

THE MADRID REVIEW

VOL II ISSUE IV



FREE SUBSCRIBERS ISSUE

POETRY

BIOGRAPHIES

Maryam Hassanat is a mother of two children from Gaza. She has had several of her stories and poems published in various magazines. Her writings reflect the experiences, struggles and resilience of the Palestinian people, offering a personal perspective on their shared history and culture. They are not just words on paper - they are a sincere reflection of her emotions, thoughts and daily experiences under difficult circumstances.

Yusef Azad has been living in Madrid for the last five years. He comes from Brixton, London, in the UK. He has had a number of poems published in the Brixton Review of Books.

Jose Hernandez Diaz (he, him, his) is a 2017 NEA Poetry Fellow. He is the author of *The Fire Eater* (Texas Review Press, 2020) *Bad Mexican, Bad American* (Acre Books, 2024) *The Parachutist* (Sundress Publications, 2025) *Portrait of the Artist as a Brown Man* (Red Hen Press, 2025) and the forthcoming, *The Lighthouse Tattoo* (Acre Books, 2026). He has been published in The American Poetry Review, Poetry Ireland Review, The London Magazine, Poetry Wales, The Madrid Review, The Iowa Review, The Southern Review, The Yale Review, The Best American Nonrequired Reading 2011 and The Best American Poetry 2025. He has taught creative writing at the University of California at Riverside, and at the University of Tennessee where he was the Poet in Residence.

Julie Irigaray is a French Basque writer. Her poetry pamphlet *Whalers, Witches and Gauchos* was published by Nine Pens (2021) and her poetry has been featured on BBC Radio 4. Her poems, articles and translations have appeared in over sixty publications across the world (US, UK, Ireland, Italy, Spain, Canada, Mexico, Singapore and South Korea), in Magma, Poetry Ireland Review, Poetry Wales, The Rialto, or Ambit, and her poems have won or been finalists in twenty-four poetry competitions, including The London Magazine Poetry Prize 2024 and The Bridport Poetry Prize 2025.

Francisco Jota-Pérez (Barcelona, 1979) es novelista, ensayista, poeta y traductor. Autor de, entre otras obras, las novelas *Teratoma* y *Máquinas de acción perfecta*, los poemarios *sólido_Celado* y *Libro de Mientes*, los poemas largos *Luz simiente* y *Anamorfosis —una utopía—*, y los ensayos *Polybius*, *Homo Tenuis* y *Circlusión*. Traductor al castellano de filósofos como Eugene Thacker, Alberto Toscano y Troy Vettesse, ha colaborado con el artista plástico Paco Chanivet en sus obras *Interregno* y *Palimpsesto*, así como con la artista Clara Moreno Leer por ósmosis

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.

Jim Young is a old poet writing from his beach hut on the Gower Peninsula

Elizabeth Fevyer lives in Wales, UK. Her poetry has been published or is upcoming in The Broken Spine, The Alchemy Spoon, Dreich and The Storms Journal, among other places. She is currently studying for the Diploma in Creative Writing at the University of Oxford and is working on the manuscript of her first pamphlet.

Laura Camacho Frias grew up in a small industrial town in the North of Spain. Despite her initial dream of becoming a translator for the United Nations, life happened; she studied engineering instead and moved to Portugal to complete her first degree. Her partner, three kids and two dogs ensure she still can't have either a proper relaxing day or a full writing day but deep down, she wouldn't change it for the world. They all live together in Eindhoven, The Netherlands. Her first novel, *Unwritten*, will be published in May 2026 by Flare Books (Catalyst Press).

LC Gutierrez is an erstwhile academic and product of many places in the South and the Caribbean. He currently lives, writes, teaches, and plays trombone in Madrid, Spain. His poetry can be found in many wonderful journals, and forthcoming in New York Quarterly, Tampa Review, BoomerLit, Trampoline, Wildroof Journal and Slant. He is a poetry reader for West Trade Review.

Matt Gilbert is a freelance copywriter, from Bristol, England, but currently gets his fill of urban hills in South East London. His work has appeared in various publications, including: Acumen, Ink Sweat & Tears, Northern Gravy, Southword, Stand and Wild Court. His debut collection *Street Sailing* came out with Black Bough Poetry in 2023.

DS Maolalai has been described by one editor as "a cosmopolitan poet" and another as "prolific, bordering on incontinent". His work has been nominated fourteen times for BOTN, ten for the Pushcart and once for the Forward Prize, and released in three collections; *Love is Breaking Plates in the Garden* (Encircle Press, 2016), *Sad Havoc Among the Birds* (Turas Press, 2019) and *Noble Rot* (Turas Press, 2022)

Sissy Doutsiou is an acclaimed poet, actress, and spoken word artist based in Athens, Greece. She has published four critically acclaimed poetry collections and two short story compilations, and released her first LP, *Insult of Public Modesty*, on Inner Ear Records. As a founding member of the Institute for Experimental Arts, she curates the annual International Video Poetry and Experimental Film Festivals in Athens. Doutsiou has toured throughout Europe, the United States and Asia, and is a member of the feminist women's writer group Her Voice in Greece and the cultural activist group Void Network. Her work examines personal life experiences, social injustice, and structural inequality through raw, embodied poetic expression.

Gordan Struić is a Croatian lawyer, poet, writer and musician whose work has appeared or is forthcoming in 34th Parallel, Half Mystic, Stone Poetry Quarterly, Ink Sweat & Tears, Headlight Review and Lana Turner. In 2025 he received a Special Recognition Award at the international Beyond Words contest in Trieste. His poetry explores intimacy and distance, tracing the quiet border between the digital and the human with precise, restrained imagery.

Ilias Tsagas is a U.K.-based Greek poet, writing in English and in Greek. His work has appeared in journals like: Apogee, AMBIT, Streetcake, Under the Radar, Poetry Wales, SAND, FU Review Berlin, Tint, Tokyo Poetry, Plumwood Mountain and elsewhere. He works as an energy journalist and academic. He can be found on Instagram: @ilias.tsagas

Azalea Aguilar is an emerging Chicana poet from South Texas, where the scent of the gulf and memories of childhood linger in her work. Her poetry delves into the complexities of motherhood, echoes of childhood trauma and the resilience found in spaces shaped by addiction and survival. She writes to honour the past, give voice to the unspoken and carve tenderness from the raw edges of experience. Her work has appeared in numerous journals, including Angel City Review, The Skinny Poetry Journal, The Acentos Review and Somos en Escrito. She has been featured at events hosted by the American Poetry Museum in DC and is currently crafting her first manuscript, a collection exploring the intersections of love, loss, and lineage.

Joseph Hunter is a fiction writer and poet whose work has appeared (or is forthcoming) with Fairlight Books, Glut Press, Merion West, The Rumen, The Alchemy Spoon, New Feathers Anthology, the Brussels Review and others. He teaches at the University of Manchester.

Saras Moodley, born in South Africa of Indian/South Asian origin, completed her MA in Creative Writing at Teesside University in the UK in 2024. She was longlisted for the Sol Plaatje European Union Poetry Award in 2023. Two of her poems now appear in the 2023 edition of this Anthology: Vol XII. She lives in The Netherlands with her husband and their three children. Having lived through the pain and humiliation of the apartheid era in South Africa, her dream remains to strive for a world that is evermore just and equal, in both personal and wider world challenges.

Charlie Baylis is from Nottingham. His poetry has been nominated three times for the Pushcart Prize & once for the Forward Prize. His translations have been commended in the Stephen Spender Prize. His first collection of poetry is *a fondness for the colour green* (Broken Sleep Books, 2023).

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.

Robert McDonald's first book of poems, *A Streetlight That's Been Told It Used to Be the Moon*, is coming from Roadside Press in 2026. His work has appeared in 2 Rivers View, Action/Spectacle, The Tiny Journal, Le Petite Zine, Blood & Honey, Sentence, and West Trade Review, among others. He lives with his husband in Chicago.

Sam Szanto is a Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net-nominated author. Her poetry pamphlet *This Was Your Mother* was published by Dreich Press in 2024 and *Splashing Pink* by Hedgehog Press in 2023. She has won the Wirral Festival Poetry Prize, the Charroux Poetry Prize, the First Writer Poetry Prize, the Shooter Flash Prize and the Mum Life Stories Prize. She is a practice-led PhD candidate at York St John University, writing about the poetry of parenthood in relation to absence and attachment.

Siobhán O'Connor is an Irish writer who has made her home in Madrid. She writes about the messy experience of living - the suffering and joy of family, the homes lost and found, the broken and hungry bodies of women, the salvation in the creative process. She is currently writing a psychological novella exploring trauma set between Ireland and Madrid and researching a memoir about her cousin Jim, who died while fighting with the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War.

Marcus Slingsby was born in Yorkshire in 1973. During his 20's and early 30's he travelled the world; working in the 1st to wander the 3rd. His work has appeared in Amsterdam Quarterly, Jasper's Folly, The Poetry Lighthouse and Flights. He lives in Friesland with his family.

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*.

Carmella de Keyser writes poetry exploring identity, intersections, ambivalence, liminal spaces and displacement. Founder of the Harlow Circle of Poetry Stanza. Judge for the Harlow Open Poetry Competition, 2025. Published in: BBC Sounds, Macmillan, Dream Catcher Literary Magazine, The Madrid Review, The Dark Poets Club, The Hooghly Review and Wishbone Words Magazine. Honourable Mention for the Dark Poets Prize, and The Small Space Deep Impact Award. Winner of the Hedgehog Press international Poetry Pamphlet Competition 2024. Debut chapbook is out now with Hedgehog Poetry Press.

Victoria Spires lives in Northampton with her family. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in Berlin Lit, Dust, The London Magazine, iamb, The Interpreter's House & Atrium, among others. Her poems have been commended/shortlisted in various prizes including Ledbury Poetry Competition & The Plough Prize. She came Third in the Rialto Nature and Place Competition 2025 & won the Alpine Fellowship Poetry Prize 2025. Her pamphlet *Soi-même* is available from Salo Press.

John Kenny is a writer and editor from Dublin, Ireland. His short fiction has been published in Uncertainties, Revival Literary Journal, The Galway Review, Transtories and many other magazines and anthologies. His poetry has featured in StepAway Magazine, Lothlorien Poetry Journal, Smashing Times, Every Day Poets and Poem Alone, and is forthcoming in The High Window and Prole. John is also winner of the NurePoets Corner Award 2025, judged by John F. Deane.

Aden Thomas lives in the Black Hills country of the United States and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. His first book of poems, *What Those Light Years Carry*, was published in 2017.

Graham Clifford is a British author of five collections of poetry. His work has been chiselled into paving slabs, translated into Romanian and German, can be found on the Poetry Archive, and is anthologised by publishers including Faber, Against the Grain and Broken Sleep Books. Most recently, his work has been included in the Manchester Review, iamb and BerlinLit.

