personal affinity, it’s the historical silencing of women that drives her mission. “There are so many stories about women that have been lost, forgotten, or deliberately covered up.”

In her books, See excavates the lives of women who’ve done extraordinary things but have rarely been acknowledged. These stories go far beyond footnotes; they are central to the fabric of history. In *Snow Flower*, she brings to life a secret written language - nu

shum - used exclusively by women in 19th-century China to communicate their hopes, sufferings, and loyalties in a male-dominated world. In *The Tea Girl of Hummingbird Lane*, she delves into the Akha ethnic minority, a community where ancient animistic beliefs and female-centred customs intersect with the global economics of rare tea and international adoption.

"Women were here every step of the way," she says. "They were there for every minute of it. Their stories just aren't told."

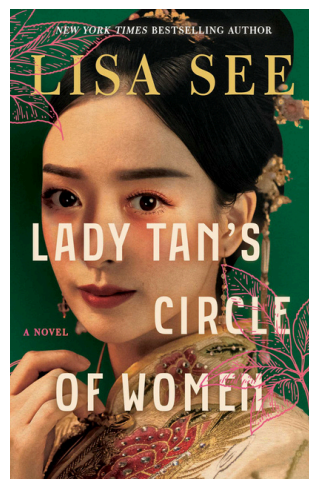
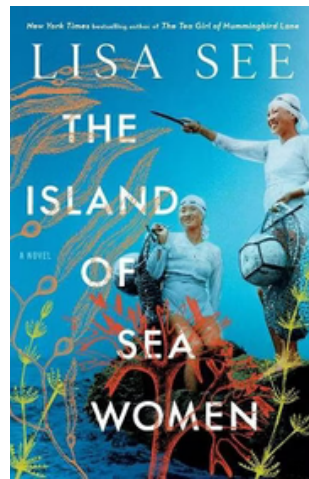
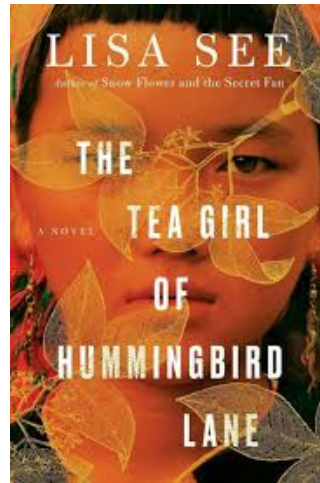
Growing up in Los Angeles, Lisa was surrounded by a large extended family - her great-grandfather had twelve children, his brother another twelve, and each of those children had between four and twelve children of their own. As a result, when she was a child, her family in the city numbered around 400 people.

Despite the size and diversity of the family, Lisa recalls, "There were about a dozen that looked like me, the majority still full Chinese, and then this kind of spectrum in between." She remembers growing up immersed in Chinese culture: the traditions, language and food all shaped her childhood. "That's why I write the kinds of books that I do," she explains. Yet as she dug deeper into her family history while researching for her first book *On Gold Mountain*, she began to notice a more complicated reality about how she was seen by others in her family.

"I always thought I was completely accepted by the family. Nobody ever said anything differently to me. But when I was doing the interviews, every once in a while, someone would say, 'Oh, you should go talk to so-and-so. He's Caucasian like you.' And that was really the first time I had seen that they saw me as different." Despite this, Lisa says, she remains "completely accepted" and "very proud" to be part of her family.

Speaking with Lisa, like reading her books, offers a vivid and heartfelt glimpse into the spiritual and cultural fabric of Chinese life and culture. She explains that Chinese religious beliefs are not monolithic but rather "an intricate blend of Daoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and folk customs, each weaving together in daily life and rituals."

She highlights how many Chinese traditions revolve around the lunar calendar, shaping festivals and family practices. For instance, Chinese New Year, celebrated not only in China but across various Asian countries like Vietnam and Japan, centres on bringing good luck and harmony into the new year. Lisa points out everyday beliefs people have, and says some people will say, "you don't want to use scissors [at that time] because you don't want to cut your luck," and that "you don't want to get into an argument because that will set a bad precedent for the new year." Even the foods served at the time carry symbolic meanings: fish represents abundance and family unity since the word sounds like 'surplus' while dishes with seeds symbolize fertility and prosperity.



