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antae

A Journal of Creative Writing



About ANTAE

antae (ISSN: 2523-2126) is an internationally refereed creative writing journal. Our editorial team is open to publishing all kinds of work written in English, from poetry to prose fiction, creative nonfiction, drama, experimental writing, review articles and more.

We are committed to publishing original creative works of quality, whether these come to us in the form of the traditional Shakespearean sonnets or flarf poetry, whether these assume the character of genre fantasy writing or thoroughly researched nonfiction. We only flank the doorway: it is up to writers to step through.

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They Never Found the Source of the Blast Emanating from the Police Station

by Sarah Terkaoui

In bars over Zubrovka shots, old men
spoke of a second coming, an Armageddon,
a holy meeting in their town.

It was Wednesday after all,
so they'd better have another,
as they'd done every day,

if the world was going to end –

what else was there to do - they had seen,
or someone had, that great whoosh and roar of light
shooting from a third-floor window.

No one ever spoke of the chief of police,
or his rocket launcher, much easier
to speak of Gods and ends
than ever consider the foolishness of men.

The Goat

by Sarah Terkaoui

I remember how it hung
by its back legs from the tree
the blood that had escaped
from the black smile of its slit throat
in an explosion at first
finally slowing to a trickle
and how the flies danced in
and around it and the children
kicked a ball across the dirt yard
nearly but never quite
hitting the white enamel bowl
that steady collector
its *snick snick snick* a terrible clock
and how we stopped the car
to buy mangos and paw paws
from the woman at the road side
with her breakfast glass of rum & Boost
who smiled at us with her gums
and how we squeezed the fruit
turning them over in our hands
letting their overripe juice drip
onto us and how we turned away
from the goat and the bowl
and the children and the dirt

November in SoCal

by Marie C Lecrivain

This year, autumn feels too familiar;
the late afternoon breeze blows
one degree cooler as more leaves

turn gold on the pomegranate trees;
shadows lengthen with impunity
as the sun travels further away

from mind and memory. I'd like
to ponder what all this means,
but my soul is filled

with more darkness than light.
I've become the autumn,
stretched, sore, engorged

with the need to lay down
and regard the horizon
through half-closed eyes.

The Moon (XVIII)

by Marie C Lecrivain

(Smith-Waite Tarot)

Here's another dream
where you wear armor
that's ornate and fussy.
You wonder how you
acquired it, or why you need it,
but the answer becomes apparent
as you emerge from the water
and see two canine cousins
howling at the moon,
drunk on its phantom nectar.

You hope they won't spot you
and decide you're dinner.
You remember,
in this recurring dream,

you've been the dog,
who wags its tail
in excited distress;

you've been the coyote,
who howls to awaken
the urge within the dog
to shed its domestic narrative;

you've been the moon
pie-faced and indifferent;

and you've been
the scorpion
ready to strike.

What you long to be
is the road,
experienced and open,
with no secrets
except for where
you're supposed to go.

Echoes of Clever People

by *Rupert M. Loydell*

'I don't mind

being mistaken for one

Of the shadows'

– Kevin Young, 'Altarpiece'

Would you recommend that readers obtain a copy of the book or not? Is it to do with collective memory and how we view the past? Will it help us understand what happened back then and how it informs now? Clever people tend to be unhappy, concentrate less on social norms and live in echo chambers where others all think the same things. The desire to understand becomes a driver for curious explanations, reason for miserable compulsions. No one controls what people think, you decide what you need to know. Confirmation bias will seduce you, make vicious assaults on your brain, undermine your reasons and refuse to discuss other ideas. Most people have been terribly let down, can't bear to speak of perpetual motion or other hypothetical machines. Energy can neither be created or destroyed, always remains the same.

I Think I May Have Read This

by Rupert M. Loydell

for Martin Stannard

Any chance of an apostrophe somewhere?
I'm always wary of rhetorical questions
when they sound like these. I don't know
if I am supposed to figure out everything
or just need a cup of coffee. No I don't.

Some of this is like ambient music:
it's alright to let it float around you,
because it's creating an abstract mood,
but it seems futile to try to figure out
what some of your assertions mean.

Feeling sentimental? Wistful? Then why
don't you jolt back to the real world?
I'm not crazy but you telling us stuff
in difficult long words reminds me of
a textbook with religious overtones.

I'm not sure what my state of mind is,
am not the best audience for poetry.
I sound like you or you sound like me
and I have made a note to remember
to remind myself that I should forget.

Absinthe and the Friendship Absolute

by Ramona Depares

Men's toes are a gross and ugly thing, and M's were peeping through the cheap, flea market flip-flops. I shuddered, introduced myself and tried to forget about the toes. But they stayed there in some corner of my mind, forcing me to picture a parade of gnarled stubs, each one more disgusting than the other. He talked fast, as though he were on something, which he probably was. And he definitely needed a good bath.

No, the first time I met M, I was not impressed. He was not young. He had also done some 'living', and it showed. He was tall, awkward, and he rolled his Rs in that typical French manner that bothered me but not quite. His black hair was curly and unkempt, and there was one strand that was longer than the rest and kept falling across his eyes, while he explained what a *game-changer* his latest video was.

I met him at Ġugar, the preferred meeting spot for hacks and artist types. I was between jobs after the magazine I'd been working for folded, but still feeling pretty chill about it. There were enough freelance gigs coming in to keep me afloat for a few months. A fellow writer had passed on M's contact, knowing that hipster types were my thing. In return, I gave him personal contacts for a local politico who was notoriously difficult with the press.

My pre-interview prep was a quick look at M's Insta. His socials were a 'like' magnet, carefully curated in black and white to give off a James Dean angsty vibe. Nothing unusual there. I would enjoy getting him to drop that facade. Little games like these stopped me from getting bored of writing about over-reachers, those who thought they could leap over the ocean of TikTokers straight into the firmament of legit stars.

When I arrived at Ġugar he was already seated, sipping a beer. Understated cockiness, clearly very much the bartender's kinda cuppa. He had no problem with

men's toes. With his skinny jeans and Hawaiian print shirt, M looked very much out of place, but not in a bad way. I sat down, switched on my recorder, and let him ramble on for a while. The more he rolled his R's, the more I found myself getting annoyed. I'm not sure why. I should add that usually I found this kind of accent quite charming. But possibly I had decided to dislike M even before I met him, for no real reason at all. It happens sometimes, maybe I don't like their name, or the way they signed off a WhatsApp, whatever. He did think rather highly of himself, so maybe the feeling wasn't entirely undeserved. So many "you've never seen anything like this" sprinkled in an hour-long conversation.

Many visitors make that mistake when trying to impress me, thinking that because I live on a small island I won't notice they're being patronising. I matched every rolled R with a rolled eye hidden behind the big shades that I always keep on, even indoors. Not to try and look cool, but because they create the illusion of a boundary between myself and whoever I'm meeting.

To be fair, M did have a good story to share. His thing was parkour, taken to another level with the clever use of French electro and a rather impressive DIY light show, which he recorded and shared on his YouTube channel. Parkour artists tended to pick obvious landmarks, possibly thinking that they are more likely to go viral by falling off the Eiffel Tower rather than an unmapped cliff-edge. M had proven them wrong with a series of videos shot in abandoned buildings on obscure islands, each racking up millions of views in the space of days. Hence, Malta, a small rock hiding just under Sicily. We do a good line in abandoned buildings and obscurity.

Ugly toes apart, M had excellent click and share potential. The interview made the coveted featured story spot and was picked up by the social media sharing beast. I was rewarded with a thank you email, which I archived without opening.

A few months later – it was a Saturday morning, and I was wasting time on one of those stupid personality quizzes that tell me I'm special - M slides into my Insta.

Hey, you

I almost left him on seen. I didn't feel like wasting time on what would probably turn out to be a half-hearted attempt to pick me up. It had taken a while, but I was finally learning that guys don't slide into your DMs just to be friendly; well, not unless they were already friends to start off with. But there was also the small chance that this was an actual work opportunity. And I was curious. I typed a *hey* and hit return.

I'll be doing a secret show at White Rocks tonight. Will I see my favourite writer?

I wondered what had brought him back to Malta so soon. A second video in the same spot made zero sense.

Not much of a secret, if you're telling everyone about it! Will try drop by. No promises though, White Rocks is a bit of a pain after dark

Will be worth it, Ms Parker ;)

Ms Parker. I'm a sucker for compliments, even when I can see right through them. In spite of myself, I smiled. I could forgive cockiness if it was backed by talent. A secret show beat an evening of solo doom scrolling, but I didn't want to turn up alone. I scrolled through Insta and saw that Mandy was online. Bingo.

Hey hey lady

Remember that French parkour artist I interviewed a couple of months ago?

The reply was instant.

swoon

Damn right I do

He just invited me to a gig tonight at White Rocks. You game?

Fuck, yeah

And dibs

All yours ;)

Pick you up at 9.30

Let's not show up sober

K

Come up to mine. I have tons of booze leftover from Christmas

Amazes

Later :D :D

Dress warm, it'll be freezing tonight!!!!