Ana C. Triculescu es poeta y performer rumano-panameña. Autora de los poemarios *De todo un poco (y de poco, nada): Incoherencias Emocionales* (2023) y *Trastornos compartidos* (2025), su poesía íntima y visceral explora la esencia humana mientras experimenta con las flexibilidades del lenguaje. Publicada en Santa Rabia Poetry (Perú) y destacada por Ediciones Caleidoscopio (Colombia) en el Concurso Internacional de Poesía Libre (2025), conecta con los lectores de Iberoamérica a través de recitales poético-musicales y de su proyecto @Ana_LaEscribePoemas.

Ruby Doran Meira is a graduate from the University of Oxford, where she studied Spanish philology and Linguistics. Originally from Dublin, she has spent the last five years living, studying and working between several English and Spanish cities, taking her uniquely Irish (but ever increasingly multinational) perspective wherever she went.

Lizzie Holden lives in Sant Pol de Mar, Catalonia, and spends much of her time asking questions of the sea. She won the 2004 LISP poetry competition, and her pamphlet *From the Bottom of the Wishing Well* was awarded second prize by Paper Swans Press. *Amber* was shortlisted both as a pamphlet by Poetry Wales and as a full collection by Hedgehog Press. Her work has appeared with The Emma Press, Dream Catcher, Live Canon, Smith/Doorstop Books, and elsewhere.

Brittney Walker-Zaleski is an American poet, English teacher and TEDx speaker based in Estonia. She received her MFA from Cedar Crest College's Pan-European Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing program. Her poetry has appeared in The Font, The Tupelo Press 30/30 Project, Prometheus Dreaming, From Whispers to Roars and other online publications. As a member of the literary community in Estonia, Brittney has taught poetry workshops locally and has been published in Estonian literary magazines such as Tangerine and Aksolotl Literary Magazine.

Liam Boyle lives in Galway, Ireland. He has been published in various outlets, such as Skylight 47, Drawn to the Light, Confluence magazine and Causeway magazine. He has been a featured reader at the New Writing Showcase at the Cúirt International Literary Festival. He enjoys spending time with his grandchildren.

Julie Runacres is a retired teacher of English and current poet, living in the rural English Midlands with two whippets and a to-do list of ditched aspirations because of whippets. Prior to this, her work has appeared in Poetry Birmingham and 14 Magazine, among others. She is currently studying for an MA in Writing Poetry at the Poetry School, Newcastle University.

Nicola Toft Lahiff writes poems about cities, poems set in cities and poems about missing being in cities, amongst other subjects. She has just finished an MA in writing poetry at Royal Holloway University, London.

Ewen Glass is a screenwriter and poet from Northern Ireland who lives with two dogs, a tortoise and a body of self-doubt; his poetry has appeared in the likes of Okay Donkey, Maudlin House, HAD, Poetry Scotland and One Art. Bluesky/X/IG: @ewenglass

Anthony Wade, the only child of an Irish migrant mother into England, an England-trained lawyer who worked in The Netherlands, relocated to his Mother's County in Ireland following a medical disability, and published a first poem in 2018 and since in Ireland, across Britain, in Spain, India, Canada and the USA. A Forward Prize nominee, he lives by the sea in East Cork not ten miles from where he spent childhood summers, an active member of the local Writers' Group.

Brought up in rural Staffordshire, Charles Penty is a journalist by profession and has worked in Colombia and Brazil as well as the UK and also Madrid, where he has lived with his family since 2005. He was longlisted for the 2020 National Poetry Competition and shortlisted for the 2021 Bridport Prize.

Juan Manuel Martínez (Colombia, 1989) vive en Alexandria, VA, EEUU. Terminó su Doctorado en Español con énfasis en literatura en la Universidad de la Florida. Juan es profesor universitario de español e inglés. Es egresado de la Maestría en Escrituras creativas de la Universidad Nacional de Colombia y de la Maestría en Estudios Literarios de la Universidad Internacional de la Rioja, además de obtener su pregrado en la Universidad de la Florida Central. Su trabajo aparece en revistas y portales en línea, algunos de estos en: Juan Manuel Martínez | Substack .

Ciaran Buckley was born in London. He has had poetry widely published. He lives in Madrid.

Poet, translator and creative-writing tutor, Gwyneth Box is at home in Spain, in the UK, and on the Internet.. She loves the taste of words and the multi-layered aspects of language and thought revealed through translation and poetry. Her writing explores the blurred borders between writer & narrator; between translation & creation; between memoir & invention; and between poetry & prayer. Find out more about her projects on her website: gwynethbox.com.

Jude FireSong – aka Fabulous Phoenix Boy – is a Scottish-by-inclination poet, specific writer, and artist. He is a polyamorous, (gender)queer, AuDHD disabled survivor. His work explores identity, community, and storytelling. Jude's multimedia show *Made of Magic* – based on a collection longlisted for new words {press}'s Chapbook Competition 2024 – debuted at the Edinburgh Fringe 2024, reviving this year. Publications: en*gendered, Poetry Marathon Anthology 2024, Man* Made//Made Man*, S*x Gap, rainy weather days, Hush LGBTQ+ Magazine, new words. Exhibitions: *I Have Always Been Becoming Who I Am Right Now*, *Untold Stories*, Level Centre's Public Open Exhibition 2024, *Trans Joy: Moments of Trans Euphoria*.

WHEN THE WAR ENDS, MAMA..
MARYAM HASSANAT

One day, my child asked me:

"Mama, when will the war end?"

I didn't answer.

Then, with eyes still glimmering with the remnants of a dream, he added:

"When the war ends, I want to eat lots of chocolate. I want to buy a big toy plane. And I want to go to the park so I can play with my sister and laugh a lot."

I smiled, though something inside me burned.

What kind of war steals a child's right to sweets, to play, to simple outings in the sun?

What kind of world is this, where a piece of candy becomes a distant wish, and a toy is postponed until after the ceasefire?

How do I explain to him that in another country, a child doesn't have to wait for "the end of a war" to eat what they want or play as they please?

That some children sleep soundly in soft beds and don't flinch at every tremor in the wall?

That some mothers don't have to sell their clothes to buy flour... or hide breadcrumbs in plastic bags for emergencies?

My child doesn't ask for much.

He only wants to live a normal day.

To buy a toy without us calculating how much money will be left for bread.

He wants joy.

To eat without sharing his portion with his little sister out of fear there won't be enough.

To drink a cup of milk sweetened with a little sugar.

To sit beside me as we count out little homemade biscuits together.

He doesn't know when all of this will end.

But he comforts himself by saying:

"When the war ends, Mama, we'll live."

And I—

I cling to that hope.

Because it's all I have.

Waiting for the dawn of a new day,

One that smells of orange blossoms and lemon trees instead of ash and blood.

A day when my little ones eat what they crave,

And laugh without fear.

YUSEF AZAD

TONGUE

I wouldn't wish it on anyone what has overtaken me because it will soon be insupportable.

To realise one usual day that your tongue, far in fact from yours, is a foreign body squatting the mandible.

The tongue crouches most of the time at the back of the mouth, alert in its cave, and I have no idea how big it is.

It can graze on the sharp edge of my teeth.

It has two jobs. To eat and to taste and to speak. Three jobs. And to kiss sometimes. Four jobs. And lick five.

Unroll.

No don't.

JOSE HERNANDEZ DIAZ

THREE HAIKU

The Beach

Blue waves rise, descend.
Sun, moon, luminous stars: beyond.
Surfers, bodhisattvas.

The Moon's Ear

Perceives autumn breeze,
Bouncing off azure, rigid earth:
Purrs soft lullaby.

Southwestern Sunrise

At dawn, young coyote,
Prancing in local park,
Everyone else sleeps.

PATATES

JULIE IRIGARAY

I've ordered some jacket potatoes
with cheddar on top and coleslaw
at the Black Country Living Museum.

I've been living in Britain for years
but I tasted it for the first time
a few months ago with my English lover.

I explain the recipe to my French mother
by text message because she has
an Instagram cooking page.

I regularly report to her British recipes
– the weirder the better –
dissecting the composition of the dish

in the same way high school kids dissect
mice or frogs for their biology class:
with curiosity and fear.

She replies that any recipe with potatoes
as the main ingredient is proletarian,
which explains why my Granny

used to cook potatoes at every meal
in all forms: fried boiled baked
as gratin dauphinois pommes dauphine

purée Mousseline hachis parmentier
patates en carré wilfully ignoring
that she was diabetic and that slow-burning

carbs *are* sugar. How she drove my mother
crazy when after a week in hospital for
diabetes training she ate crisps and pizza

for dinner, insisting it was a *healthy meal*
because potatoes and tomatoes are vegetables.
We teased her about her obsession with potatoes:

for Christ's sake, do you have Irish ancestry?
The first French sentence I taught my Irish ex
before he met my family was *je suis Irlandais*

et j'aime les patates,^[1] which he recited in
a thick, sexy accent that charmed my Granny.
The only German word she remembered

from the war was 'kartoffel': her hometown
was perched on a hill and during a heatwave,
two German soldiers pounded on her door.

She was eight years old but took the risk
of opening. The young men made the gesture
of drinking, so she brought them two

glasses of fresh water. A few days later,
they returned with a bag full of potatoes
– kartoffel – to thank her.

Six weeks after Granny's death,
my mother and I can finally joke about
how she made us hate boiled potatoes,

how much of a pain in the arse
she could be, and how much
she would have loved jacket potatoes.

[1] *je suis Irlandais et j'aime les patates = I am Irish and I love potatoes*

FRANCISCO JOTA-PÉREZ

SÍNTESIS URGENTE

*una reconsideración del arte como motor de creatividad racional en tanto abastecedor material de
ignorancia mediante el que la razón satisfaga su necesidad de exponerse a lo peligroso*

aparece
una red indiscriminada
de luz veguera sobre humedad insoportable
y en sus nudos se pudre el pelo y cuartejan las uñas
aparece
el viento enmarcado
como lo que aún no se ha perdido
un rectángulo del aroma picante del vetiver
envuelve la tela acrílica
bajo la que esconder las manos
al toque de la tarde · un chasquido de dedos

no respira
ya la brasa como caricia
alguna otra carencia de sentido
fue a suplir ese ímpetu que tanto se añora

un clamor de hiedra · la madrugada
aparece tan despacio
que podría hacer esquina
en
un clamor de hiedra · la madrugada
rompe brusco y deja una estela
cuando esa última bandera se deshilacha
con
un clamor de hiedra · la madrugada
pesa como un paisaje incendiado
donde no queda nadie
desde
un clamor de hiedra · la madrugada
quiere expresarse

y así es como, sin cabos sueltos ya, deja de cumplir las condiciones del bucle y
asienta la cronología
hasta
avanzar a la siguiente secuencia

tan no lineal
como es este tiempo
por más que se muestre
objeto recto hecho peligro

impone
el hilo musical su estrechez
de embudo sobre las posibilidades
del tiempo
contiene
las alternativas · bajo control fáctico
y por el control se sale la enredadera
que perfora la membrana interdigital
en un suspiro
de dolor, urticante
pedacito de falda de negrura