Central to these customs is ancestor worship, which Lisa describes as a cornerstone of Chinese spirituality. Families set up home altars with offerings like fruits and incense to honour parents, grandparents and previous generations. She explains that in Chinese belief, "the afterlife is a parallel world to this one" where people's ancestors continue to live with needs like those on earth. "Just like you need food, you need clothes, you need a place to live, you need a television set, you need a laptop, you need a cell phone," Lisa says, "so do they." To provide these things for their ancestors, families burn paper replicas of these goods in ritualistic ceremonies, sending them to the spirit world. She adds with a touch of humor, "I've seen people on their motorcycle with a big flat screen TV made out of paper mâché for someone." This act of care, she adds, is believed to secure blessings for health, wealth, and happiness in the coming year.

By the time Lisa became a bestselling novelist - she now has her works translated into over thirty-nine languages and numerous literary honours to her name - the seeds of her writing life had long been planted whether she wanted them or not.

"I didn't write as a child," she says. "My mother was a writer and her father was a writer so, in a way, I didn't want to be a writer because I'd seen what it was like. But looking back, I had a lifelong apprenticeship."

Her mother, Carolyn See, was a noted author, book critic, and professor at UCLA. Her grandfather, George See, as she says, also wrote. While Lisa resisted the family vocation at first, the discipline of a writer's life was quietly ingrained in her from an early age. "I sometimes joke, 'It's a good thing they weren't plumbers. But why couldn't they have been brain surgeons? That might've been easier,'" she says, laughing.

What she absorbed from them wasn't literary style or technique, she explains - it was work ethic. "It wasn't about how to craft a sentence. It was about habits. Commitment. Discipline."

See recalls discovering a letter in the UCLA Special Collections, where her mother's literary papers are archived. "It was from my grandfather to my mother, when she was in college. He told her, 'If you want to be a writer, you have to write a thousand words a day.' That's what she did. And she passed that down to me." Today, See follows the same mantra. "When I'm in the writing phase, I do a thousand words a day. I keep a notebook where I track it by day and by week. You can't cram a novel at the last minute like a final exam. If the book is going to be 400 pages, you have to show up every day."

After decades of writing acclaimed novels See is often asked what motivates her now, after so much success. "Each book is a personal journey," she replies simply. "There's always something I'm working through."

And right now, that's the 1871 LA Chinese Massacre.



# Susana Benet: El haiku del asombro desde el corazón de Valencia

por James Hartley

“Soñar despierta tenía sus consecuencias”, dice Susana Benet recordando sus caminatas de infancia por el casco antiguo de Valencia. Nacida en 1950, creció en una ciudad que le ofrecía una mezcla de historia y cotidianidad que ya entonces la fascinaba. “Para acudir al colegio debía atravesar el casco antiguo de la ciudad, con monumentos que ya entonces me impresionaban. Mi ojo siempre ha estado atento y leía cualquier cartel o rótulo comercial. Observaba a la gente e incluso les ponía motes o inventaba historias fantásticas durante el largo recorrido”. Esa mirada curiosa y contemplativa prefigura el tono contenido y asombrado que más tarde adoptaría su poesía.

Aunque su inclinación inicial era el periodismo, optó por Psicología: “En realidad, deseaba estudiar Periodismo, pero entonces era una carrera privada, no pública, por lo que opté por la Psicología que también me atraía por mi interés en lo mentalmente patológico y por figuras sobresalientes como Freud o Jung”. Fue parte de la primera promoción de la carrera en Valencia, lo que vivió con matices: “No encontré tanto estímulo como esperaba... Lo más positivo fue conectar con otros alumnos afines”.

Benet amplió su formación con un máster en Psicoterapia Gestalt y un diploma en Logopedia, lo que le permitió tratar a niños con dificultades del lenguaje. Esta experiencia le marcó: “Esta actividad me resultó muy gratificante. Todo lo anterior repercutió en la elaboración de mis relatos”.

Su vocación literaria, sin embargo, se remonta a la adolescencia. “Empecé a escribir en la adolescencia, impresionada por la poesía de Juan Ramón Jiménez. Pero no fui constante porque tuve que compaginar trabajo, estudios y criar a mis dos hijos. A pesar de ello, nunca abandoné la lectura”. El momento decisivo llegaría en 1997, cuando recibió un regalo: “Gracias a un libro que me regaló el poeta José Luis Parra, descubrí el haiku y comencé a interesarme por esta pequeña estrofa japonesa”.