Mandy, my newish BFF that was almost a girl crush. I am not big on female accessories. The last real girl friend I'd had before Mandy was Marianna. All the Ms, maybe there's something there. Anyway. I first met Marianna in primary school, aged ten, and we were pretty much joined at the hip from day one. We even chose

the same course at uni. We both adored doughnuts, dancing, and Chris Hemsworth, not necessarily in that order. We could spend hours laughing at nothing in particular. I still loved her to bits, but she was adulating a lot more successfully than I was, and we had grown apart over the past years. Since Marianna, no other girl had measured up.

Women are boring. Or at least, the ones I meet are. They talk about men. Clothes. Kids. Periods. They are Normal, and I have nothing to say to Normal. Which possibly explains a lot about my non-adult life.

But I didn't think of this when I first met Mandy. All I saw was a pretty woman with short, curly hair, wearing a tiny miniskirt with frills. We were the same age, give or take, and she ran her own second-hand bookstore – an unassailable indication of success, naturally. She was quirky, and she liked to hang out at the same places I did. Our tastes in music crossed, like a hipster-meet-rock chick Venn diagram. We were both obsessed at first sight.

Our first meeting happened by chance, soon after I was dumped by an eleven-month long relationship and I was staging a return on the social circuit. That night, a new girl band was playing at Coach, one of the few hipster hangouts on the island. Bit too hipster for my tastes, in fact, but then again the gigs were fun. Plus, you got to meet some real characters.

Best thing about Coach was that I could just show up alone and no one would bother me. I didn't need to fit in because everyone was somewhat lost in their own private world. The place came with its own cast of regular characters, which was also part of the fun. The nerdy pharmacist who moonlighted as DJ in her spare time. The Hipster Queen all the boys wanted to shag, in her very early 20s, dressed like an eight-year-old in shapeless, flowered dresses, Chucks and beanies with teddy bear ears. The groupie, who had dated most of the guys from the indie bands. And the wankellelectuals, hiding behind their specs and their absinthe and discussing the long-awaited new Herzog. They managed to make watching movies sound like homework.

It was a good cast and I did like most of them, despite everything. But I'm getting sidetracked. Mandy. Before we first bumped into each other, I already knew who she was, thanks to, well, the island being the size it is. She was a Coach regular way before I had ever heard of the place – my late relationship had necessitated a degree of hibernation – and the first time I walked inside I recognised her immediately by the yellow flower in her curls. A trademark of hers, she never left the house without it. People teased her occasionally, but she always replied that yellow was her colour.

In reality, she didn't need gimmicks to stand out. Mandy was tall, super-skinny. She had black hair and blue eyes that were unexpected. She needed no yellow flowers in her hair.

Anyway, that first night we were the only two dancing to the pre-gig DJ set at Coach. I still remember what was playing when we finally spoke. Blue Monday, New Order. We danced, we laughed. We switched to vodka shots that we had to down from normal glasses, the shot glasses at the bar having run out. We danced some more. It felt like I had found my second Marianna.

We met again the next day. And the next. Mandy was fun. We filled each other's inboxes with crap, uploaded a dozen stories every time we went out partying, chatted non-stop... If it sounds like a teenage romance, it's because it kind of was.

Being with Mandy meant there was always something to look forward to. Pretending to be shy, she was one of the biggest extroverts I had ever met. I've seen her walk up to random guys to tell them that she liked their hair/skinny jeans/butts. She would then giggle, look at them from behind lowered lids, and and go, "awkward". I've seen her flirt her way into gigs for free, give the finger to strangers she decided were looking at her funny and down a quart of neat vodka, straight from the bottle, in a few (tearful) gulps. I was hooked on her.

If the Mandy highs were high, the lows were something else. But that is a different story for a different day. The night we met M, we got to White Rocks pretty buzzed. The place was just about the only isolated spot on the island where you could pull off a semi-spontaneous performance in a relatively controlled space. We got there right as the action was about to start, and walked up to the improvised DJ stand. Being with Mandy gave me that kind of confidence. If I were with anyone else, I would probably have huddled at the back.

M was in good form, rolling his Rs stronger than ever, as he gave the small crowd the usual spiel about the show. It was incredible really. Place the man in the middle of a crowd, and his sex appeal sky-rocketed. A flock of what I was sure were regulars, who hopped along with him on plane trips wherever, gave us the side eye as we pushed our way ahead of them. Shit, the guy even had honest-to-goodness groupies. You could see them in his videos, lone females crowding the front, looking warily around them, sporting a half-nervous, half-hopeful look. To M's credit, he stopped to exchange a couple of words with each one of them once the performance was over. I used to think it was sweet of him to care, until once, before it all ended, it came up in conversation.

Don't fall in love with me, I'm heartless

No I won't and no you're not, you're even nice to all the weirdos who follow you around

Well yeah that's 'cos I want them to keep coming to my shows

Are you always like this, wanting something out of people?

Eh bien, isn't that the essence of most human relationships?

Mhmmm

Mhmmm?

So you're saying... you and I, we're only friends 'cos I'm a journalist. Disssapointing

Don't be silly. Our friendship is absolute

And we both laughed and downed our absinthe shots and talked and drank our thoughts away.

That night at White Rocks I saw that M's strategy was well-founded. I turned to Mandy, a snarky comment on the tip of my tongue, but she was sporting the same puppy eyes as the rest of them. I shook my head. Sucker. After the gig, I made a beeline towards the guy selling beer from a picnic cooler. M headed straight over, as I knew he would.

Ms Parker

I smiled. Sometimes, I liked smooth.

That was great fun, M. Have you met Mandy?

Kiss, kiss, awkward smile and Mandy was ready with her usual routine.

You should get us shots. We need to drink to this new friendship

I think there's only beer, though

So, we go elsewhere, no?

But that would be very disappointing to my fans, n'est ce pas? I'll see what I can find

And that is how we first ended up drinking absinthe straight from a small bottle, courtesy of one of said fans. A habit that I would only lose four months later, when M boarded a plane out of our lives to Detroit.

But back then I was not used to it, which is why half a shot into the game I spotted someone who posed less of a danger to my liver, and absconded. That night was the night my friendship with Mandy started to unravel, only we didn't know it yet. My focus lay elsewhere, mostly on the way M's chin rested on the top of Mandy's head whenever he laughed. And he was laughing a real lot. This was going to be an easy win.

I would love to say that I was right, and that I helped my friend snatch the artist of her dreams. But I didn't. Two months floated past, a whirlwind of weekday binges of absinthe and cigarettes that would inevitably finish off at M's rented apartment in St Paul's Bay, watching the sun rise from his living-room balcony, scrounging for the last dregs of coffee in his empty kitchen. The next day, we'd start all over again, spending entire nights talking about that which fucked us up but didn't kill us. And those two still hadn't progressed beyond the chin-resting-on-head stage.

Why didn't I disappear, give them space? Truth is, I did try, but they wouldn't let me. The two or three times I backed out of these evenings, one of them would cancel on the other. I still wonder what it was, the barrier that stopped it from becoming real for them. Whatever it was, I soon gave up trying to make the hook-up happen, mostly because I wasn't sure what to do with myself once these meetings fizzled out and things went back to normal.

And then, one night we walked into our usual hangout to find M chatting to some random woman, and everything changed.

The fuck does he think, that he can drop us just like that?

Mandy's words, not mine. By then it had become a bit of an obsession for her, the idea of promoting M from friend to lover. We should've left, I suppose. Instead, we got a tray of absinthe shots. Finally, about an hour too late, M joined us. He smiled, and it annoyed me.

So? When's this drink coming?

As soon as the words left my mouth I heard just how rude that was. He raised an eyebrow, but obliged, returning with a fresh tray of shooters that I ignored. Mandy matched him glass for glass.

Not gonna tell us who that weird chick was?

She's an old girlfriend. Not really weird at all.

But you've never mentioned her.

So? I haven't mentioned a lot of things. Another shot?

Well at the very least you could've introduced us, no?

Why should I? You're in a strange mood tonight, huh? Shots? Oui? Non?

And that smile again. Mandy walked out, and now it was her I was annoyed at for leaving me there hanging by the bar, not quite sure what to do.

I'll get us something decent to drink, not this cheap shit your friend likes.

The last I remember of that evening, before waking up ten hours later to a haze of guilt and cigarettes, is M asking me if he was the oldest man I had slept with.

I never saw Mandy again.

The Mobile Butcher

by Tricia Gates Brown

Always arriving at the height
of beauty. Spring purples: hyacinth, grape
and wood; crocus; Japanese iris. Daffodils
in every shade of yellow and peach. Trees
ballooning into flower: Magnolia, star
and saucer; arrays of magenta and rose –
Japanese plum, flowering cherry, their showy
cousin, the crabapple. Did I mention
a thousand shades of green?

In damp sunlight of early morning,
I pass the fence where our two cows
meet us and I ignore their devoted
gaze. Their bewitching eyes matched
only by diminutive horns. The morning

of the butcher's arrival, I assiduously
avert my mind – shaking the thought
of him like thoughts of old trysts
immediately regretted. For days after
the mobile butcher, I cannot
enter the farmyard, despite my husband's
careful cleanup, the cedar shavings
intended to keep dogs
out of the gore. I may live on a farm,

but today I am no farmer's wife.