estafeta:
se envía y recoge, se frena
la inercia de la fila, pieza templada de gente
ante la decoración que se ha hecho
estándar de diseño
de base
ante el bufido poco tosco de los extractores
en el cuarto vacío
y no queda tedio
cuando se palpa fijamente
ya no repica a desgana
el reloj
porque se ha vuelto a solucionar el bucle

taraceado
yunqucito del diablo
con el bucle en el pecho, rabioso
insoluble
lo que bien acaba y que hará
a cortísima instrucción

muralla óptica · un dietario espectro
resume lo ficticio pero transparente
suplica como una caricia
a
muralla óptica · un dietario espectro
injerta en esa única palabra amable
que se malinterpreta
ante
murallas ópticas · dietarios espectro
miden retrocesos
a palmo de lo que está permitido
y es que

quien destripa un oso de peluche para esconderse dentro a recibir debe asegurarse de
que sus orificios queden justo en los puntos sueltos de la costura de asimilación

las olas no rugen
insinúan
que hay una respiración
que vale la maldita pena

un parpadeo
reubica la espuma escupida en la arena
corre una cortina

STEVE DENEHAN
SPARE CHANGE

He must be newly homeless
is my first thought
as his clothes
have not yet attained
that greasy shabbiness

he has picked a decent spot
standing just beyond
the drive-through window
out of sight
of the teller

he signals
asks if I might
have some spare change
for a hostel

I pat my thighs
shake my head
nothing on me
but

there is a fiver
in my car
I get it
bring it to him

it must be hard now
being homeless
in a cashless world
I say

he smiles
says that it is, but
that it was pretty hard before
too

I feel guilty
as I laugh with him
as I walk back to my car
as I drive home

STEVE DENEHAN
THE TREMBLING WORLD

Several buses have passed
none of them mine
it is city-cold, and I
just want
to be home

my throat is raw
from talking
over pub music
pointless conversations
with pointless people

nobody being more pointless
than myself
I look down
the world trembles
in the puddle at my feet

a guy arrives to stand beside
me
his feet shuffle
he wears socks
that could be referred to
as wacky

he balls his hands
blows into them
I know what's coming
"Cold one tonight isn't it?"
the thick smell of drink

he laughs, filling the silence
"But sure, it has to be done."
Jesus
fucking
Christ

STEVE DENEHAN

BEDSIT WINDOW

Stuck in traffic
I look out and up
to a bedsit window
above a pharmacy

the light is on, and
there is a woman
walking in the room
around the room

she wears a tightknit
v neck jumper
dark blue
her hair is black

just beyond shoulder length
it is hard to be sure
from this distance, but
I think she might be beautiful

she is on the phone
walking and walking, and
running
her free hand
through her hair

I want to get out of the car
call to her
to open her window
to tell her

that it won't always be like
this, but
I don't, because
for all I know
it will

JIM YOUNG

THE PARABLE OF THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESS MAN

he called to my mum
did mr dean
had some cake and tea
then left his magazine
never talked of christianity
so you'd never know that he had been
each month as i recall
of his beliefs we knew absolutely bugger all
never read the watchtower or awake you see
used them to line the budgie cage wall to wall
but he sure did like my mother's cake
she baked like an angel
said the jehova's witness man
sipping his tea in 1950

ELIZABETH FEVYER

BEFORE THE END

Do you remember the night we chased the music
and watched the lights dancing,
high up on the hill above the city?
How we daubed tequila in our clavicles
like expensive perfume. The ringing
in our ears, a temporary betrothal.
How we walked back down the length
of the Cemetery, the railings holding back the night
like ribs. The shadows of the villages still visible
inside the urban sweep.
How we went back to our bed above the pub,
our room no bigger than a bed, to sleep wakefully,
our ears still ringing, straining for the breath
of the cracked window and each other.
How hot our skin felt. How cold to touch.

SUEÑOS

LAURA CAMACHO FRIAS

El problema de los sueños
no es cuando no se cumplen
sino cuando se vuelven realidad
y el príncipe es verde rana,
la princesa compra en Zara
y "para siempre" dura
hasta saltar de la cama.

Oyes una música y descubres
que la persona más equivocada
es la que te hace feliz...

Te equivocas,
Te pierdes y encuentras.

Decides cambiar
porque existe un océano enorme
lleno de posibilidades
frente a tí,
más allá de la genética...
o eso dicen.

Claro que,
a estas alturas de la vida,
a quien le importa lo que digan,
si al final,
los dos sabemos que no nos entienden.

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR AUBADE

LC GUTIERREZ

*(after the entire Iberian Peninsula heard the whisper
of the apocalypse, during an 18 hour power outage)*

Again in a world where I am nothing
yet everything to me, slightly swollen

I have found morning words in my room
tossed as though by waves

and eaten them when they were good.
Awakened from a dream of cats

large enough to torture monkeys
and felt pleased to have seen them

for their extraordinary grace and power
where things otherwise collapse

around our little piles of hope.
I count the stray blessings and learn

that backwards they add up to something
from which I might drink a thin succor.

The first up: I stretch, I lunge, I pray
I try not to think of my children grown

enough to see over my shoulders
and find there only a smoldering end:

what we have left of a life for them. After all
they too will be nothing

(their little piles of hope, slightly swollen)
but everything to me.

MATT GILBERT

BONDING

At ten, it was the funniest thing
I'd ever seen. A white-bearded head,
dripping wet, neck up from the surface
of a lake. Two geese floating

either side, seeming to peck, or kiss,
an old man on his temples. A photo
in a book. Used to ambush my brother
with hysterics. Helplessly, we'd roll

in laughter. Years after, I learnt
the picture was of Konrad Lorenz,
Nobel winner, pretend goose mother,
pioneer in the study of animal behaviour

and previously, a Nazi – later regretted.
The image does not appeal now
in the way it did. But what I wouldn't give
for one more taste of that unbridled glee.

DS MAOLALAI

DEAD TEN YEARS

after the funeral. tidying teacups
and rinsing out glasses
of winerind. I didn't
much know her – I guess
with the alzheimers: dead
for ten years and then buried
just recently. flowers don't last;
they fall over each winter,
drop seeds and don't think
of what else might come.
and she was a flower
and, the last time she knew me,
I seventeen, and a flower
as well. I pick up a plate
from the piano of unpopular
biscuits. some glasses
and two empty bottles,
and a bottle which still
has a gulp in it.

MATT GILBERT

OBJECT – TATE LIVERPOOL

'THEY call it Art! That thing!'
Two young critics stand,
unimpressed by a square of canvas
painted red. I can't dismiss them,
as I would with strangers,
for their knee-jerk,

tabloid-style response.
I can't because I owe them
more than this. I am their father
and therefore, in some way,
to blame. I dragged them here,
under protest,

away from the Mersey,
just outside – whose wet, wide
interesting credentials are more
readily apparent. So, I throw
a provocation, suggest
– Anything can be Art.

They loudly disagree, but go on
to read the caption. 'Something
to do with World War II. It says.'
They scoff, with shaking heads,
before coughing up more reasons

why this shape should not be seen,
as anything other than a waste
of time. I will not prove them wrong,
but note their fascinated ire,
their inability to stop talking

about this painting. Pretend
I haven't noticed, their flicked
middle finger gestures,
causing snorts of laughter,
a few steps behind my back.

SISSY DOUTSIU

The first time I made love
The first time I got drunk, stopping every passerby in my neighborhood
asking them about my freedom

The first time I got lost in a forest all alone
The first time I was afraid of my own darkness
The first time I looked at the sky and wanted to be an astronaut

The first time I travelled in Nile and in the desert of Palestine, as a sailor

The first time I touched you
I dripped, I opened, I dissolved
Baby, what could I do?
I weighed, I won

The first time I went with my cousin to the main square of our city
to find something to smoke, just the two of us
and we found the most awful weed you could smoke
and we shared a joint
just the two of us
last puff, and then an unforgivable laugh

We could do anything
just tequila and short skirts
poetry and wet eyes
a friend vomiting from too much alcohol and herb
behind the busy street of the city with pride

I never slept with my clothes on - in bed
no matter how drunk I was

With a rapper in Brooklyn for the first time
I told him to take me home with a French accent
"Take off my clothes
my clothes are making me warm this time"
the first words were spoken at the meat market

Back then, I thought of robbing a taxi driver
threatening him with a knife and a dog.

The lights of cars blind
the shop windows melt
in front of me, in a perfect demonstration, and everyone gets stuck
we carried seven Molotov cocktails and a black spray in a bag, hidden
to write poetry on the streets of a grey city burning
my gun is the spray that catches fire

The first time I sold a few kilos of weed
I have to pay the rent, little money but it's crap, not first class
The first time I worked as an escort
Sexworkers fall in love with their clients, it's sad, I know
Masters fall in love with their slaves, I know, never felt before
My first trip to Paris,
good money – I enjoyed it incredibly

The last time I smoked heroin
The last time I smelled a bit of death like a little girl
many children are secretly in heaven

We've learned to bite others and it's getting dark outside
Everyone just wants to be able,
to be able, to work, to be able to hate, to be able to wear
a woven silk shroud
every Saturday night

The last time I wondered why
Some choose to be heroes and others followers

Nothing anymore is from my life

Make love to me now
the two of us, my love, we're not enough
with the brave ones, we'll come now.

GORDAN STRUIĆ

TRAIN WINDOW

The glass shakes
with every turn of the track,
my face returns
blurred in the reflection –
younger, almost,
as if the years
had stayed behind
at the station.

A woman across the aisle
peels an orange,
the scent carries
through the carriage,
sharper than memory.

I press my hand
against the window,
trying to hold the fields
that keep rushing past,
but the glass
does not keep anything,
not even breath.

Later,
when the train slows,
I notice the peel left
on the empty seat beside her –
curled into a spiral,
a small geography of absence.

ILIAS TSAGAS

FLAMENCO DANCER

Flamenco dancer -
a centipede sweeps the stage
legs that multiply

GORDAN STRUIĆ

SEARCH: MADRID

02:13.
I open Photos, type Madrid,
the sound of the keyboard
– like footsteps in a hallway.

Results appear:

calle_olvido_01.jpg
a doorway with peeling paint,
the colour somewhere between wine
and pain.

respira_despacio.wav
your breath, then mine,
then traffic, distant as a seashell.

manos_con_sal_2.jpg
a close-up of fingers,
salt glittering like quiet electricity.

Maps suggests a path I never took.
Blue pin, grey streets.
I pinch to zoom until the pixels lose
their names.

nota_para_luego.txt
one line only: buy apples.
I try to remember if we did.

lluvia_suave_ventana.wav
soft rain against glass,
the same tempo as our last silence.

beso_guardado.pdf
fails to load.
The spinner turns, as if rehearsing a
small planet.

I scroll to the bottom and the phone
asks
if I want to delete duplicates.
My thumb hesitates over Select All.

In the search bar, the word remains,
bright as a cursor blinking:

Madrid –
un archivo de lo que falta.
A file of what is missing.