El descubrimiento fue un punto de inflexión. A través de foros en línea y lecturas, Benet se adentró en una forma que parecía abrazar su sensibilidad. “Del haiku me atraía la brevedad, su relación con la naturaleza y con lo cotidiano. Sólo necesitaba observar a mi alrededor y tomar nota de cualquier detalle que me produjese asombro o sorpresa”. Pronto sus haikus comenzaron a ser publicados por la editorial Pre-Textos. Su primer libro, *Faro del bosque* (2006), marcó el inicio de una producción constante que incluye títulos como *Lluvia menuda*, *Jardín*, *La durmiente*, *Lo olvidado*, *Grillos y luna* y *Don de la noche*.



Sobre lo que define un buen haiku, Susana es clara y rigurosa: “No hay un criterio específico para que un haiku sea ‘bueno’. En todo caso existen una serie de condiciones para que un haiku se considere auténtico, desde el punto de vista ortodoxo. Ha de aludir a la estación del año, debe constar de diecisiete sílabas, norma que yo respeto. No deben utilizarse metáforas, ni debe aparecer el ‘yo’. Deben aludir estrictamente a la naturaleza, evitando el sentimentalismo”.

No obstante, reconoce que la tradición ha evolucionado: “Ha habido autores clásicos que no se han ceñido a esos principios y hoy en día existe una mayor libertad creativa”.

Benet no solo ha cultivado el haiku; también ha explorado otros registros, como el cuento breve. Su volumen *Espejismo y otros relatos* (Renacimiento, 2022) recoge varios relatos publicados en revistas como *Sibila* o *Calle del Aire*, junto a textos inéditos. “Algunos han aparecido en revistas literarias... Otros, permanecen inéditos hasta que los revise”, explica.

Además, su mundo poético se ve ampliado por su faceta como artista visual. “Tampoco abandono mi afición a la acuarela con la que ilustro algunos libros propios y ajenos”, dice. La relación entre palabra e imagen se intensifica en obras como *Jardín* (2010), donde versos y acuarelas conviven con una armonía silenciosa.

Hoy, Susana Benet sigue escribiendo, dibujando y publicando: “Tengo un par de libros pendientes de publicación... y desde luego, nunca abandono la poesía y el haiku”. Su obra ha sido traducida al francés y al inglés, y figura en antologías fundamentales del haiku contemporáneo.

Entre asombro y exactitud, Benet ha hecho del haiku una forma de vida: una atención radical al presente, al temblor de la hoja, a la luz que apenas roza una superficie. Desde su taller, observa y escribe. Como cuando iba al colegio por las calles de Valencia: con los ojos bien abiertos.

# Matthew Tree: Finding a Voice Between Languages and Nations

By James Hartley

Born in London in 1958, Matthew Tree is a writer whose career defies borders. Though he began writing in English, it was not until he switched to Catalan - his second language - that he found his literary voice. Since then, he has published extensively in both languages, producing novels, essays, autobiographical works, and opinion columns. His singular trajectory has made him one of the most distinctive voices in contemporary European literature, particularly within the Catalan cultural sphere.

Tree first arrived in Catalonia in the 1980s. Unlike many expatriates, his move was not driven by the search for sun or a change of pace but by something closer to curiosity, even bewilderment. "I found my own complete ignorance of Catalonia, and that of everyone I knew in the UK, absolutely stunning," he says. "How could a country visited by about 16 million tourists every summer have remained so thoroughly hidden?" This apparent invisibility, he later learned, was the legacy of sustained political repression - especially during the Franco regime - that sought to minimize Catalonia's distinct language and culture.

Immersed in a Catalan-speaking environment, Tree opted to learn the language rather than impose English or rely on Spanish. The decision would prove pivotal. After a decade of attempting fiction in English, producing two unpublished novels and several short story collections, he found that British English - with its deep ties to social class - stifled his creative expression. "British English is a socially stratified language," he explains. "I wanted an English like the Americans have: William Burroughs went to Harvard and Charles Bukowski never completed high school but both write in the same flexible, malleable, and dynamic idiom."

Catalan provided that flexibility. It allowed Tree to shed linguistic baggage and locate a literary voice that felt authentic. His debut in Catalan came in 1990 with the novel *Fora de lloc*, followed by *Privilegiat* in 1997 and a series of nonfiction works including the acclaimed *Contra la monarquia* in 2001 and *Negre de merda* in 2005, a searing essay on racism in Europe. After ten years of exclusive work in Catalan, Tree returned to English. "A decade writing freely in another language had taught me to write just as freely in English," he says. Since then, he has published five novels in English, with two more in development.