One Day Older

by *Tricia Gates Brown*

Each morning, I pull back our top sheet
and slide into the bed's buttery softness. Early
riser, I return to wake you, to throw my leg
over you as you face me and I take in
your still-blue-eyed beauty, though you say
this casts aspersions on my sanity.

We are one day older. Each day
we stack like coins on the bedside
before you rise and shave and head
to the kitchen to mollify pets,
drink your coffee over *NY Times* obits,
which you later report, especially
if the dead are your age, or all too young.

We may worry how this love story ends
but today – and maybe tomorrow and the next
day – we will decide whether to grill
pork chops for dinner or make linguine. I will
remind you to hydrate because July, nowadays,
is sweltering, and you will turn on the AC
when I get distracted. But mostly we'll
go about our day on separate tracks until
we happen to converge at morning.
One day older.

Baritone Twelve

by Sara Backer

He's neither worst nor best, useful
for community choirs, but he yearns
for a solo. He constantly auditions,
believing in *try again*. Soprano Six owns
the star aria, Alto Eight gets a duet,
Tenor Eleven makes a trio. Baritone Twelve
gets *sorry*. One problem is that he'll bury tone
in his thick and curly beard. Another
is that he can't shave his beard, not now,
before the baby willow warblers fledge.
When they fly out – *one, two, three!* – he still
can't shave because a tiny shrew-mole nested
its black velvet body inside his warm long locks.
The shrew-mole, on field trips, chews tunnels
and hums strangely. Baritone Twelve combs shreds
of bark out of his beard. Willow warblers slice
the sky with aberrant vibrato.

This Cold Morning

by Sara Backer

my brain forgot to think in words.
It was wonderful.

The sky, one huge cloud, released
the snow, rolling in silence

the way trees die, slowly,
over patient generations.

Suddenly, a burst of red
feathers, a herald with a bright beak.

I have crossed the border
into my last lap of life.

I will no longer speak.

The Zombie Titular

by Ben Nardolilli

Out of bed with a hurting head, there was an unexpected sign-in attempt, eyes open, it seems I'm eligible for a prize, but only if I keep rising to meet the windows, the floors, the doors, the curbs, the rails, everything the sunshine casts its glaring sparkle on.

Congratulations to me, all the springs and boards creak out in a chorus, I have established my financial independence and this Saturday seems to be mine, now I have to honor and advance my freedom by choice, though I have no say in signing up for the matter.

Back to bed, I feel underqualified, sleep was an easy internship, my perk was all the dreams I could have, I make a firm stab at the dark spots ahead of me but the store is closed, my consciousness is wanted elsewhere, does it really have to be here though?

Absolutely Not for Profit

by Ben Nardolilli

Napoleon's ghost tells me there are plenty
Of consolation prizes, just look around
And find the Elba of your dreams

I laugh and mention Helena, he frowns
And comes back with an Imperial Guard,
This is the way I will rally you, he says

After some courtesy laughs, I lead them
On a chase searching for the nearest steppe
Where I can let winter take over

Connecting with the dead I never knew
While both of us managed to be alive,
It is the only long distance call I make now

Failing Small Talk

by Tallulah Howarth

I attempt to look nonchalant
leaning against the fence whilst I wait for you.
Instead, I brand my denim dress
with anti-vandal paint.

The taffy of conversation stretches
to forty minutes long – successes,
recovery, academia, colonialism –
you have an anxious hum

that lingers underneath every statement
and trails after you've finished speaking,
as if the last word of each sentence exits
with its tail between its legs.

The lips you can't bring yourself to love
twitch. We don't view the world
in exactly the same way, but
in the same amount of detail.

I should have told you how the nettles,
after rain, glistened like girls
in soaked nightgowns.

BE/LOVED

by Alex Kretzschmer

As I stood-smiled (alive) amongst
a line of lavender- (white-) blue
chosen to witness,
soothe-circulating song singed-softened our hearts.

A melody accompanies a harmony to
celebrating (colliding) uniting, tying the (untiable) knot.
I'm caught uncallous crying.

Guitar strums; now
voice filled the room, wall to wall,
ear to toe (and belly in-between).
To sing in love!

The two saw they see awe –
(Notice the wonder!)
alluring, warming, disarming the lookers-on:
their patience toward awaiting onward.

Now and not yet.

A glance exchanged accelerates and slows,
excite-ignites their breath (their eyes).

A silver ring ran round and bound now
to send ascending heart(beat)s
(heavenly) skyward.

The hues (*chosen*) had form,
the shape of two becoming one.

Love is patient, love is kind.

But I am impatient.

A want-ought enters –
could I belong as one singing (heart-beating),
become one (from two) for sake of

sound-color-feeling?

A whisper reverberates:
it cannot be forced; found.

The Only Church That Illuminates

by Robert Beveridge

Perhaps, you reflected, your creosote perfume was not the optimal choice for a night on the town with whiskey, matches, lighter fluid. Entire flocks of unidentifiable, perhaps robotic, songbirds hover around your head, a monotone crown of beaks, of claws, hungry for the worms you have always felt live in your gut, or perhaps behind it, neighbors of spleen, colon, appendix. None will come close to the match, once lit; all are loath to taste fingers smeared with butane. This is your life, or at least the life you have found a way to inhabit. The target is across the street on your left. You shake the can. Just enough.

At First Light

by Maria Grech Ganado

She could see him sinking deep when she leaned over, his hands above his head still clenched like one big fist. And as he sank, he looked up at her and she saw he had no face. Where his face should have been there was only a hollow. She didn't question why the wind whistled, or how it blew her from the top of the cliff into that emptiness. She was neither surprised nor scared. But just as she began to feel she was on the brink of some momentous transformation, Jessie woke up.

By her side she could feel the clammy aura of her sister, Janey, already reeking in the air of the scirocco, but not strong enough to overcome that sweet smell of dung that came from further away in the valley, a welcome smell of manure, heavy and full as it always was in September when the fields were being prepared for the fresh season's start. She felt for the clean dress she'd laid by her bed the night before, slipped it on quickly and opened the door a chink, making sure she didn't wake Janey, who had other notions of early morning pleasure.

Yes, the day's first light was already there, warming her as did some silent client who'd stay for a mug of coffee after he'd got what he'd come for. She liked foreign men who couldn't speak her language most of all. They brought whiffs of worlds full of new smells with them. They left before she'd lost curiosity, but best of all they couldn't ask questions even if they were interested. Words tended to fill her with terror when they got the better of her, and were merely absurd when not needed. She enjoyed a generous man who was ready to give pleasure as well as take it, and wished she needn't charge when that was the case. But when she sensed contempt in a client, she charged enough to ensure he wouldn't return. No chance of a cup of coffee for such a man!

The mist was being drunk greedily by the sun rising between the hills, a bit like the sweat between her own breasts when Father Pawl finally raised that head he had sunk into them when he came. He was huffing and puffing so desperately recently, as though attempting to divine in her that vitality she still carried in her smile. She'd been fond of him ever since he'd been a lonely novice, sobbing his wet insecurities

and fears into her body, but they were both older now and she couldn't help wishing sometimes that he'd give up using this body as some sort of infant comforter.

Poor Janey seemed to be growing older even more quickly. She'd become stouter over the last couple of years, and her lassitude was becoming so oppressive that Jessie could feel it creeping into her own bones every time she lay beside her. Father Pawl's frustration with age sometimes smashed mugs to smithereens against the wall, but putting up with that was easy – it needed only a broom to set everything right. She sighed. Janey made such a fuss about her sweeping it up so tamely, without complaining – but Jessie was more peeved by anyone who expected her to waste time in futile arguments, with too many words. She was torn between her imagining the extra humiliation she would have burdened Father Pawl with by requiring him to sweep it up himself, and the amusing image of him in his cassock, sweeping a broom across their small room shortly after he'd celebrated Mass in his ceremonial vestments. Who'd have swept it up if she hadn't? Janey's lethargy was much worse.

The mist had lifted like a lake dissolving into the air, and the copse which had seemed to form on one hill was coming apart. The soldiers were dismantling after their exercise and she hoped that this meant more work again. Best make use of the minuscule shed next door, so as not to wake Janey. Poor thing! After all, she'd been working longer than she herself had been. Someone had even told her once that she wasn't Jessie's older sister at all, but her own mother. Nothing unusual she'd found out. After her initial astonishment at this staggering revelation about family relationships in those parts, she'd felt quite relieved that it might not have been her father who first fingered her. It still made a difference, somehow. And her thoughts turned to Pawl again, remembering how other teenagers had taunted him with being gay, a *puf*, because he'd been so shy, so kind and gentle, when they were first drunk on lust. She couldn't help but feel proud of how it had been she who raised him from his inhibitions and taught him to be a man.