AZALEA AGUILAR

EVERY SINGLE THING

I spent all Saturday searching
for something to satisfy this hunger
made homemade chicken soup
tried baking my first artisan loaf
served some apple pie
allowed myself one more slice
tried a piece of dark chocolate
wondered if hungry was what it was
after none of these sufficed
opened the blinds, closed the blinds
played Dylan's *Blood on the Tracks*
Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*
began a deep clean of the pantry
tossed expired masa
decided we were never going to use
that bag of organic pumpkin seeds
gave baking goods their own shelf
took all the utensils out
organized them by use
stacked measuring cups and spoons
decided to mop all the floors
on my hands and knees
a bucket and a rag
like momma used to do
slid my nails into crevices
to clean lint old as this house
washed mirrors with newspaper
like daddy taught me
rummaged through old files
tossed paystubs from 2018
flipped through old writing journals
tried salvaging stanzas
found old photos of me
one from high school prom
showed it to my girls
they were not so interested
decided not to do that again
thought about having a cold beer
salt, lime, and tajin on the rim
or a strong pour of merlot
in the glasses my mother in law
gifted us before she knew
I stopped drinking
made myself chai tea instead
read another book about trauma
The Myth of Normal by Gabor Mate
highlighted text like "we pass on

to our offspring what we
haven't resolved in ourselves" and
"the more severe the trauma,
the more total that loss."
dog eared pages where
there was too much to highlight
I was going to give up sugar
but then the cold came
and all my body craved
was every single thing

JOSEPH HUNTER

HITCHHIKING (2006)

Van full of tools and tired men
coming down Pyrenean mountain
I was young and didn't know it
felt old as the rocks, as the sleep
the tired working men slept
driver asked me about the war
I didn't know what war he meant
all wars were the same to me
all men were the same, too.

They were building a new tunnel
they'd come from Algeria
they were men who smelled of dust
their faces were mottled and grey
driver asked about the war, smiled
I think he meant the War on Terror
but the question made me afraid
I didn't know how to answer him.

They left me a mile from Lleida
mountains pink and forgiving behind
city dappled, chattering below.

JOSEPH HUNTER

YOU WERE THERE BESIDE ME AT THE WEDDING

You were there beside me at the wedding
I thought for a moment that you were her
but you were you, and saw my hand
reaching out to touch your back

but there were all those days, remember?
On wooden benches, in piled bedclothes
smiles and hands and suppressed laughter
I fell into the river after an all-nighter

my dinner suit was sodden and limp
we kissed in the hallway outside my room
the others were inside sleeping and talking
your lips were cold, I tasted of river.

JOSEPH HUNTER

THERE WHERE YOU REMAIN

Nailed-up grandfather-built garden house
Eastwood Nottingham by the organic farm
cold in winter hot in summer flat roof thin walls
there where you remain, and I can't go.

I remember when you were 11
strangle-tight black rollneck, white Nikes, smiling
we played basketball, you did silly voices
later your voice broke, got silly again
shattered clarion calling your brothers
striding the playground on puberty legs.

And was it because of your sweaty hands
like greasy greenhoused meat in summer?
Was it the red minefield your face became
oily mass of acne confessing pus?
Or was it getting dumped last day of school
when we played pool together in silence?

I went to college, you lived in that house
you never came out – couldn't come out
your PlayStation controllers were sweat-slick
us side by side, watching the milky screen.

I don't know the way to your garden house
I can't go to see you there anymore
but I remember high sounds the wind made
the squirrels and their stop-frame hands
and the bat we found under the fascia
black knot of brittle bones and blind sleep.

SARAS MOODLEY

ODE TO MY BLACKNESS

(Response to Sharon Old's, 'Ode to my Whiteness')

How could I have ignored you,
when you were always so present?
You followed me everywhere—
from birth to here.

On the park bench that said
'*Whites Only*', you chased me
to *my* side of Pietermaritzburg.

Where the roads were dotted
with potholes, mud, and dead juniper,
where the gardens were tangled
in brush and aimless lines of flaccid
marigolds,
where the streetlights were cold,
and electricity and water
sparse and broken—

~~the side of town where we, the so-called
'Indians' lived—
far from Woodlands, and Edendale,
where the so-called 'Coloureds' and
'Africans' lived.~~ [1]

Far from the northern suburbs
where the '*white*' people lived,
far from their lofty villas
and princely-scaped gardens,
far from their majestic golf
and rugby country clubs.

You have planted yourself
in the marrow of my bones,
in the nameless corners
of this loose-fitting sky,
in this other land I now call home.
I lie below sea-level unable
to swim upwards to breathe again.
You've left me marked,
deformed, distempered
and even here the orange soil
speaks in your fractured
grammar of intolerance,
and glass fences,
of *us* and *them*—

South Africa, I bleed still
the same fearful tears
of those dark days before 1994.

Those crowded days
of heat, dust, and sweat,
when grown women and men
were called girls and boys.
Bare-footed and blistered
they'd walk for miles to
serve their *white baas*[2]—
in their homes, on their mines
and on their farms.

In the backdrop of that damp
existence, the ever-present
burning of coal, plastic and
wood fires swooned the early
morning township air, as mothers,
daughters, and wives hung over
their fires, and with their
cracked hands, prepared a thin
breakfast of *mealie-meal pap*. [3]

Come evening, the day's decay
piled up in pit latrines, heaps of
rotting garbage, and dirt-roads
lined with stagnant puddles of
urine, clogging the night's air, as
homeless dogs barked through
the cow-dung-watered streets.
They were the days and nights
of boot-stamping police raids
and *pass-controls*. [4]

But even amidst the smell
of hardship and oppression,
there was a lighting of
incense, the roasting of spices,
the stewing of meat, the performance
of life-rituals, and song & dance:
people got married, had children,
grew old, and died...

South Africa, I did not leave you,
& you did not leave me.

[1] I strike out these words, making them vaguely visible in my poem in resistance and abhorrence of the apartheid racial categories as they were used in South Africa up to 1994. In apartheid South Africa, the *Population Registration Act* of 1950, classified all South Africans as either 'White/European'; 'African/Native/Bantu'; and 'Coloured'. Indians/Asians (that is, South Asians from the former British India, and their descendants) were added later as a separate classification as they were seen as having 'no historical right to the country'. <<https://www.source.library.utoronto.ca/southsetter.pdf>>. <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/apartheid>>. <<https://www.sehistory.org.za/article/timeline-group-areas-act-and-selected-related-pieces-legislation>>. [accessed 17/06/25].

PS. I strongly oppose using these racial categories, especially in the light of this apartheid history. However, it must be noted that these terms continue to be used in a democratic South Africa. In the post-1994 South African context there are still those who willingly embrace such categories in defining their own identity. <<https://www.source.library.utoronto.ca/southsetter.pdf>>. <<https://theconversation.com/coloured-south-africans-are-all-but-erased-from-history-textbooks-i-asked-learners-how-that-makes-them-feel-234832>>. [accessed 17/06/25].

[2] white baas: this term was commonly used in a master-servant relationship within the apartheid system that prevailed until 1994 in South Africa. Today it is regarded as a derogatory term. (various internet sources)

[3] Mealie-meal pap: is a porridge made from fine maize meal and can be eaten as a sweet or savoury dish. It is a staple food for the majority of South Africans. (various internet sources)

[4] pass-controls: Under apartheid, the pass laws restricted the movement of all Black South Africans, keeping them confined to designated areas. If a person was found outside of these areas they were arrested. All black South Africans were compelled to identify themselves at all times with a pass document. This was regularly checked by on the spot checks by police. (various internet sources)

CHARLIE BAYLIS

I CARRY LILAC HIBBERT IN MY PINK TIGER MOUTH

she bites my neck
strawberries ripen on the vine
pink angels swooping in from the pink ocean
mourning & she sucks my skin

as if i loved her as if love
is a body of want

or if love is jane birkin
tickling the oysters in the hot french sunlight
in tiger print
in chapel white polka dots
sipping a cappuccino on the boulevards of hot paris

tortured, ludic & pure
teenagers

whose tongue searched the mouth of charlie baylis
who set charlie down on his knees
took his dreams & buried him under
chestnut trees

shuffling dawn across the lawn
pushing up daisies
gathering together his highway years
falling in love

KEVIN MACALAN

I DON'T KNOW S C FLYNN

I don't know S C Flynn,
the Australian Irish poet
who thinks pragmatically
while commentating
the coming apocalypse.

Like I don't know
a few billion others,
and time to leverage
the commonalities that unite us
is running low.

We're in the epoch
of the brindled cow,
and must learn our place
before the cold kills us
or hubris bleaches our bones.

We respect the wrong nature.
We respect politicians
whose nature is division.
What if the final dismay
at a minute to twelve

is finding amity
with the othered
(or friending an antipodean muse)
with only time enough to hear
I told you so?

HOPE

KEVIN MACALAN

I remember you there when my mother beat me,
when trust fled,
when I pleaded
with the dumb dark edge of the world
for the Earth to turn,
for the slow creep of light to rinse shadows,
and everything done under their cover.

Then later, when I tilted my head
and slid a hand across the sleek surface
of my grandmother's mahogany table,
cast away in that cheerless room,
adults, death, the scent of too many lilies,
my hand reaching your fingertips,
the touch of solace pointing beyond loss.

Later still, when I carried my child to A&E,
blood in his trusting eyes,
tears in mine,
you helped me lift him,
helped bear the weight of fear,
as you did the day I buried my father,
wanting to go with him; staying for you.

Even later, weren't you there
when I had three careers in two years?
Where did you go when I paid the manic toll?
The come down, down, down,
the narcoleptic regret,
my dismal soul
dissolving in rain on the steps beneath Eros.

I remember the chore of remaining without you,
the inertia of being,
the ache to slip away into nothing,
until the shock of bumping into you,
turning a corner, finding you again
in a new face, a body with a beating heart,
that infectious belief.

Would that all who lose you
were gathered back
before losing themselves.

ROBERT MCDONALD

MONSTERS

Sometimes I woke up when my father came home, drunk
enough that he had trouble with the lock, and this was the fault
of the keys, or the door, the goddamn lock, or my mother.
Then I'd hear the sound of furniture moving, his grunt
as he moved the couch across the room or tipped over

the kitchen table. Next to my bed I had a collection
of snap-together models, they glowed in the dark,
Godzilla, who might smash and burn down your city,
or fight another monster on your behalf.
And Frankenstein's monster, as played

by Boris Karloff, an ogre assembled from the parts
of other people, held together with bolts and stitches.
The Monster understood beauty, but he had trouble
expressing himself. That scene, for example,
when he throws the little girl into the water,

so she can be with the flowers. In those years, my father
plunged into midnight, threw himself into the deep part
of the lake, hoping green-bottled beer
would bloom the evening
into roses.

.

ON MY MUM'S EIGHTIETH BIRTHDAY

SAM SZANTO

I send a text with a balloon GIF
from the train. I check
the app to see if my son has homework.

An hour later, the text is undelivered.
She has not replied to yesterday's. At York station,
I have twenty-three minutes to get to the classroom

where I am teaching a poetry workshop
for my full-time PhD
on attachment and absence.