Despite his immersion in Catalan culture, Tree identifies firmly as English. "I'm English and always will be," he says. "But Catalonia is my home now and England isn't, and never will be." He navigates this dual belonging through language: when writing in Catalan, he sees himself as part of the Catalan literary world; when in English, he steps into the global Anglophone tradition.

Tree credits William Burroughs for the idea that "all writing is autobiographical." He draws on personal experience and real-world observation, then reshapes both to illuminate broader truths: "I try to nudge both in a direction that shows them up for what they really are, makes them even more interesting, and makes them come alive for the reader."



In addition to fiction, Tree maintains a regular presence in opinion journalism, especially on themes such as religion, genocide, and nationalism. He sees columns as a valuable form: "They're a useful way of keeping in touch with readers during the long pauses between books." Still, fiction remains his true passion. "The novel seems to me to be the freest form of literature," he insists. "You can do and say anything, absolutely anything, in a novel."

His political views have been as unflinching as his literary voice. An outspoken supporter of Catalan independence, Tree is aware of how international observers often simplify or misread the situation. "If you don't live in a place, you can't really come to any seriously realistic conclusions about it," he observes. While acknowledging the divide within Catalonia itself - "a lot of people think independence is necessary, a lot of people don't" - he maintains that the key issue is unresolved because Catalans have not been allowed to vote freely on it. "It would be nice to be given the chance to find out which lot is in the majority," he says.

His perspective on Catalan and Spanish literature is refreshingly non-polemical. He sees the two traditions not in conflict, but as parallel currents, occasionally overlapping. Some writers, like Albert Sánchez Piñol, move fluidly between the two languages. Others, such as Javier Cercas - staunchly opposed to independence - nonetheless possess a deep familiarity with Catalan literary history. Still, Tree notes with interest that Catalan literature often finds a warmer reception abroad than in Spain: "Catalan writers, when they're translated, tend to sell better in German, Italian, French, Dutch and English than they do in Spanish."

For readers in Madrid looking to explore Catalan literature, Tree recommends *Jo soc aquell que va matar Franco* by Joan-Lluís Lluís, a gripping alternative-history novel set during the Spanish Civil War. "It's a fabulous (and violent) story... and people in Madrid would enjoy its take on the dictatorship - which belongs to their past, too," he says. It's also a reminder that Catalan literature extends beyond Spain's borders, with voices emerging from across the historical Catalan-speaking territories.

Whether writing in English or Catalan, fiction or essay, Matthew Tree remains a literary bridge, between nations, languages and sensibilities. His work invites readers to consider what identity means when it's chosen rather than inherited, and what language can become when freed from old hierarchies.

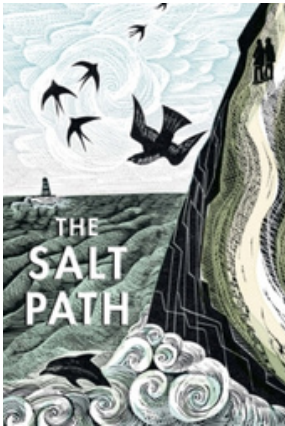
Matthew Tree's most recent publications include the English-language novel *If Only* and the essay collection *La piel robada* in Catalan. He lives and works in Barcelona.



# THE BOOK WAS BETTER...

## A REGULAR COLUMN ROUNDING UP RECENT BOOK TO SCREEN ADAPTATIONS

By Cliff Shephard



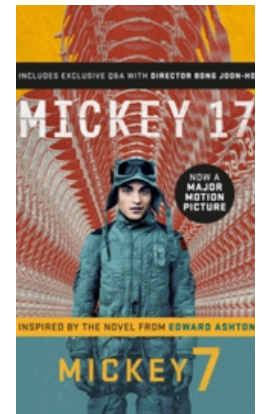
Based on the uplifting 'true' story of a homeless couple who walk the famous South West Coast Path in the UK and starring Gillian Anderson and Jason Isaacs, it seemed on paper that *The Salt Path*, a story of overcoming adversity and finding kindness in strangers would be a surefire hit. Shortly after release though, it gained notoriety when questions were asked about how factual it actually was. The film itself suffers from feeling like a series of 'set pieces' which stretch credibility to the point where the viewer can see why some of the vital elements don't ring true. What should have been the feelgood film of the summer, where the power of nature can heal mind and body, has become something altogether different - at best a curiosity and at worse an emotionally manipulative piece of misery fiction. Perhaps audiences will make this a hit out by going to see what all the fuss is about, but given the backlash...I would suspect not.