Making his way down another hill slowly, she could see the sailor. He was coming once more along the high route overhanging the sea. Time enough for him, even if a soldier decided to come later. When he first came, the sailor had told her she was his last harbour and laughed. She liked men who laughed. Laughter was the best medicine, the Captain used to say years before, while he zipped up his trousers at the cave at Manikata. He was the one who had first praised her native intelligence, teaching her also how to read. Her grandmother had been so grateful for his generous attentiveness to her twelve-year-old granddaughter.

The sun was drying the earth fast and her arthritis wasn't as bothersome – she would be able to suppress the pain as her sailor enjoyed her. It was nothing like the pain of

fear that she would soon be too old to charge, so she shrugged off all thought of her children and concentrated on the sailor instead. No matter what they thought of her, she was as alive as the rest of nature. She closed the door on the one-roomed hovel cautiously and tried to suppress her irritation when Janey swore anyway. There'd been hardly any light in the room to check whether she was looking decent enough in the mirror – which meant, made-up enough to cheat a man. But then she smiled yet again. She solved everything with a smile.

What did it matter really, as long as she was clean? She'd always washed herself with cold water in the tin basin before coming to work in the shed, and she'd done it quickly and silently now, not to disturb Janey. September was still warm enough even first thing in the morning, but not hot enough to have made her sweat through the night. Unlike Janey, she kept herself trim, even athletic, loving to run across the fields up to the edge of that cliff which the sea washed in all its various moods. She prided herself on still being able to run fast despite her age. And sing well enough to tempt the farmers in the fields, who sometimes popped in for a fun one – free, of course. And she chuckled again when she thought of how they then went to Father Pawl to confess before returning, sober as his cassock, to their wives. They never divulged her name, of course, and he respected the secret of the confessional, but they all knew what lay behind his sour looks, till even he got used to it all.

She ought, she knew, to be ashamed of herself, as Janey often told her. If it was work, she shouldn't enjoy it. And Janey didn't know the half of it. Ever since the Captain's lessons, she had found the whole thing delectable, enjoying the laughter of the farmers when she mimicked the people in the town who looked down on her. How quickly she'd squirmed out of her teenage shotgun marriage, what a hurry she'd been in to see her children educated and watch them leave in disdain of their childhood home. She couldn't pretend to herself that she didn't still care for them terribly, or sometimes miss them badly, lost as they were in the smog of time beyond the hills, living in a totally different century altogether. Only a few kilometres away in space, but so distant from the reality she had been born into and cherished. Perhaps it was wrong to love her freedom best of all, but that's how it was.

She snapped out of her reverie as soon as she saw her sailor was closer – whistling, young, tanned, with a full head of gleaming black hair. Shielding her face from the sun's uncompromising light, she placed one hand invitingly over her cleavage and twirled her hair casually with the other, pretending she hadn't seen him approach. By the time he left, the sun would expose her unkindly to full view but she was always careful to take her leave of clients at the door, still inside, so that they wouldn't be able to see exactly how far she'd come from the first flush of youth. It was different with the farmers. They didn't much care about her looks. Some had

grown alongside her since they were children. But still, when her dress stretched across her breasts every time she hung out clothes, she knew they lusted to squeeze them. When they heard her raucous voice sing of love, her swaying buttocks exuded a sensual welcome they were not accustomed to in their wives. She had a trim waist despite her big breasts, her face was sun-burnt and mischievous, and her tongue was brimming with that wicked wit which made them roar with laughter, even as she spread her legs wide. They were incomprehensible creatures, men, but she adored basking in their attention and feeling vibrant, alive. She loved knowing it was she who had roused that hardness between their own.

She made her way in for the sailor to find her ready when he arrived. He knew she'd seen him coming now. All he had to do was push the door open on the shed without disturbing Janey in their hovel. He knew the procedure from the day before. She skipped lithely out of her dress, lay down on her solitary worn mattress and stretched contentedly. When he shut the door behind him, she was purring like a cat. 'Hello, Jezzie,' he said softly, and began to stroke her.

Janey didn't wake till a few hours later. She boiled some water on their kerosene ring to make instant coffee and mixed the rest with fresh well-water to wash. She ate some bread and cheese in her leisurely manner. The sun was hot now, but when she walked out, she could see that the sea was angry. Waves beat the cliffs, their high crests as foam from an over-worked horse. Their hovel was secure till the first heavy rains, when they returned to their small village home in Father Pawl's parish. The house they'd been born in was not very high above the depths of their valley, just enough to evade the floods which might come. Till then, the narrow stretch between the hills sheltered its inhabitants from the full force of the wind. The waves told her, however, that it was picking up. Despite her incipient deafness she could hear it lashing, moaning as though in pain. Or pleasure, for that matter. By the time the wind dropped to a whistle, she was wondering where Jessie had got to – had she gone to the market already? Perhaps it was later than she'd thought when she'd woken.

The shed door was ajar, but hardly any light got in despite the advancing day. Dark was good for work, but Janey could just make out that Jessie wasn't working. She was lying motionless on her back, fast asleep. That's what came from waking at dawn. Well, it would be too late for the market if she didn't wake her. She must have been drinking with her last client before he left. They'd spilt a lot of whatever it had been. Sticky, too, clinging to her feet. 'Jessie,' she whispered. Then, louder, 'Jessie,' and bent to shake her awake. Jessie's hair clung to her skull like a wet brown cap. There was only a dark hole where her face had been.

Bildungsroman as Slasher Movie

by Christian Ward

Beautiful was the slasher movie
of my youth: the tumultuous shadows

under my bedroom door, the floorboards
absorbing more than trauma,

the kitchen knife of moonlight
ready for its five minutes of fame.

Wes Craven couldn't have done better
than the soundtrack of screams

recorded by the front door, the ficus
already succumbed to familial unhappiness,

the man with a melted face
kissing me goodnight, the lie

held tightly in his fist
like a decapitated canary.

The Old Pond

by Katie Beswick

After Matsuo Bashō

Slade Ravine last summer I heard a splash! In my gravid belly,
the tadpole turned too. & we saw a frog, leaping by the old pond – its piebald
slimy self.

Silent, lumbering jumps.

I knew now what it was to be heavy.

Time came upon me.

I was lithe & young again, crawling over logs by this same pond; moss-mush gross on
my hands & knees.

Silence.

Listen! There was a moment after I slipped when an algae bloom appeared like grass
that might break my fall. But oh! I plummeted into blue-black.

Held there by my own weight I drowned.

I lay dead.

Crisp packets & coke cans decayed alongside me.

I lay dead for one thousand years – until, in the next new millennium, something slithered
suddenly through my rotted lips & the tadpole hatched inside my body, stirring it to life.

The Not Enough Blues

by Gurupreet K. Khalsa

*It takes a worried man to sing a worried song.
The Carter Family, Worried Man Blues, 1930*

It's a lie you don't have to worry:
pricks of uncertainty, dread
hurtling in the batting cage
bouncing in your head.

Sweat and sweat, it's not enough,
don't matter if you're strong or tough.

Swinging on the pendulum,
gripping tight and powerless
hanging on with wish and fear –
despair at lack of righteousness.

Sweat and sweat, it's not enough,
don't matter if you're strong or tough.

Grating rasp, hum thrum of clanking,
justice bend stuck in reverse,
pedals jammed and wheels unbalanced,
shimmying wildly toward the worse.

Sweat and sweat, it's not enough,
don't matter if you're strong or tough.

Moral arc turned dark-night swamp,
black cat lurking, smoke and ash,
ataraxia betwixt-between,
mumpsimuses drunk on sour mash.

Sweat and sweat, it's not enough,
don't matter if you're strong or tough.

Brambles, bitrex, barriers, and bricks
crush pollen grains of hope to dust,
assurance teeters on the edge –
make a difference, now we must.

Sweat and sweat, it's not enough,
don't matter if you're strong or tough.

It's Like a Near-Death Experience

by Nancy Byrne Iannucci

to write about the sea –
chimes of seagulls, plovers, and hybrids I call sea-lovers,
chant while waiting for bits of bread.
It's like walking twickly back and forth on delicate legs ahead of breaking waves
as the stained-glass sea opens, and the meerschaum pours forth:
a sermon preaching at your feet.
It's fierce, and deadly, like an orca.
Just when you think you've caught it,
it slips back out to sea, with the driftwood, and an old baseball cap.
You go Ahab mad pulled down by a cord of words.

Eyes Straight Ahead

by Mara Adamitz Scrupe

Only stone and rock could hold one person's loss and another's beauty forever.

– Michael Ondaatje

Any off-pitch halter hums the walls. Trying to find major/ minor.
Failure itself rare amplitude. Bluster/ capitulation. A woman
wearing black stockings walks in front of a shattered church. Gazing
straight ahead. Not at the ecclesiastical ruins. She doesn't appear

Lost. Rain's bashing the roof. Cataracts crash.
I'm searching for something. I don't know what. Maybe it's nothing.

A stout man stands in a stone-fenced farmyard surrounded
by treeless emerald hills.
Perhaps the Royal Navy wanted
the wood for masts. Or landlords wanted the land cleared
for ploughing. Or a smoldering city wanted rebuilding. Or Lord
Blennerhasset Chief Baron of the Exchequer wanted
to flush woodkernes out of their lairs. Or. Or. Or.