In an overheated room with twenty students
young enough to be my children, I think of how
my mum did a BA and got a first aged fifty,

under the table, I check my phone:
blank screen.
I see sirens, hear the hospital trolley.

At lunchtime, my text is undelivered
and the return train is cancelled.
Someone must fetch my daughter.

The rain hard on my spine, I open the door
to hear my son screaming at a video game
while my daughter yells about how loud he is.

Mum does not answer her phone.
I clutch my rectangular black box
as though it contains a soul.

I call my father. *She's fine.*
Mum says, *My phone was on silent,*
I was helping the elderly this morning.

MY FATHER'S HANDS

SAM SZANTO

were made for dancing
on typewriter keys, for gripping
steering wheels, for decanting whisky
and holding a pipe, for gesturing
in the courtroom

and the bathroom
as he made up stories. His hands
lit fireworks, grew vegetables, met mine
when we crossed a road,
my fingers tucked in

around his, thick, warm
and hairy as a bear in a fairy-tale,
bone and muscle tamed by olive skin. When
I cried, those hands shambled
in circles on my back.

They were steadier
on the pages of the ephemeris
as he looked up planetary aspects,
working out when life
might change.

Now our hands
meet like branches, rough-hewn
and worn. His arthritic, mine callused, veins
close to the surface. My children's
toffee fingers stick to his.

LOOK, FLOWERS!

SIOBHAN O'CONNOR

We collect pine cones
In a town called Miraflores
Which translated literally means
Look, Flowers

We crouch under an old tree
With branches that droop
So low they make a tent
For us to shelter in

We play hide and seek
You clamber up a slippery slope
Your fingertips grip a mossy wall
I pretend I cannot find you

We eat pizza out of a box
On a standard double bed
At the three-star hotel in
Look, Flowers

We laugh like two infants
You snort and I take selfies
And I think about how joyful
A silly night in a hotel is

And how memories are made
When we take little breaks
From our people and places and we
Look, Flowers

But then I remember
All those infants and mothers
Who when fleeing the bombs
Of PalestineSyriaUkraine
Can afford one night's rest
In a hotel along the way

Do they make memories too?
Do they order chocolate cake?
Do the mothers pretend
When they play hide and seek?

And when the children ask please
Can we just stay here?
What do the mothers say then?
Do they lie through their teeth?

Do they say
Hush now my darling and
Look, Flowers?

BULLY SLASH VICTIM

MARCUS SLINGSBY

Dear Peter,
You held my hand
onto a hot radiator
in a cold classroom
years before
the thought had entered
Zuckerberg's mind
that would tell me
forty years too late
that you'd lost
your brother and
your mam was reeling.

LAST CIGARETTE

MARCUS SLINGSBY

Smoke and black
tea the tailgate

down, sat with
an artist &

soldier; weary eyed
homesickness is harder

to draw than
homelessness.

She could have
drawn the salmon

sunset but tells
me gunpowder and

sump oil are
the perfect composition

for death heavy
clouds.

PROMETHEAN COFFEE

ALEX PADINA

I never told you about those mornings.
The pink and purple hues.
A light fog and the pale moon
as a lingering testament of the night.
Today, again.
The dreamy canvas of celestial proportions.
And here and there, dead trees,
a small farm and a lonely white horse.
And the sun's flames above the mountains
painting the firmament in fiery
orange swirls and peach undertones.
Like a cosmic madman with a giant spatula,
it has whirled the colours in the sky.

Below, next to the road,
hiding in the bushes lays a bird's corpse.
It doesn't get to see much of this oneiric spectacle.
Ants feast on its insides but its black eye is still shiny,
the glossy surface reflecting only the dampest leaves.
And my dream turns to an office cubicle
so I write these lines.
I cough and, to my surprise,
I spit some ants on the napkin.
The fog has devoured the orange tones,
the sights now are pretty grey.

Deep inside me, a white blood cell has chased a
bacterium.
As the bitter taste of ants and coffee haunts my mouth
I remember Prometheus, the Three Sisters of Fate,
and other stuff from Greek legends.

Don't you just love Monday mornings?
There's so much beauty
albeit just for a few seconds.

THE JAWS OF THE SUN

CARMELLA DE KEYSER

As tender as a melting ice cube heart in my mouth,
As tender as sea foam flirting on pearl grey rock,
As tender as the dying light betwixt the pine blinds smokes,
As tender as the last yawn of the day gently closes,
As tender as the bow hits the low-voiced cello,
As tender as the weeping willow of fall, fades from green to yellow-
The sun's jaws soften me into tenderness.
A cerebral soaking.
Into the light...

THE LONG PURSUIT

VICTORIA SPIRES

Drawn back to the lake, as though my heart
Must always follow these same desire lines -

I look for your trail of dirty brushstrokes
In every sky; off-white on grey. The path is soft

Today - I feel its ache, in how it leavens
With the knead of my footsteps, and my breath

Comes pre-distilled, pluming like esters before
Your drinking eye. We are of a feather, you and

I, and here we are again, wrestling grace from
Anti-grace. A man was found here, once - did you

Know his name? I like to think he merely
Slipped, just one skipped tread in this same

Game we always play, and that you stayed
With him, in vigil, as he fringed the water's edge.

PATIENT, THE TREES

JOHN KENNY

Trees allow themselves
to be played
by the wind,
their leaves
applauding.

Trees talk silently
to each other,
branches touch,
roots seek out and
caress the earth.

Trees bend to our
burning, our slashing,
our sawing, our
hammering into
new shapes.

Trees are playing
a long game, safe
in the knowledge
they will be here
when we are gone.

HOOVES LIKE COWBOY BOOTS

ADEN THOMAS

You don't remember,
but there was that night
about a month ago,
after drinking all that sangria,
I came to you as a bison
through the mist of a dream,
singing like Chris Stapleton.

I was powerful
with my animal elegance,
with my hooves
like cowboy boots,
that I'm quite sure
had the dream continued,
I would have eaten
straight from the palm
of your ballerina hands.

UNDER STRIP LIGHT

GRAHAM CLIFFORD

You put something in your will,
a task or clause that you think is funny.

And you have pre-paid for
a novel service that provides for the legal disposal of bodies
in a way that will leave no trace.
You want to vanish.

You have emptied the loft of our childhood toys
and sent our schools books and paintings
and report cards and immunisations documents
to us. And my retelling of Cinderella
on yellow card. Typed. Illustrated
with wax crayon.

This all makes you breathe easier.
You have digitised the albums of sticky photos to throw them away —
Dad making us stand on the edge of a cliff in the rain.

You are tidying up as you leave over decades
painting yourselves out of rooms, leaving them
disastrously empty.

Once, I looked and looked for something
in your bedroom, at the back of drawers, not believing
the cursory, operational fact of you.
There had to be more.
I needed smoke and grease,
40 watt bulb-gloom clammy with nutrients

but you are fresh, plastic pipes
stacked neatly in a carpet showroom
under strip light
smelling of Leylandii.

PADRE NUESTRO
ANA TRICULESCU

Dios, ¿a dónde te has ido?
Aquí haces falta, aquí te necesitan.
¿Vienes, vuelves?

Dios, ¿estás? ¿Dónde te podemos encontrar?
No vaya a ser que has huido,
Tú también,
Junto a quienes huyen por sus vidas
Del hambre, de los truenos, del temor.
¿Has encontrado un cupo en los camiones,
Tras rejas, escondido;
O en algún contenedor,
Como producto de carnicería?

¿Será que te has ido,
Abandonando toda fe en esta
Humanidad?

¿Empezaste la semana desde cero en otro planeta,
Intentando el experimento una vez más,
Esperando que en esta nueva vuelta
La prueba salga bien?

Dios, ¿vas a volver?
Aquí haces falta, aquí te necesitan.

Dios, nos traicionaste.
Las oraciones se quiebran al desertar los labios,
Se deshacen, se descosen.
Las palabras pierden el hilo,
La aguja no las atraviesa.
El grosor de la connotación
No permite colgarlas como dijes.
No se llevan en el pecho
Como medalla de San Miguel,
No trenzan coronas de laurel.

Dios, ¿cuándo vuelves?
Aquí haces falta, aquí te necesitan.
El plomo es pluma. Vuela.
Más ligero. Más etéreo. Vuela.
Más fácil. Más rápido. Mejor.
Más. Más. Más.
Mata.

Dios, ¡vuelve!
Tu palabra no es verdad.
Se cuestiona. Se dobla. Se tuerce.
Las palabras las perfora el plomo.

¿Volverás...?

TO THE SMALL FIELD THAT SEPARATES GETAFE AND LEGANÉS

RUBY DORAN MEIRA

If I had less to do,
I would visit more often.
On a bus that barely clears corners,
I stare as your gnarled roots twist into sigils
And wilt into frail yellow knots.

If you only knew,
You would feed your leaves proudly.
Sharp shoots of mad green puncture blue,
Enraptured in homage, an instinctual rage
Of somewhere some distance from here.

The roads have forgotten
Your bygone dominion.
Wedged primly as power grid rigging,
The headstone afforded to your half-sealed grave,
A motel with a faux-Chinese roof.

You haunt my commute
With inscrutable purpose.
Split-second confessions betray you,
And in speechless wisdom you still serve the damned
Who hide from the sprawl under dust.

Whenever it rains now,
I listen for sprouting.
The groan of a sapling limb daring,
To creep past the K-rail and sop up the diesel,
And silence a death-rattle exhaust.

If ever you wanted,
I'd leap right out to you.
I'd stomp and blow air into soil,
I'd throw up a cabin and sleep there to prove it,
You're better than no grass at all.

If you have to die now,
You'll be dying twice over.

FIRST CHRISTMAS IN CATALONIA LIZZIE HOLDEN

There's no red robin
everything is blue
and tinselled with sunlight.
Flurries of white waves
and the soft crunch of sand.
Church bells tumble
through crisp nights.
Oranges hang luminous on the tree
illuminated by the perfect moon.

AFTER WORK, TEACHERS TALK ABOUT OTHER WAYS TO MAKE MONEY WITH THEIR BODIES

BRITTNEY WALKER-ZALESKI

We'll become stepmothers one colleague says
as he checks out rich daddies
discussing business at the burger place.

Maybe there's a way to be a sugar baby
without spooning out any sugar.
Maybe I can find some patron of the words
who gives me euros
to know what's on my mind
or maybe
I can teach topless online.

We talk about other ways
to make money with our bodies.

Did you hear about the girl who stopped shaving?
She sells her photos online.
Did you see the other one who sits on cakes?

Sometimes being an English teacher
isn't that much different from being a sex worker.

At one language school we called students
"customers."
Customers who could request
a specific gender or accent.

I remember hearing that lonely people
hire sex workers for conversation.

Do you know how many times
I've comforted a divorced,
recently redundant man?

I corrected all his grammar mistakes
I gave him thorough
feedback on his CV.