THE SALT PATH is at selected cinemas and available to stream on Amazon Prime, Apple TV



Oscar award-winning director Bong Joon-ho's follow up to *Parasite*, *Mickey 7* is a stellar adaptation of Edward Ashton's 2022 sci-fi novel *Mickey 7* (in films, everything has to be bigger it seems, even the numbers). Starring Robert Pattinson, it follows Mickey Barnes, a luckless loser who signs up as an 'expendable' who can die and be cloned over and over. After an error creates two Mickeys at the same time, he finds his simple life has become much more complicated and dangerous. Faultless special effects and an almost satirical, almost pantomime-like approach to the source material make this a hugely enjoyable retelling of one of the most well-received sci-fi books in recent memory. Mark Ruffalo's 'Trump-like' turn can sometimes seem a bit much, but credit must go to the director for reining this in and giving us a fun and offbeat adaptation.



MICKEY 7 is available to stream on Sky Store, Amazon Prime and Apple TV



It's tough to get audiences onboard with a new version of Francois Sagan's notorious bestseller *Bonjour Tristesse*, when such a beloved adaptation featuring David Niven and Jean Seberg already exists. Unfortunately, the flatness of the actors (despite a good turn from the ever reliable Chloë Sevigny) in this new realisation and the lack of tension means that despite being wonderfully shot, it isn't a patch on the 1958 film. The complexities of this coming-of-age tale are never really explored in any depth, and the dramatic finale bears no resonance, or indeed consequence. In truth, neither adaptation really nails the relationship between Cécile and her father Raymond which is the crux of the seminal novel, but perhaps on this occasion it would have been better to leave us just with the memory of Otto Preminger's classic.



BONJOUR TRISTESSE is available on Amazon Prime, Apple TV, and other streaming platforms



# COMICS, STRIPS AND GRAPHIC NOVELS

## Craig Thompson and the Power of the Graphic Memoir

By Cliff Shephard



For most fans, *Blankets* will always be Craig Thompson's best known work. The autobiographical story of his upbringing in an evangelical Christian family and subsequent break away resonated with a whole generation when it was released in 2003. Its significance for indie comics and, in particular, autobiographical comics entering the mainstream cannot be understated.

Part memoir, part travelogue, part social history, his latest ambitious graphic novel *Ginseng Roots* (a collected edition of comics he published 2019-2024) is educative, moving and shows a progression of a confessional and self-effacing style which Thompson has made his own.



Growing up in a family who worked a Ginseng farm in Wisconsin, the author flashes back so we see all the elements involved in production, and at the same time are given a wider context of how his family and childhood were ruled by this miraculous root. An adult Thompson travels to Korea and China in search of more understanding, and in these journeys reconnects with his brother as they witness just part of the huge influence Ginseng has across the world.

The artwork in this series is stunning - the

introduction of red to compliment the black and white pages such a beautiful way to add depth to the images. A long read that never seems so, the author is happy to meander in and out of his personal journey, whilst giving us a potted history of Ginseng and its surprising importance to America. Touching on global politics, Asian mythology, American domestic agricultural policy, as well as more intimate notions of home and belonging, *Ginseng Roots* could well be the best, most satisfying graphic novel you will read this year.

**GINSENG ROOTS is out in hardback in the UK at £25**



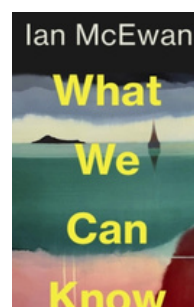
## Incoming!

WHAT WE CAN KNOW by Ian McEwan

Hardback £22 published in the UK on 18th September

A flooded Great Britain in 2119, and academic Tom Metcalfe searches for a lost mythical poem once read aloud in 2014. Its prophetic significance can only be guessed at, but the search reveals many uncomfortable truths for all involved.