He – the thickset man – tries hoisting himself over the not very tall
wall. Hands down/ palms to rock crown. He pushes. *Hard.*
Shimmies his rear end. Working out height & distance he tries a hip
swing. Mince & hop. Fails. Prepares to try again. His feet reconsider.
Overcome by inertia. Trajectory. Space-time continuum. From behind
he reminds me of a rowboat spanking the North Sea. Evidently he can't
hear me. I know he can't see me. The boy inside the man remains
unconvinced. Baffled he tries *tries* one last time.
I walk right past. Eyes straight ahead.

I imagine the doors open only *only* for me

A man returns home from a two-day deathwatch
drunk. It's self-inflicted. The misery. He sleeps all day
wakes that night & pours himself another.
I'm eight years old cleaning out the trailer
post-divorce. A dozen fifty-gallon trash bags full:
drained Smirnoff fifths & crushed 3.2 cans.

The train was traveling a hundred eight miles an hour when
it met the curve. The last thirty seconds it sped up. The engineer
can't remember. Perhaps something hit the windshield.
Torque. Horsepower. Momentum.

I'm searching for something. Perhaps it's *nothing*.

A window opens. Flint & sheaf. One hundred & twenty Irish
take Third Class passage to America. An iceberg calves. Makes a baby
capable of killing an ocean liner. Ice fract's rock. Blisters steel.

A saint hears a voice. It speaks to her clearly.
Face of rapture. Cry of bliss. Sixteen-year-old Anna Kelly
hears strange noises. She makes her way up
to the topmost deck. Climbs into Lifeboat #16.

Eight souls perish on the night train home.

Taxes, Mostly

by *Dobrochna Lodyga*

The girl you're here to see is sitting on the side of the road.

Quite inconvenient of her, really.

It's raining, has been for the last couple of days, and the mud latches onto your shoes, leaving the leather soaked with wet and grime.

It's that kind of road in that kind of town, where the forest cuts deep and the air feels a little cold at all times, and it's hard to imagine that the ground below your feet was ever anything more than a pool of darkened earth.

You wonder why you even bother, why you spend so much time this morning wiping off everything that was left from your last visit. You like the details, you suppose.

You like the clean cut of your blazer, the way the white collar sits just above your collarbone, the shape of your pants as they cut away just below the ankle.

It makes you feel cleaner, more put together than the people you see on the regular – all messy clothes and panicked eyes.

It's a nice reminder. Makes you feel more important than they might consider you to be.

But it does lose some of its magic. Most feelings do when you can feel your socks stick to the insides of your shoes.

The girl doesn't look at you at first, even when you stand right next to her.

She's sitting hunched, arms wrapped around her legs and knees. Her hair falls around her face in a wild mess, sticking to her cheeks, wet and tangled from the rain.

You didn't even think to consider your own hair after you left the house, and seeing her makes that familiar sting of self-consciousness dig into your stomach.

You reach up, slicking back some of the frizzier strands.

Finally, you clasp your hands in front of you, clearing your throat.

Over the years, you've perfected this sort of aura. That slope of your shoulders, the cutting edge in your voice that makes people acutely aware of how much of your time they're wasting.

She looks at you, finally.

She has the sort of young, round face which, in your mind, puts her somewhere between sixteen and thirty. You're bad with faces like that. Always have been; not that it matters now.

That's one of the good things about the job. You don't get a lot of regulars.

"Good evening," you say.

It's three in the morning, technically, but you decide to keep that fact to yourself.

The girl watches you, for a moment.

She doesn't say anything, and you're wondering if she's just embarrassed. You would be, in her place. Her makeup is quite the mess.

You roll your shoulders, feeling much more secure in your crisp shirt.

"Very well then," you sigh a little.

It's an ungrateful job, really. Still not as ungrateful as the years you spent as a teacher a long time ago.

You reach into your messenger bag, swung casually across your shoulder, pulling out the right folder by touch alone. You developed an array of small skills like that over the years.

You lean over a little, trying to shield the paper from the rain, and click your pen open.

"Do you mind telling me what happened?"

She does, apparently, because she stays silent, eyes wide and open.

Finally, you look to the side, giving what is left of her car a proper look.

It's not the worst car crash you've seen, all things considered.

And you've seen a lot over the years. Enough that it makes you wonder if its intentional.

It's the sort of first-hand response nobody really wants to deal with, especially when it comes with hysterical clients. Or worse – defensive ones.

It would make sense if your co-workers were quietly slipping you all the dirty work. Doesn't seem all that out of character for them.

You make a note to watch your desk more carefully from now on.

At least you can still tell it's a car, which is a lot for these kinds of accidents. There's still some smoke spilling from beneath the bent hood.

"It skid."

Her sudden voice almost scares you.

It sounds rough and unpleasant. Her face is blank now and she's not looking at you anymore, gaze a little hazy.

Still, it's good to finally have something you can work with.

You almost give her a smile, but decide otherwise when she snuffles, wiping her face on the back of her hand.

"That's great." You look down to your papers, jotting down a few notes under the CASUSE OF ACCIDENT section. It's your favourite part to fill out. "Do you mind telling me your name?"

You don't need it, not really.

It's already filled, right at the top of the first page, right next to her age, address, and everything she ever was.

“What happens now?”

They always ask that.

And the bare truth is – you don't know.

You don't know what to tell them. You don't know what the judge will say, what the verdict may be, what they should receive after all of this.

You know what is in front of you and the numbers you typed onto the paper in black ink.

What you see right now is a mess of a girl.

You don't tell her that. You're nice like that.

“Well, we'll see very soon, won't we?”

She doesn't seem happy with that answer, frowning widely.

She leans a little closer, and there's suddenly something manic in her gaze, something a little more human.

“Tell me.”

She puts one of her hands on the ground, maybe for balance.

You wince and wonder if it's worth pointing out she will need to sign a few papers like this. The idea of the reality of this, the grime and dirt and everything nobody wants to know about spilling onto the striking white of your bureaucracy, makes you feel a little sick.

“I wouldn't know,” you answer, honestly, making sure you sound as annoyed as you feel.

“You wouldn't know?” She leans back and laughs, something very unhappy. “What are you here to do, then?”

“Your taxes.”

She stares at you, blank.

They never appreciate your sense of humour. You suppose this is the sort of job that doesn't really call for having one.

“Give me a few more minutes, I'll be done soon. You can leave then.”

“Leave where?”

You sigh, not dignifying that with a response.

When you're finished, you close the folder, nice and neat, even if some of the rain bleeds onto the pages.

You watch her as she struggles to stand. She looks at you, for just a moment, her hand hovering in the air, like she wants to grab onto you, have something to hold herself in place.

It's a good thing she doesn't.

She's crying again. Or maybe it's the rain, staining her face.

Now, she's looking at you.

And for a dead person – she seems so alive.

They always do when they're scared.

You wonder if there is some part of you that still remembers this. That deep

unsureness that comes with being human.

You hope there's not.

"We can go now," you say.

You walk, leading the way ahead, making your way across the mud and dirt as neatly as possible.

You feel her follow.

This is always the easy part. You're good at many things, but this is where you excel.

Death and taxes.

But mostly taxes.

Vanishing Hitchhiker

by John Grey

There's still a highway
and more than enough land to traverse.
And cars of course.
Plus a whole lot of trucks.

But there is nobody at the side of the road
with their belongings on their back,
thumbs in the air.
So nobody's stopping.
Unless, of course, they brake
to pick up a ghost or two.

The journey is there
as it has always been
but, whatever it promises,
no one's taking the mileage up on it.

So, from town to town,
landscape to landscape,
there are no engrossing
conversations between strangers.
No life stories.
No ruminating on the freedom of the great outdoors.
No older driver who suddenly feels nostalgic
for the trip he wanted to but never took
when he was young.
No two voices singing along to the radio.

The highway still looks the part,
as does the country it crosses.

But the cars, the trucks,
they're just traffic these days.
The people are strictly behind the wheel
or a familiar passenger.

There's no inclination to travel rough.
There are less thumbs than there used to be.

Beyond Where We're At

by Sean Chard

I stroll from St. John the Baptist's Cathedral
towards St. Giles on the hill.
Sunlight walks with me.
North Farm is a thousand miles from
these moments of transient
white clouds, clear blue sky.

On Grapes Hill, below the
footbridge, two arteries flow with
endless desires and expectations;
such hypertension on the highway.
For some, not all,
work is a suffering, not a calling.

On the pavement a broken young man
nudges a hat littered with small coins.
His eyes speak of corrupted identity:
'I am PTSD, I am violence,
I am depression, I am addiction,
I am regret, I am shame'.

His unwashed hands tremor in aftershock.
I put down my bag, sit next to him,
talk about the incalculable worth of human life:
'You are valued, you are change,
you are potentiality, you are good,
you are possibilities, you are precious'.

Beside him on the sidewalk
I realise what it means to be a victim,

to wander aimlessly, oblivious of
our self-created world, identifying with negativity,
when, despite appearances, we are, all of us,
without exception, quite remarkable.