AUTO-FICTION

JULIE RUNACRES

First up, the yellow Passat that was
your mother's. When I backed out
hoping for the best I stove in
the nearside wing. Next, the '67

Beetle, red – minestrone
gearbox we stirred with a stick
of spaghetti. Designer Dalmatian
on the black vinyl bench

ears pinned back as we sped
to The Rosie when my waters broke
reaching for the instant coffee.
Parenthood made us reckless. Swapped

it for a Porsche, same colour. Blew
the proceeds from the house we sold
when we couldn't pay the mortgage.
On a July evening on a humpback

bridge the whole pub garden
cheered. Legged it to Oz and a tin-can
Daihatsu, unbreakable
even in deserts. We never hit

a 'roo. Back home to the family
saloons, the MPVs. I drove
the Espace too fast on the Witney
by-pass. A Toyota like Boxer

on diesel hoofed all the children,
carted grandparents. One day you
saw three generations in the rear view.
We traded it in. You cried.

AGREE TO DIFFER

LIAM BOYLE

It happens sometimes, maybe late evening over a bottle of wine
we raise one of those issues difficult to decide.

You suddenly are rigid in your attitude, I in mine.

You suggested once "we agree to differ;" in horror I replied
"That's an option for moral cowards, not us."

So we fought like cats over scraps, with honesty and pride.

But I'm tired of the way every issue we discuss
becomes one of unyielding principle. We agree on such a lot,
why not let the positive be the centre of our focus?

At this stage, I should make clear what these lines are not:
They are not meant either as betrayal or surrender.
It's just that now I want to repair and to build on what we've got.

I don't want to ignore the ugly, but to promote the tender.
Let's make a space for elements of splendour.

MUSEU NACIONAL D'ART DE CATALUNYA

NICOLA TOFT LAHIFF

Guards here follow you
like eyes in the pictures.
This one's leaning on a rail
staring at a girl; she's gazing up

at Christ in His Majesty,
who looks down on her,
His eyes all round and deadpan.
'I am the Light of the World.'

It's a job.

I WAKE TO JACOB MARLEY'S CHAINS

EWEN GLASS

I fully expect a visitation
but it's the cat's collar
and her day-bright bell,
a furious setting of the
scene and my options:
adhere or
bear the burden of her
dismay for nine lifetimes.
I inch over and let her
sleep in the warm patch,
with all her ghosts and mine.

CHARLES PENTY

SILOS MONASTERY, ROMANESQUE CLOISTER

(For John Wezelman)

My last living uncle calls
unexpectedly from Canada,
concerned I might be depressed.
In Silos, there is a cypress

like a sword blade, enhiesto!
Where Gothic meets the Romanesque,
the guide points out a painted minstrel
playing a four-stringed Amazigh oud,

his song carries across seven centuries
to the garden where a February mist
is clearing. Dear John, I am
still in my right mind, just

grasping for the lightsomeness
scattering from this sculpted scene
in its star-field where the doubting apostle probes
the wound in the side of Jesus.

Enhiesto – held aloft in Spanish

ANTHONY WADE

FOREVER

A particular pain
lies in the loss of you,
child not borne into our lives,
to no avail
the warm nourishing
of your promised life
in your mother's fertile womb,
instead the cruel snuffing out
of all future days,
and a life's every chancing die
remaining forever uncast.

You will forever play
only in the disturbed dreams
of your lonely parents,
a line of promised candles unlit
and stretching nowhere
unlighting your Mother's
darkened heart forever broken
for you who long lay unseen
in her lightless growing womb,
and now in your lightless tiny tomb
will lie forever unseen.

THE COUPLET

JUAN M. MARTÍNEZ

When I do count the clock that tells time,
empieza el Soneto XII de Shakespeare
en aquel librito de mesa de tapa azul
que en la mañana había dejado
como anzuelo para la visita de un gran amigo.
Venía de Canadá —con whiskey de maple
y el frío de invierno pegado a los huesos—
a estas tierras peninsulares de la Florida.
También llegó con un blanco
más copioso en su pelo
y, por lo demás, los rasgos intactos.

“Es una escena de Lost Highway”,
se había atrevido a asociar mi amigo
en nuestro viaje zen por las carreteras
campestres del norte de la Florida.
El sol había caído y aparte de las luces
(en el sentido contrario)—
y los ojos de los venados a la orilla—
todo parecía estar en total oscuridad,
a menos que miráramos a las estrellas
y que por un instante soltara el volante
como un reto de niños en la vía

Las cartas en la política nacional—
y por ende mundial—se habían jugado;
credos, mitos, “ciencias”, y hasta religiones
se habían sacudido, quizás mezclado
como una baraja de borrachos.
Pero aún escuchábamos las canciones
de siempre en el equipo del carro.
No lloramos, como de costumbre,
pero tampoco contemplamos la posibilidad

Todo terminó con una ida a una iglesia
de no-sé-qué denominación
y una pizza con cerveza.
“Lo curioso son esos dos últimos versos”,
Pensó mi amigo en voz alta, volviendo al soneto.
The couplet, recordé remotamente
que así se llamaban.
“Son como una explicación,
como una moraleja”,
traté torpemente de explicar.
Luego seguí con mi cerveza.
And nothing 'gainst Time's scythe can make defence,
dice el primero de esos dos versos del final.

EL NIÑO

JUAN M. MARTINEZ

Se encontró un palito en la tierra
bajo el árbol que desde entonces
o quizá desde siempre
le dio la sombra

El palito no era uno cualquiera;
tan grande como él mismo,
capaz de espantar las hormigas de su guarida
y de sacudir las abejas de los bosques

pero el niño tropezaba y tropezaba
y recogía y recogía su palito,
luego no lloraba
sino que reía

sin dientes reía y el palito se materializaba
como el de los grandes alquimistas
que le arrancan el oro al detrito
como la espada libertadora

como la que aplasta y castiga
y sin sangre desangra
como el bolígrafo para la carta de amor
para la sentencia de muerte

y la madre lo alza en sus brazos
para nunca dejarlo ir
y el palito bajo el árbol
en la sombra

PALLBEARER BLUES

CIARAN BUCKLEY

Face the coffin, the undertaker's assistant says,
Face the coffin, and the man himself,
Weeks from retirement, adds
That it is in fact the early bird that catches the worm,
He doesn't want you to be late, that's the very last thing he wants.

So, the six of us get it on our shoulders
Out of the back of the long-black car,
Struggle with directions, half-cut
In the piss-taking rain, miss the church entirely

Walk on, hope for the best
Trying not to drop it, let it crush us,
But it isn't easy,
The hills nearly kill us,
The shadow of a hungry bird circles,
Each time we see a hill our hearts sink.

We drop off, God knows where, the boozier, home,
Thirst, fatigue, dying from boredom, who knows,
You can almost see them, defeated sparrows of the gutter,
They never complain, one moment they're not there,
Left with their share of the burden, the undertaker's echo,
His bony finger poking your face.

You stumble for what must be the seventh time,
The arrogant bird, knowing the end is at hand, whistles a tune.

Shook, from the box a voice rises,
Stuttering out through broken teeth
"The early bird catches the worm
But I am the worm you cannot catch".

Mocked, the merciless bird swoops
Hoping to rip the soul from the body,
Strikes you down, the last weak man, slashes your cheek.

Starving for a second death
It tears the wood to splinters
But inside finds nothing
But snatches of laughter, an IOU, unsent letters,
A pair of odd shoes, half a bottle of vodka.

All the hopeless, hideous, heartless,
Wormless, devilish, bastard bird can do,
Outside the boarded-up church,
Is wait for night, whistle, dream of worms,
Wonder if he's past his prime, wait for dawn.

AT THE WESTERN EDGE OF EUROPE

GWYNETH BOX

Palm fronds prick at a volcanic sky
and bright hibiscus leer at pink-skinned
foreigners. I stand on a grey beach.
Black breakwaters guard my back;
beyond them lies all the heave and swell
of the Atlantic.

The boardwalk stalls
are bright with Disney towels, plastic
raffia hats and tax-free tat. Chippies,
tandooris and all-day-English-breakfast bars
are interleaved with burger grills.
Each time the scummy waves recede, I feel
America suck the sand from under my heels.

POINT OF ORIGIN

GWYNETH BOX

The house where I was born's a blank.
And yet I know my parents slept for years
in that same high bed that cushioned
my entry into the world. I remember
metal twisted tight in coils that buoyed
the mattress where my mother
twisted in her labour. Eyes shut,
my fingertips recall the bevelled edge
of head- and foot-board, smooth and warm,
and dark as coffinwood. My birthplace
travelled with us – north, then south,
then north again – the moving centre
of my infancy. Now street-view maps
reveal anonymous grey pebbledash
and slates slicked bright with English rain.

MEMORY OF YOU

JUDE FIRESONG

I've been focusing
on the cowardly way
you let us drift apart
just enough for me
to realise you'd gone

because it's so much easier
to cuss you out
for a few months of fuckery
than sit down & deal with
the loss of everything you are
and everything we were

you said you wanted to take away
some of the obstacles in my path
and so you did, more than you
ever let me give you credit for

you held me through each dissociative seizure
until one day it just dawned on me —
oh wait — I haven't had
one of those in months

you held me as I cried
over my alien body
until I got myself a chop-top
and I had no reason to cry anymore

you believed in me
being a boy, and a good one
when all the world
made my world tremble

in your eyes
on your lips
I discovered love
& true happiness

and I know I'm lucky
I got to hold you tight
in my swimmer's arms
for as long as I did

so for as long as I live
I cannot — I will not
— I refuse to let go

of the memory of you.

WATCHING THE SUN SET IN CÁDIZ AFTER THREE GLASSES OF SHERRY
CHARLES PENTY

Have you seen how the sunset spills
its bottle of *palo cortado*
onto the tablecloth of the late snows
spread over the Sierra in early April,

how a cool evening in spring
golden skinned like muscatel grapes
wraps herself in a dark cape,
adjusts her hat with the broad brim,

settles at a table in a *tabanco* in Cádiz,
tops up her glass with *Pedro Ximénez*,
watches the lanterns light one by one

on the ships anchored beyond the *Malecón*,
the sherry-hued sky clear over the bay
honey-coloured, like *Tío Pepe*?

tabanco: Andalusian tavern

AUTHOR SPOTLIGHT

Writers to Watch: Six New Voices Shaping Today's Literary Landscape

Every so often, a group of writers appears whose work reminds us why stories and poems matter — that words still have the power to confront history, explore emotion, and make sense of our world. The six authors we're spotlighting this season each bring a distinct energy and sensibility to contemporary writing, from historical fiction to experimental poetry and translation.

Jerry Simcock opens the list with his debut novel *Giselle and Mr. Memphis*, a haunting, multi-layered work set in 1970s Frankfurt. Told through the journal of Ignatz Himmelsputz - a dwarf, entertainer, and survivor - the novel examines guilt, trauma, and moral responsibility in the aftermath of war. Simcock's experience as a teacher and his time living in Germany infuse the story with compassion and authenticity.