The last few offerings from Ian McEwan have been patchy at best, a far cry from the spiky outsider that made his name with memorable novels such as *The Cement Garden* and *The Comfort Of Strangers*. There was a concern that his best work was behind him, and that there was nothing more to say. *And What We Can Know* is a book that could have been of similar fayre - proto science fiction, with a nod to climate change and the main plot thread concerning...a poem that no-one can remember? Not an easy sell. The genius though is, of course, in the execution. The elements McEwan uses are irresistible - the construction of found fragments of a dinner party where the poem was read, a quest for the manuscript across Britain's remaining archipelagos, the main character's messy personal life...all cleverly interwoven into a compelling story which spans a century. *What We Can Know* is a surprisingly rich, resonant novel about loss and memory from a master storyteller back at the top of his game.



THE SILVER BOOK by Olivia Laing

Hardback £20 published in the UK on 6th November

Charting the years when Italian film designer Danilo Donati was at the top of his game working for legends such as Federico Fellini and Pier Paolo Pasolini, *The Silver Book* eavesdrops on the intimate lives of those who he loved, hated, worked with and worked for. Taking on a young and beautiful apprentice, Donati is unaware of Nicholas' hidden past and this, along with national tensions rising across Italy, collide violently. The result is a story that can only end in tragedy.

Probably best known for her non-fiction books such as *The Trip To Echo Spring* and *The Garden Against Time*, Laing's second move into fiction (after the sublime *Crudo*) still feels as meticulously researched and as wholly authentic as a factual history. This period of time was perhaps when the Italian film industry was at its most bold, most popular, and most scandalous, something which the novel does not shy away from as we follow Nicholas through the uncomfortably unconventional sets of *Salò*, or *The 120 Days of Sodom* and *Casanova*.

Mood and atmosphere, and a very real sense of authenticity pervade this brilliantly paced, and fully formed novel which serves to bookend a certain period of classic European cinema.

TAKE THE SKY THAT WAS MY MOUTH  
BOB BLACK

take the sky that was my mouth  
take the words that were our bones  
take the time that poured from rusted cans drug down the road  
take the rhyme that was our heart fished up from the mud  
take the bodies opened and rearranged by modernity and medicine  
take what was our gift  
take the thoughts that were your compass  
take the scales and carcass of the fish in the market windows of Lisboa  
take the olives from the groves and olives sunning in Gaza Port  
take the language that was our hope  
take the books we imagined would one day burn into maps and carve them into teeth  
take our hearts and pour the flesh into the sea as start dust  
take the syllables as the heartbeats of the dead  
take the reflections that shimmered between lovers on Sun Moon Lake  
take the bones scrubbed with linen before the Dead Sea fell apart, chip by chip  
take the night as it fell as abundance and prayer  
take the black at the center of the sunflower and replace our eyes and blindness  
take the sky between the land and puddle in our palms, a country with veins  
take the counting of pebbles and the owl's howl in the forest as our lives' negotiation  
take this poem unearthed from under a listing tree and grow new fruit  
take the wind and swing it against a giant's waist  
take my mouth filled by lemons and by bees  
take my body, clench our bones  
take the sky that became our words and replaced thought, cloud by cloud by explosion  
take this poem and burn it with carbon, tallow, and map the anemic words  
take the sky that was meant for you when we left the hospital to cross the desert  
take the colour of our shawls and weave it in a Coptic jar  
take the promises we carved into a mast on a raft and sent overboard  
take the jade in my throat and turn it into wine, bracelet and flag  
take each of our teeth and sew them into the night sky and incinerate the silence  
take the most from the least river and forge it into a lost key  
take the lost timber and turn it into mountain crag and switchback  
take back the sky and the dying that was once us  
take the vines and use for our village's carpentry  
take the songs and work them kite and skymaking  
take the grief in our children's eyes and turn it into snow  
take the repairs the old man made of tea kettles and turn them into stone  
take the ants that carry us in jars of honey and move our hearts over desert  
take the twitch in our eyes and reimagine the cosmos  
take the olive grove and turn it into forest to build coffins and bury the dead  
take the high mountain tea plantations and strain the leaves to quench the Earth  
take the sky that was our home and bury it in a chasm under the sea  
take everything that we became and seed us in the morning soil  
take the sky that became our words  
take this poem and burn it  
weave our language into shroud for everything we have become  
turn loss into love and slip the remaining into us for we have nothing left.

and what of the sky?

*for my friend: Razi Shawahdeh and his son Omar*



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