Looking for Dermot Healy: A Trip to Sligo

by Eamon Doggett

The wind was too strong for an umbrella, so we wore our coats and hoped for luck as the sky threatened rain and the sun lowered into the Atlantic. Grey sand and white sky framed the water as the backwash shyly flowed away. The tide was going out. Out there was Inishmurray, and somewhere out there still was Hy Brasil, and for a moment we stood admiring the vista: the gradients of blue and the hinging of the sea and sky. This was the writer Dermot Healy's garden, back when he lived in a cottage nestled into a headland the locals christened Inishhealy. For him, it was like living on a boat. 'You learn to sleep to the beat of the engine,' he wrote, 'and wake when it stalls on the way to the shot. It's the silence that gets you after the worst has passed the walls'. [1]

As we walked towards the cottage, the sand turned to gravel and then the gravel to large rocks still glistening from high tide. I looked out for fossils that Brian Leyden, a local and friend of Healy's, had shown me on my previous trip to Maugherow. I can't remember which way he went, I told Tiffani, my partner. I couldn't keep up with him. He was dancing across the rocks. We walked with one eye looking out at the sea and the other looking down on the ground. I tried to imagine Healy waking each morning to this gaping drama. How can you write small in the face of an abyss?

We came upon gabions, wire cages filled with rocks. Healy had built them as buttresses against the pounding sea, lifting each stone into the wire cages until he had filled many cages and built a wall to dampen the water's power. It didn't seem to bother him when his walls were destroyed in raging storms, and ten years after his death, the wire on many of the cages had been torn ragged by the sea, with the stones spilling out of the trap. Regardless, the work is the thing, he told us. The act itself. The feeling of immanence before the mind takes over:

[1] Dermot Healy, *Collected Poems* (Oldcastle: The Gallery Press, 2018), p. 288. All further quotations from this text will be cited in text as (CP, page number/s).

The everyday goes on.
I am who I am,

opening a can
to paint a toilet wall,

afraid of my folly first thing in the morning and glad to welcome the postman
and put the sausages on (*CP*, 245).

Tiffani called me over to a rock inscribed with an ancient symbol. We got down on our haunches to examine it. It had wound into itself like a foetus. I spotted another fossil before we realised that they surrounded us. Look at this one, we said to each other, as they grew more defined and spectacular. We moved between them – ones that looked like snakes and others like fish – and when we couldn't find words for their beauty, we took pictures on our phones.

How old do you think they are? I asked. They must be thousands of years old. More like millions, she said.

I looked down at one and wanted to pick at it, to try to lift it off its host, like a child unable to resist tugging at a flowering scab. With a bit of water and scrubbing, it could come back to life and tell us about millennia past.

Between the rocks were pools of water we were mindful of as we made our way, until we were beneath the shadow of the old cottage. I wanted to get to the other side of the headland – the strip of land holding the cottage aloft – to see what we couldn't see from our side. But rain came in a great burst that had us scrambling up a slope to take cover under a small tree. Our clothes were soaked by the time it relented, and it seemed foolish to walk any further.

The newspaper I worked part-time for wanted someone to visit Sligo for the weekend – accommodation, meals, and attractions included – and write about their experiences. The first morning we went kayaking on Lough Gill, looked at Jack B. Yeats's paintings at the Model, and tasted oysters before an evening meal. The second morning we went paddleboarding on Lough Gill, hiked up to Maeve's Cairn, and took a seaweed bath before an evening meal. On Monday morning, having completed the itinerary, we drove to Gleniff Horseshoe, Glencar Waterfall, and then headed towards Maugherow.

Google Maps, which we set to Dermot's old cottage, carved a green line through the land for us to follow. We took in fields, houses, and the odd person as our eyes sought out the blue of the ocean. I tried to overlay the immediate landscape onto Healy's Maugherow, searching for a threshold into a more spectral and shadowy world. The map told us we were about five minutes away, and then a few minutes later, it told us we were still five minutes away.

I think my phone has frozen, I said.

We should pull over, Tiffani said.

No, I said, I'll figure it out.

If you think so.

We kept driving straight, going past turns we didn't know if we should have taken. I eventually pulled the car to the side of the road. Tiffani searched for directions on her phone, and we got back on course. We passed Maugherow Church, where Healy had married his wife Helen, and Ellen's Pub, where he drank with friends. At a crossroads, we headed straight, and a plain opened before us with the odd human decoration: a scattering of houses, walls, sheds and machines. I knew Jimmy Foley, Healy's old neighbour and friend, lived somewhere along that road, but I wasn't sure which house was his. The land appeared wise and contemplative as if in the process of assessing time long past. Somewhere, Healy's life, real and imagined, was waiting to be stored in the memory of the place. The road ended where a wooden gate protected the driveway to the cottage. I parked the car parallel to another car facing the sea. An old man and woman sat in the other car and looked suspicious of us as we got out to walk the beach.

Healy tells us that the story is not known until it's told, and even then, it can be reinterpreted, revised and rewritten. Perhaps it is a symptom of spending too much time in a library, but I often enjoy the image of books being unsheathed from their containers, allowed to gather in the air and scum for prominence. Some pages shout and yearn for attention, while others are meek and look to make friends. It all becomes a bit of a mess, of course, a babel of voices lacking harmony. But it tantalises a master narrative, a story amidst the swirling discourse of living that might be the keystone. As Healy imagines in 'A Breeze' (2001):

I step back from the crossword and turn to see
the leaves of the dictionary flap in the breeze
[...]

the pages speed by like frames in those early movies
till it all makes
some kind of story (*CP*, 190).

We drove from Healy's old cottage back down the road to Ellen's. There was a communion party in full flow. Shiny banners were stuck to the walls, and food was spread out on tables in the middle of the room. Young men in jeans and brown shoes were spooning chicken curry into their mouths between gulps of stout. People were tapping their feet to music. We sat at the bar, ordered two pints and looked around. A jumble of pictures, some coloured and some black-and-white, hung on the walls.

It was easy to spot Healy in a couple of them. Tiffani prodded me to ask the barman about Healy, but I felt it wasn't the right time and, in some ways, the right place. In my imagination the pub had more nooks and shadows. It was darker and smokier, and people struggled more with expression. I looked around for an empty chair or some time-worn hollow in the room's being to suggest Healy's absent presence or where his energy might be stored. But life was going on. Parents were taking pictures with their children, whose sponsors, young men and women, were eyeing each other. The barman poured pints and lined them up on the counter to settle. Business was good.

I stopped at a wall of photos on the way to the bathroom. One captured a white-haired man and a dog walking away from the camera. They were on their way down a road. From the man's build, hair and clothes, I assumed it was Healy. Although it could have been someone else. I felt self-conscious about staring too long at the picture. When I sat back down, I got the urge to tell people about the Healy I had grown to know. I wondered if my Healy differed from theirs. I wondered if he was a neighbour to them before he was a writer. I wondered if they had read his books and found themselves in them. I wondered if he had coloured their perceptions of this place.

We could chance one more, I said. Tiffani looked at me.

No, you are right, I said. Better try to beat the dark.

The barman took our glasses and thanked us for our custom. Outside, a group of lads were smoking and staring at the ground. We got back in the car and pledged to return when we could have a few drinks and take in more of the place. I said we could take a room in a B&B and wake up to the ocean each morning. She said that sounded

like a good idea. We drove on thinking of our own oceans.

'I'm back on the bank of a river
I've not stood on in ages,

and there's nearly too much to remember
and there's not too far to go' (*CP*, 114).

Works Cited

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Cave Dwellers

by Maria Chiara Grech

Crouched in the cold,
we filled caves with red handprints
to let you know we were here.

We felt our hearts beat,
stretched skin over hollow stone
so you could feel it too.

Our fathers stared at the dark,
saw gods in the shadows
that lived there.

They spoke of a future
that would never be ours.

Curious fathers asked,
“Do you still have Rain?”
“Do you still have Fear?”

The gods stared back.

Woman stepped forward.

“Does it still hurt to see
your children die?”

“You speak of language.
What word will describe
a mother’s howl,
as she holds a child’s vacant stare in hers?”

“Grief,”
the shadows said.
“You will step into the sun, and you will
see sons in the gentle breeze,
daughters in the wild things.
And you will call it Grief.”

And so, they grieved.
Weeping they gnawed at their flesh
until hands held them back.
“What do we do with this Grief?
Where will we put it?”

“Hang it on the walls,”
the ghosts said,
“so it will be remembered.”

I'm Here to Forecast Exhumation

by Sheila E. Murphy

Semblances do crazy better than you. I'm here to forecast exhumation. Don't blink. Sit still for Gwynevere who lores you in her steeply unimaginable sleep. And lures the crops to harvest. With sheep to watch, some derivations you can't suppress despite your eyelash fetish left on like an overnight light impenetrable as weeds. Gorgeous yourself against your will. I'll be the pill you usually accuse of damaging your augur on a freehand template made for gods.