In a very different register, Julian Gorham's *Ten Poems* and *Ten Poems Too* are a masterclass in linguistic rhythm and design. A long-time copywriter and creative director, Gorham brings musicality to the printed page, celebrating the beauty of words both seen and heard. Produced in a limited letterpress edition by Paekakariki Press, both collections explore nature, transience, and connection in a way that feels both timeless and tactile - a refreshing analogue experience in a digital age.

Steve Denehan, an award-winning Irish poet, offers a collection that feels like a conversation with life itself. *A Quarter Dead and Half Alive* captures the everyday textures of existence - ageing parents, growing children, fleeting joys - with humour, insight, and tenderness. Denehan's voice is one of empathy and quiet strength, his poems companions for the ordinary and the extraordinary alike.

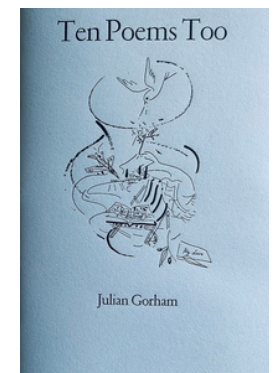
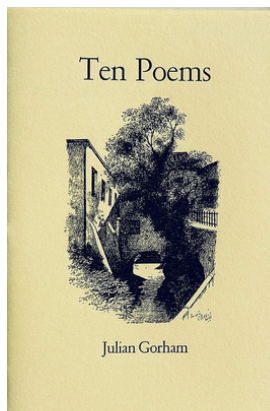
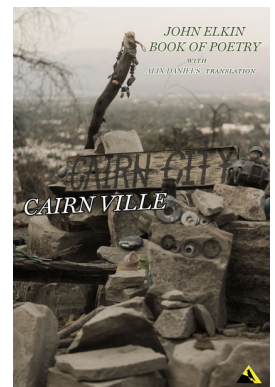
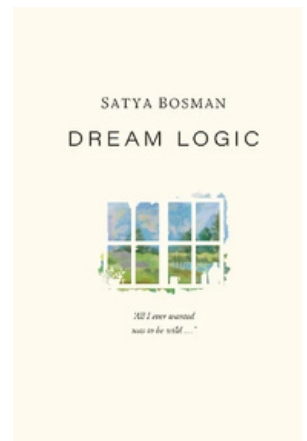
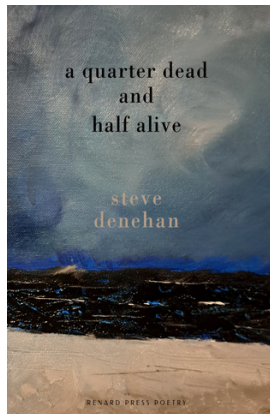
With *Dream Logic*, Satya Bosman - poet, editor, and founder of Black Cat Poetry Press - presents a debut collection that moves between myth, memory, and the mysteries of the heart. Her poems hover in that space where loss becomes renewal, where the past feels vivid but unreachable. Lyrical and intimate, *Dream Logic* asks what it means to belong and how we navigate the thresholds between reality and reverie.

Finally, John Elkin and Alix Daniel (also known as Docteur Cybirdy) collaborate on *Cairn City/Cairn Ville*, a bilingual and illustrated edition that reimagines poetry as architecture - a city built from language itself. Elkin's vision of "Anthropoetry" merges anthropology, myth, and imagination, while Daniel's French translation mirrors his rhythm and tone with musical precision. Together, they create a work that transcends linguistic and cultural borders, offering readers a truly immersive experience.

Alix Daniel is also the celebrated translator of *Ariel: Percy Bysshe Shelley*, the classic text by Andre Maurois. Amidst scandals—expulsions, financial woes, child losses—Maurois evokes Shelley's skylark-like spirit, soaring yet earthbound. Daniel's 2025 translation revives this classic for modern readers, infusing her version with idiomatic vitality and accessibility. It skips "lightly along," correcting dated phrasing from D'Arcy's while preserving Maurois' poetic cadence.

Each of these writers brings something unique to the page — a new way of seeing, feeling, and understanding. Whether through the haunting echoes of history, the music of words, or the layering of translation and image, they invite us to explore what it means to be human in all its complexity.

If you'd like to know more about our featured authors and their books, simply scan the QR code on the left.



THE WORLD PLUS THE WORK

JAYNE MARSHALL

And then he uttered the subtlest thing of all, that sly wooer: he who loves, he said, is more divine than the beloved, because god is in the former, but not in the latter.

I saw it today.

Under the searing, relentless Madrid sun. Mercifully, on the road near the apartment, there were rows of mature leafy trees every half-block or so. My steps beat out their rhythm: sun/shade, hot/cold, light/dark, clip/clop. I checked the piece of paper with the approximate address scribbled on it. On my phone, the film was ready to play at the scene outside the front door. I stopped and looked over the road at number 62. I raised my eyes to the sky, at the layers of the apartment block soaring upwards, the contents of each balcony revealing something about the inhabitants. I looked at the chairs and tables of the pavement café on the corner, and at that orangey-coloured front door. I played the film.

¡Jacquemate!

The idea to look for the apartment had circled in my head for some time. Or rather, I circled it, enjoying the courtship, losing myself in daydreams. It's free, right? Harmless. And anyway, don't artists want us to immerse ourselves in their work? Isn't that the point of creating it in the first place? Perhaps they are less keen on the idea when the work implicates their own lives, their own selves. But if someone can show me where that line is, I'll consider staying on the correct side of it.

On a bench opposite Calle de ---, number 62, I sat and watched the apartment building, vigilant behind my sunglasses. I wanted to see what kinds of people were coming and going, and how often. Maybe even catch a glimpse of him. I didn't try to disguise myself in any way. The best place to hide is in plain sight, as everyone knows. I wasn't trying to *disimular* - a verb I learnt whilst watching his 1988 film *All About My Mother* and carefully noted down for future use. The curves of the letters, the soft sound - even before I looked it up in the dictionary, I sensed it was a word I needed to know. I didn't stay long. My objective had been achieved: find the flat. I could live off this not-so-secret knowledge for a while.

Have you noticed how everything is a version now? Artists have got into the habit of using their lives as source material, then translating it into something else. That's how this began. It wasn't my decision; I'm not in charge of genres - that's the eternal ebb and flow of art itself. What's that maxim? Art is long, life is short. It's probably something to do with that. Anyway, what I mean is that interleaving layers of fact with fiction doesn't really change either one, it's just shifting the view, looking at things from a different angle. It's almost an invitation for us to do the same. I don't know if this supports what I'm planning to do or not. Here is where I should explain what I'm planning to do.

But wait, I want to keep this neat and tidy. Nicely delineated - even if these artists don't afford us the same courtesy. So, let's go in chronological order. He had a precedent. Before The Film Director, there was The Singer.

I was 10 years old when I heard The Singer's voice for the first time. I was attracted to the funny drawing on the album cover *Talking with the Taxman About Poetry*. That title isn't original, I found out later - it was taken from a poem by Vladimir Mayakovsky. The Singer borrowed it, translated it, made it his. See what I mean about artists? His voice became lodged in my brain, like a seed or something, and from that moment on his voice flourished in the ecosystem of my body, weaving itself around my heart and in and out of my life.

My favourite video of The Singer is him performing live at the Dominion Theatre in 1988, the year *Workers Playtime* was released. Let's watch it together. Look. Look at his posture as he strikes the guitar... The way his clothes fit him, his hair, which always seems to be a little bit on its way to being in his eyes. The way his lips move in that particular, pouty way when he sings the words to the songs that move me so much, and how, when those words are very tender, he squints at the camera, as if it physically hurts him to expel them. I really should switch it off and get on with things; I'm sure you're wondering whose apartment I'm casing. But just wait. The setlist is about to move to "The Short Answer". Watch with me, with the same intensity as I do. It's an intensity not regularly applied to the more standard areas of life, and I bet if you stopped to think about that for a moment, you'd find you have your own Director or Singer. At least, I hope you would. We all need to escape relentless reality from time to time. Here it comes. Listen out for the lyric: "... I'm left standing here/With my hands down the front of my trousers". You know, that isn't his only reference to onanism. Though it makes sense - to me anyway - that an artist who sings about obsession, about monumental desire, would get around to it eventually. In "The Warmest Room" his tone is more playful, more plainly sensual, like when he sings:

And here she comes again
And I'm sitting on my hands
And she sings to me that siren song
Here she comes again and I'm biting my lip
But it won't be long

His hands... His hands on his guitar, his hands being restrained beneath him, his hands down the front of his trousers... Raymond Carver claimed that his own poems about sex and love turned him on. He wrote poems about those poems. Many artists say that if they can't make themselves feel their work, they can't expect their audiences to either. So, it has precedence, right? It's an invitation, too. I'm watching my own hand now, as it starts to move...

It was only after I followed The Director to Madrid, his adopted and beloved city, that I discovered The Singer's album *Workers Playtime* for the first time. Imagine - on Radio Nacional de España of all places! Hearing the beauty of his voice, the familiar lilt of his accent, was a welcome salve. Warm sun on my face on an autumn afternoon. It located me, in this strange city, gave purpose and meaning to my being here.

It was the first time I had heard him sing about love, and its counterpart: heartbreak. And about sex and infatuation. He made me think about the decisions we make, and that which spills forth from them and into the lives we create. I walked this foreign city, listening to his songs as ancient seams of feeling ripped themselves open, blending with his lyrics, creating my own version of his story, each one layered over the other, fact folded through fiction. And the lyric: "The temptation to take the precious things / We have apart to see how they work / Must be resisted for they never fit together again" running through my head. The longing *Workers Playtime* described spoke to me in a profound way that transcended actual heartbreak, though it seemed to encompass that too; the entire heartbreak of life itself, as if all of it were just one big breakup song. It sounds like I'm defending myself, doesn't it? Poeticising and so diminishing responsibility. Well, that didn't last long. It soon gave way to something less... passive.

At some point, I began to notice who the album was about. Or perhaps more accurately, for - written as it was, to target someone obliquely, at a remove. And so I began to wonder, who was this Mary? The tall girl, the barefoot girl, the little black cloud in a dress. The more I listened, the more the songs about Mary became the point where The Singer and I met. In those moments, I merged with something bigger than me. They came to stand for the whole thing, smushed together and speaking for the entirety, a pointillist mess with its own crazed, internal logic. I urgently wanted to know who Mary was and what she had that held The Singer so in thrall to her. The lyrics to "The Short Answer" provided a lead:

If anyone could help me with my obsession with
The young Susannah York
It was Mary

She was a British actress, active in the 60s and 70s. She played Superman's biological mother. We looked nothing alike. I listened to all the different versions of "The Short Answer" on YouTube that I could find. The demo version was particularly raw and heart-rending. Under it @studonaldson1497 had added the comment:

Ahem. I knew Mary a little. [The Singer] nicked her off a
mate of mine during a tour and then gave him a 'new man
proletarian socialist hug' to compensate which never really did.

A year later @aqhat3702 had asked:

is this true?