The Number of Words I Speak

by Sheila E. Murphy

We stand beside the mottled white-gray tree bark admiring the trunk, the complexion, the shade of that broad, strong tree. Is it always autumn in the mind, even in mid-spring replete with butterflies that flick away some sadness. Our speech is blotted gently by long vowel sounds of the mower. When in love one needs a spare vocabulary. Apostasy's unlikely given grounding in a firm floor of belief. We wend our way toward stasis. The pure, stable form that lifts above cliché of dance I hear more than I step. Instead I shoulder the thin breeze that nearly colors tips of my fingers as I touch the stately tree. How many sounds are required to shelter or accompany us here? We dovetail in insisting on coming leaves, as windows once removed from former and forthcoming seeds.

Thank You Note

by Sheila E. Murphy

Her pet blotter went out with liquid ink akin to bustle in a blink. Her cursive; one long vine. She tills the syllables that perspire from an antique pen, pressing onto cream-hued sheets absorbent, plush. Her premonitory inklings dress for dinner. As if protocol had turned striptease enlisting other species. As thunder ravages a garden party to which several have been uninvited.

A Few Bucks Short

by David R. DiSarro

I know about silence
and the severance paid
with words, and the way
the currency is measured
in equity and not equality,
and how there is always
incorrect change and no sales
and voids, and at the end
of the night, when the lights
dim and the alarm is set,
the till of words is always
a few bucks short.

Townsend

by *Ted Morrissey*

[Fragment 3492]

I'm on my way to the apartment, where my roommate Berto will be, illuminated by three screens, in his shirt and shorts, sometimes a canary kimono too. Berto works in finance, doing something with currencies and crypts. I'm not convinced he knows exactly what. HQ is in Hong Kong, and sometimes he'll have a meeting with his division or just his handler, forcing Berto to wear a better shirt. Otherwise, this is how he spends his days, half dressed in the glow of his monitors doing something with money that earns him crypts of his own. Lots of them.

He hasn't left the apartment in weeks, the building in months. Nearly everything is delivered. Groceries, toiletries, alcohol, gumdrops. Agoraphobia as a lifestyle. Berto socializes. He belongs to several groups on the deck. The members tend to have extroes like me, who help them stay in touch with the world beyond their walls. After all, the deck can't fulfill every need.

I know, for example, Berto is looking forward to tonight's riot.

Sometimes I coax him to the roof of our building. It's risky because we can run into others. Extroes by themselves, or ones who, too, have convinced or coerced their roommates to venture to the menacing world beyond their apartment door. I don't mind being Berto's extro. He pays the razor's take of the rent to compensate me for my service — a standard arrangement. Besides, I like Berto; he can be a lot of fun.

I leave Berto at the door that opens to the roof, the final point of safety, and go out to scout if anyone else is there. It doesn't take long because most of the roof is taken up with panels, big, ugly archaic ones. Antie swivels them to follow the sun as it creeps across the sky. The inky gray panels track it precisely whether in plain, painful view or incognito, hidden behind a dingy shroud of clouds. At night the noisy panels are at rest, their sun-seeking motors mute, not bothering to chase after the moon.

If the roof is free of extra extroes, Berto will risk a few minutes in the open air. Night is easier since we don't have to screen against the sun. But it's easier for everyone, making it more likely that we'll encounter other extroes, with or without their symbiotic, agoraphobic halves.

Sometimes, on the roof, in the moonlight, Berto and I talk about girls and books and streams, or Before. When we talk of beforetime we inevitably glance up at the moon. If it's out and full or nearly full, especially if it's after the illumine curfew, we can convince ourselves we see Zheng Min City, though it's probably just mountains and craters and shadows and suspicion. It grows larger and larger, says the deck, and will one day be as sprawling and as populated as the dark side's New Beijing, which of course we've only seen via pix and vidz. So we watch and wait for Zheng Min to grow beyond the threshold of obscurity.

Other times, Berto and I sit quietly and stare into the void, the black water stretching invisibly in one direction and the soulless land spreading across night in the other. Both ways incomprehensible. I can only guess at Berto's thoughts. Maybe they drift upon the infinite water. I consider the wild world beyond the city's limits: the communication vacuum, the satellite desert, the untethered zone, where you are as isolated as an embryo.

[Fragment 1023d]

Against organic opponents Townsend is almost unstoppable. Her chess is masterful, but it's her private site (private sight) that gives her such an edge. She's attractive, not stunning mind you. Very English, pale, lithe, an engaging smile with that little gap between her front teeth that shouldn't be alluring but is. Her fans — which number in 100ks — can watch her dispatch an opponent in a dozen savvy moves, then later get herself off in any number of positions.

Critics on the deck say she demeans herself and her gender and, for that matter, the game. There are standing petitions — gathering supporters in the 10ks — to ban Townsend from competing. But Antie has calculated her drawing power. Her official earnings average about 500k crypt a year, between tournaments and exhibitions. Meanwhile the rumor is her private site rakes in three times that. In other words, Townsend has demeaned herself into being a billion-crypt celebrity, one clever chess move and one ecstatic orgasm at a time.

I've checked out her private site, as any diligent journalist would. I haven't, however,

split-screened her during a match, as some fans are said to do. Skeptics attribute Townsend's success in tournaments to the distraction her alter-ego creates for her org opponents. For her games she dresses as demurely as a beforetime schoolteacher. Surely though her opponents have watched the vidz of her other self: the self-pleasing, moaning, cursing, screaming, coming Townsend, her labia as well-lit as a tennis court, her love-slick clit blushing like an untried bride. And how can they not think of it when seated across from her, the game-clock counting down, their game cock inching up? How can they fashion a defense against her often-unorthodox parries when their Id is immersed in all manner of imaginings?

The incongruence of the two Townsends aids them both.

Townsend doesn't fair as well when she plays against the Before masters: Alekhine, Botvinnik, Capablanca, Fischer, Marshall, Petrosian, Rudakovsky, Schlechter, Tarrasch, Tartakover, Weiss, Zagoryansky. Antie's visitants are immune to Townsend's attractions. Not that she is provocative when she plays against orgs. But they know, the orgs know. What lies beneath. What beats within. Her formless façade is a blank on which to project any precious temptation, enact any unspoken desire, invoke any unvoiced violation. In time it corrodes their concentration, and they run tripping into Townsend's traps. She is an expert of the Persian Phalanx and the Parisian Opening; she's perfected her own devious version of the Viennese Defense, or as she calls it, the Viennese Vivisection.

[Fragment 3977]

I make myself a cup of coffee and while the pressure is building I open the refrigerator. Its contents yawn in the harsh light. There's little to choose from on my sad-looking shelves and even less appeals. I take a hardboiled egg, already shed of its shell because that's how Antie sends them, and pepper it (and my fingers) from the shaker that's always on the counter. I eat the egg in two bites standing at the sink while the coffee finishes in a furious cloud of steam. I think of Zeus and Io.

I carry the small cup to my room, intending to read while waiting for the Townsend-Chernov game to begin.

[Fragment 5001b]

Berto was close to his father, Roberto Sr. They talked every Sunday morning like clockwork. But Berto Senior died... two years ago. Berto was still in mourning when he decided to purchase his father's ghost. That's not what Antie calls it: ISSI, intelligent synchronous sympathetic image, or issy. Berto Senior's issy contacts Berto every Sunday morning, like clockwork, and they chat for an hour, like father

and son. The issy mainly listens — I hear them through the wall — but sometimes it offers fatherly advice. I think of King Hamlet on the battlements.

Berto knows I don't approve, and he swears they only have the one weekly conversation. I'm not so sure. When I'm out I wonder if Berto contacts his father's ghost, or vice versa. People, especially people in mourning, can become addicted. They shut out their first life and even their second, and only want to be with their issy, wanting to see only them on their screens, to hear only them in their mindplants. It's an icy slope to acquire an issy.

[Fragment 4678]

There's still an hour before the chess match, and maybe it's because I've been thinking about Townsend but I feel the ultimate urge and decide to spend time with Wanda. She's set to respond when I enter my room. Hello, Hem. A tilt of her blond head, a sudden brightness in her eyes (aquamarine number 3). I've been with organics three times, well four times, the same org twice, and I prefer Wanda. Her techniques, her noises, her tits, the flying-buttress V sculpted above her vulva — all to taste, even its taste. But it's not just all that. I mean, the haphazardness of org sex, the surprises, the sometimes pleasant ones — those all have their attraction, sure. With Wanda there are no lurking shadows to distract from the sensations, no thoughts of disease or pregnancy or affection. No attachment. Just the primal sensations, the release, the ultimate urge ultimately cured, then Wanda powers down without a word and returns to her sleep station.

There are newer models, with longer menus and allegedly less uncanniness — and I've thought maybe an Asian Wanda, or African, or Latin. Some of the really pricy ones are synced with Antie (which I'd find rather weird). But I'm happy with Wanda, comfortable with her settings. Plus I don't owe a blip of a crypt. She's mine. There's only the semi-annual maintenance that comes mindlessly out of my crypt.

I brush back Wanda's hair and touch behind her right ear, where she's programmed to oral. Fast, I say, then check the time, No, medium. Slutty talk on setting 3. No, sexy talk, light, 2 max. I can't make up my mind: No talk, just noises. Enjoyment setting 4.