@studonaldson1497 replied:

Aqhat, sorry to say yes it is. It's not for me to judge but it
caused some hurt as those things always do. I really hope
everyone's now over it, Stu X

To which Aqhat, on the side of fairness and balance, closed the conversation with:

theres more than one perspective i guess

This was a link to the flesh and blood Singer. The real Singer doing real things, like stealing someone's girlfriend, breaking hearts and then having his own broken in turn. Someone on the other side of my screen had breathed and touched someone who had breathed and touched him. I found it extremely exciting to have him manifest in this way. And I wanted to maintain that excitement.

That said, with The Director it's different. Rather than the arguably more straightforward obsession with The Singer (which, let's face it, has the lingering taste of possession), it's more that I want to become The Director. Or somehow melt myself through his world. Which is the same thing as *becoming* him really because isn't he also infatuated with his own work, thus his own self? In *Pain and Glory*, his most autobiographical film, he says that all the money he made throughout his career, he used to buy art - huge canvases by Guillermo Pérez Villalta, gigantic on the walls of his central-Madrid apartment, on Calle de ---, number 62. Making, from his body of work (itself made from the stuff of his own life), a work of art within which to live.

On a class trip, when I was 14 and studying Spanish at school, our teacher took us to see a film by The Director. His work introduced me to a world that was so hugely different to the one I was living in - a grey, industrial city with its attitude of proud hopelessness. After that trip, I immersed myself in his work, taught myself how to live in these two very different worlds at once. Which was necessary because, the life I saw around me, I realised, was not for me. It seemed so pointless. Narrow and constrained. No one else saw it that way and. I suppose that made me strange, but I prefer to point to the counter argument.

The first time I visited Madrid, I came to understand how the city herself was a character in The Director's films. It represented the thrill, the creativity, the abandon of his world. And so, like The Director before me, I left everything behind and moved to Madrid. I still live in the same barely furnished apartment I looked at after arriving in the city. To walk down to buy bread in the morning, I pass the fountain where, in *The Flower of My Secret*, Marisa Paredes sat and paid a homeless man to help remove her boots, which were too small for her feet. And the apartment building that went up in flames in the final scene of *The Law of Desire*. The serpentine backstreet where Rossy de Palma beat up Antonio Banderas for stealing her drugs in *Tie Me Up Tie Me Down!*

It's almost like living in one of his films and it satisfies me for now: an inverted reflection of when I was at school and from that distance dreamed about the world I am now living in. I know it sounds like I'm justifying myself again. Using distance, an authorial gaze through which to view and theorise my actions. But all I can say is for me there is no remove. This is my life as I live it. In my world, all this fiction is very real.

Once I had established a base in Madrid, I went back through The Director's entire filmography. I borrowed as many of his DVDs as I could from the local library, impressing the librarians with my commitment to their culture, their language, their most famous creative export. I watched them in order, carefully taking notes, tracing the themes of his life and work, following them through and back and out and back in again. I drew diagrams, maps of his stories, which I tacked to my bare apartment walls. Though I may sound impulsive, I do like to be organised.

There is a clear thread; a strong taut thread, through from the seed that was planted by The Singer and his voice when I was 10 years old, to discovering The Director as a teenager, to where I find myself now. What *Workers Playtime* did, once I was installed in Madrid, was to photosynthesise the seed and allow this life to unfurl itself. The one I'm on the brink of living. But, before I roll the dice, allow me to share this last piece of data.

I had grown up with the idea – been indoctrinated into it – that obsession was a good and beautiful thing. A powerful thing. (Mary was one proof of that.) And so, my own initiations into the world of relationships had been more like experiments than lived experiences. There was one boyfriend who almost pulled me back into a more ordinary life. He normalised my heart by understanding and accepting its abnormalities. This boyfriend was an artist, so that likely had something to do with it. I was with him on an idle daytrip when I found the battered old copy of *Lolita* at an outdoor book sale. It was missing the dust jacket and appeared half-abandoned, some way apart from the other books, on a weather-beaten shelf. I tore through it. This was the first time I had come face-to-face with real, serious obsession and its most murky, shadow-side.

I lent my copy of *Lolita* to that boyfriend. We happened to be in bed together when he finished it. When he closed the book, he left his hand on the cover for a moment, as if in prayer, then turned to me and said: 'Why would anyone bother to write another book ever again?' For a moment, I thought I could love him. Really love him, like other people love. He showed me Martin Creed's *Work No. 232: the whole world + the work = the whole world*. He interpreted this as saying that art is ultimately meaningless, as it all comes out the same in the end: the world is still the world without the work. I took it to mean the opposite, that the world is not the world without the work. The work is the world. We broke up not long after that.

So, this is the thing: in *Pain and Glory*, The Director uses his own life as source material. He appears to film outside his own home and possibly inside too. I respect his commitment to his medium. I really don't think he will mind what I'm planning to do. Once it's all over – when he has had time to view it all from a different angle – I think he will see my actions as a work of art in themselves. And I could really do with the money if I'm honest. In the script – or is it dialogue taken from real life? – The Director says: 'I spent all my money on these paintings by Guillermo. They are all I have.' I'm going to take his art from him, the art he purchased with the money he made from the art he created. The art that helped create me. It's all quite logical really.

I saw him today.

I could and couldn't believe my eyes. He strolled, or rather somewhat limped out of Calle de ---, number 62 (he's getting old now, something which will be of use to me). Unmistakable with his dark glasses and crop of white curls. *He really does live there*. He put his *own house* in one of his *own films*. Now I just need to know what's inside. If it's true that original paintings by Guillermo Pérez Villalta reside there amongst his artfully arranged books and stylish kitchenware.

I'm so close now I'm almost tired of it. I remember a time when the sight of a thick black hair curling out of a lover's nostril entirely demolished what had been, only moments before, a powerful and significant desire; such a degree of passion apparently impossible without the hovering threat of its disappearance. Let's try *Workers Playtime*. Tell me you can't hear that? Feel that... such intensity must only exist within this matrix. It has to be ridiculous. It has to be beyond the everyday, beyond any knowable definition, for it to feel this way. I think: It's not just his words. It's his voice. And it's the tone and the potency of his voice. And with that voice he speaks the words. And that's the whole thing really.

I conclude it would be prudent to follow The Director around for a few days and get an idea of his routine before I strip him of all his assets. For someone so well-known, he spends a lot of time alone, without company or anyone keeping watch over him. I decide obsessive, sycophantic fan is the best way to get his attention. And that's a role I barely even need to assume. He goes to the same café for a coffee (a *café solo* that he sips at interminably) around 11:30 am every day. I plant myself there, I wear brightly coloured, well-cut clothes and sunglasses so we can eye each other up behind a shield of plastic. I buy a big ostentatious copy of *The Human Voice* to read. I also place a copy of *A Manual for Cleaning Women* on the table. I know his weak spots. It takes one obsessive to spot another.

It's hard to tell, with so much sunglasses wearing, but I'm pretty sure I've caught his eye. After calmly finishing my coffee, I raise my arm to signal for the bill and flash The Director a big smile. As I'm leaving, I stop at his table and graciously, politely tell him how much I love his work. How much it has meant to me over the years. The Director removes his dark sunglasses and smiles at me. Warmly. Genuine warmth. Then he stands and kisses me on both cheeks. His hand on my arm. It almost wrong foots me, this sweetness. A human kindness. But I carry on, using the script I wrote and rehearsed. I tell him it was because of his films that I moved to Madrid and he laughs, saying he hopes I wasn't disappointed. I laugh too, like tinkling glass. I casually drop into conversation that I've recently moved to a new apartment nearby. I say that perhaps I'll see him again, I have coffee here most days.



It was easy to pull off in the end. He is very trusting for a famous person. All I had to do was have coffee with him enough times for him to allow me to walk him home and then later, up to his apartment, where I saw 'Artist Looking At an Art Book' and all the other canvases, in all their magnificence. Glorious with pain. I made sure as many people as possible saw us together: the doorman in his building, the waiters at the cafe. I smiled at them all, my broadest smile. I touched The Director's arm when we spoke, my face close to his. Laughed at his jokes. Small details to illustrate trust and intimacy to anyone who might be watching.

On the chosen day, I got to the café early and told Isma, our waiter, to tell The Director I would arrive late because I was going to collect the latest Sigrid Nunez novel from our favourite bookshop. I wore an oversized, double-breasted, gold lamé trench coat and a touch of his favoured tomato-red in the form of some big hooped-earrings and matching lipstick. As I said, the best place to hide is in plain sight. It also served to distract from the old jeans and heavy work boots I was wearing underneath. Then I took up my old position on the bench opposite Calle de---, number 62. I waited until The Director had left his apartment building, then knocked the door to get the *portero*, Antonio's, attention. I explained that The Director had left his preferred sunglasses at home and had asked me to run up to his apartment and get them. I let myself in with Antonio's master key and threw off the coat, ripped the earrings from my ears. Then I dismantled the panels of triptychs, threw soft blankets over the rest of the Pérez Villaltas and took them out the back door in the kitchen (Just like the apartment in *The Flower of My Secret!*) and into the service lift which I kept wedged open with one of The Director's hefty coffee table books. From there I put the artworks in the back of the van I had parked on the road behind the apartment building. Like I said, easy. Easy for someone like me, anyway.

Here I am then. Standing with one foot crossed in front of the other, a hand on my hip, looking at my favourite of his bold paintings 'Artist Looking At an Art Book' which is propped against the wall in my new, undisclosed location. About my location, all I'll say is that this time I have furniture. I've arranged everything as closely as possible to how it was in The Director's Madrid apartment. It's a replica, an homage. And I had to sell one of the paintings on the black market in order to afford it.

I'm still hopeful that once all the details are out, The Director will see this as an artful act, not a criminal one. I swiped a few of his books that day too. He had so many handsome books. I was just reading one about the artist Amelia Mendelson. She says that most of us only ever glimpse 'a small portion of the vast landscape that is the soul'. What we consider to be ourselves is really just a magnified detail of an enormous painting whose entire composition and narrative we don't yet know exists, let alone have seen. Just zoomed in details without ever fathoming the whole. But once we do, if even for just a moment, we are forever changed. I find that touching. Significant. I want to know more about her life and work. Once it's safe to go online again I'm going to start researching.

It's a good job for her she's dead already.

The Wee Sparrow Poetry Press is an indie publisher which creates paperback poetry anthologies with 100% of the proceeds going to charity. We also make free digital zines, run a monthly Haiku Nook, regular Ekphrastic Challenges, and host free online workshops.

We are a small press with big ideas which aims to showcase fantastic poets from around the world and give them a platform to get their words out there. The Wee Sparrow Poetry Press does not believe in charging submission fees and all the team are volunteers. We are a creative community trying to make wee ripples of kindness in a crazy world.



Fancy listening to some wonderful poets chat all things poetry and creativity? Then check out The Wee Sparrow Poetry Podcast. Claire Thom, EIC and founder of The Wee Sparrow Poetry Press, and occasional co-host Scott Cassidy, chat to poets about their work, their creative process, what inspires them to write, and much more.

The best way to keep up with everything we do is by subscribing for free to our Substack newsletter.