Wanda is perfect, or at least perfectly obliging. After she returns to her station I lay back and listen to the quiet whir of her self-cleaning. The newer models, says the deck, are completely silent in self-clean mode.

Normally the calm envelops me like an old-fashioned, beforetime moonbeam, and it

does for a moment. Then the restlessness returns. I hadn't felt it so plainly until after. It occurs to me I should've been thinking of Townsend, if I was going to be thinking of any org, but my mind is on the trail and the tail of the downside girl. I keep seeing the look she gave me, and the right roundness of her jeans as she scampered away, and the black leather jacket. I think about touching behind her ear, brushing back her pink hair... I think about kissing her.

[Fragment 1994]

The saying goes, Antie is everywhere and nowhere. Antie's eyes are omnipresent to the point of passing unnoticed. If one pays attention, sometimes the red dot is a gory glow, oftentimes not. It may be Antie's trick, to appear asleep, unaware. Or to appear alert. Her light on or off, either could be obfuscation, deception, pacification. One can believe whichever suits in the moment. Maybe all of Antie's Argus eyes are blind. It matters not. Antie sees through the deck, reads all the texts, watches all the images, absorbs all the news, weighs all the reviews. That much is certain. In that way we are united: we are all Antie's eyes and ears and everything else. Here in the city at least, beneath the satellites, Antie's stratosphered (stratosfeared) arms, Antie's oversight overseen by the Chinese machines like towered guards over a pacific prisonyard.

The deck has accounts of the Satellite Wars but they're brief, no doubt edited by Antie, who prefers to look forward. Before is just a base on which we stand, a starting block, a launchpad to be left behind as speedily as possible. Before exists, of course, in the books, ignored by most. They used to burn books, the deck says, and ban them, but why bother when they're unread anyway.

Written into the Earthen Contract

by William Doreski

Perversions of thunder undress
the sky, exposing its essentials.
We cower in the study and count
the seconds between lightning
and its long undulating verb.
Nothing can redeem the slaughter

of innocence everyone suffers
the first time weather enters
the primal matrix of thought.
Rain pummels our flower garden.
It saddens the lilies and roughs
heavy leaves of hybrid hosta.

The vegetable world considers
this experience foundational,
written into the earthen contract
that precedes the human event.
We crouch over the weather map
smiling on the laptop on which

most of our knowledge depends.
Soon enough the storm will end
by drifting east and out to sea.
The sky will look embarrassed
until full dark prevails, ending
our séance with a murky kiss.

Nocturne in D

by William Doreski

At three AM the dark thickens
and becomes almost edible.
Hard to breathe, though. You lie

in self-absorbed sleep while
the ceiling and roof disappear
and the naked stars peer down.

I've dreaded this moment
of exposure. The sky expands,
the earth under me vanishes.

The dark is so thick despite
the starlight I can't swallow
without chewing, but my teeth

are pebbles in a shallow brook,
my open mouth the entrance
to a cut-rate version of Hell.

You stir a little and sigh
in memory of all memories.
I want to wake you but

we've drifted a thousand miles
apart. Our mutual radiance
dispersed without illuminating

the places we used to love when
love was an option always
available without tears.

Notes on Contributors

Adamitz Scrupe, Mara

Mara Adamitz Scrupe is a poet and writer, visual artist, and documentary filmmaker. Her publications include five full poetry collections: *Lamentations of the Tattoo Queen* (forthcoming 2025), *REAP a flora* (2023, Shipwreckt Books), *in the bare bones house of was* (2020, Brighthorse Books), *Eat The Marrow* (2019, erbacce-press), and *BEAST* (2014, NFSPS Press). Twice nominated for the Pushcart Prize in Poetry, she has won or been shortlisted for significant literary awards including *Arts University Bournemouth International Poetry Prize*, *University of Canberra Vice-Chancellor's Poetry Prize*, *Pablo Neruda Poetry Prize* and *National Poetry Society UK*.

Backer, Sara

Sara Backer's first book of poetry, *Such Luck* (Flowstone Press), follows two poetry chapbooks: *Scavenger Hunt* (dancing girl press) and *Bicycle Lotus* (Left Fork), which won the Turtle Island Poetry Award. Her honours include a prize in the 2019 Plough Poetry Competition, ten Pushcart nominations, and fellowships from the Norton Island and Djerassi resident artist programs. She holds an MFA from Vermont College of Fine Arts and reads for *The Maine Review*. Recent publications include *Lake Effect*, *Slant*, *CutBank*, *Kenyon Review*, and *Poetry Northwest*.

Beswick, Katie

Katie Beswick is a writer from south east London. Recent poems appear in *Ink Sweat & Tears*, *Dust Poetry Magazine*, *Roi Fainéant*, *English: Journal of the English Association*, *Ballast* and *The Citron Review*, among others. Her debut chapbook is *Plumstead Pram Pushers* (Red Ogre Review, 2024). She is longlisted for the 2024 Canterbury Festival Poet of the Year award. She teaches at Goldsmiths, University of London.

Beveridge, Robert

Robert Beveridge makes noise (xterminal.bandcamp.com) and writes poetry on unceded Mingo land (Akron, OH). He published his first poem in a non-vanity/non-school publication in November 1988, and it's been all downhill since. Recent/upcoming appearances in *Kokako*, *The Impossible Archetype*, and *Taj Mahal Review*, among others.

Chard, Sean

Sean Chard is a student, father, and poet. Chard's work has been featured in various publications including *Popshot Quarterly*, *HereComesEveryone*, *The Crank*, *Bounds Green Book Writers*, *A Spot of Writing Magazine*, *The Norfolk Longbook*, and *Covid and Poetry*.

Depares, Ramona

Ramona Depares is an award-winning journalist and author. During her tenure at *The Times of Malta* she received two journalism awards by the Istitut tal-Ġurnalisti Maltin, one for cultural journalism and another for op-ed writing. Ramona has published three books: *Beltin: Stejjer Minn Nies Minsija* is a collection of real life stories that document the dying community of Valletta, *The Patient in Hospital Zero* is a collection of short stories, while *Katya: Easy on the Tonic* is the authorised biography of Katya Saunders, one of Malta's first openly trans women.

DiSarro, David R.

David R. DiSarro is currently an Associate Professor of English at Endicott College in Beverly, MA. His work has previously appeared in *Conclave: A Journal of Character*, *The Wilderness House Literary Review*, *The Hawaii Pacific Review*, and *Shot Glass Poetry Journal* among others. David's first chapbook, *I Used to Play in Bands*, was published by Finishing Line Press. He currently lives on the North Shore of Massachusetts with his wife, Riley, five children, and two rambunctious dogs.

Doggett, Eamon

Eamon Doggett recently completed a practice-based PhD at the University of Galway, combining a short story collection with a critical analysis of Dermot Healy's stylistic development. In this short essay, Doggett discusses visiting Sligo after finishing his research on Healy and trying to find Healy's traces in the landscape.

Doreski, William

William Doreski lives in Peterborough, New Hampshire. He has taught at several colleges and universities. His most recent book of poetry is *Cloud Mountain* (2024). His essays, poetry, fiction, and reviews have appeared in various journals.

Gates Brown, Tricia

Tricia Gates Brown's poetry has appeared in *Portland Review*, *Friends Magazine*, and *Mason Street Literary Review*, among other publications, and her flash story *Cold Wave* won a Winter 2024 Pop-Up Writing Contest with *Brilliant Flash Fiction*. Her debut novel *Wren* won a 2022 Independent Publishers Award Bronze Medal. By trade, she is an editor and co-writer residing in northwestern Oregon, mainly working on

projects for the National Park Service and Native tribes. For fun, she makes art. Her poetry collection *Of a Certain Age* is forthcoming from Fernwood Press in early 2025.

Grech Ganado, Maria

Maria Grech Ganado (b.1943) has won National Book Prizes for four of her eight poetry collections in Maltese or English and co-organised an international seminar with LAF and Inizjamed in 2005. She has been published in translation in many countries and in English in *Orbis*, *Envoi*, *Cinnamon Press* (Britain), *The Massachusetts Review* (US), and *In Focus and Cadences* (Cyprus). She has been awarded by her hometown, the University of Malta, and the State. Maria has three children and three grandchildren.

Grech, Maria Chiara

Maria Chiara Grech (MC) is a Maltese writer pursuing a Master's degree in English Literary Studies at the University of Malta. In both her creative and academic work, she explores themes of community, nature, and horror.

Grey, John

John Grey is an Australian poet and US resident, recently published in *New World Writing*, *North Dakota Quarterly* and *Lost Pilots*. Their latest books (*Between Two Fires*, *Covert and Memory Outside The Head*) are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in *California Quarterly*, *Birmingham Arts Journal*, *La Presa* and *Shot Glass Journal*.

Howarth, Tallulah

Tallulah Howarth is a multidisciplinary creative, currently studying an MA in Writing Poetry at Newcastle University, UK. They have previously had publications in *Ecosystems of Fury* and the *Leeds Poetry Festival Anthology*, among others. Her lyric essays have homes with *English PEN Transmissions* and *Something Other*. Previously shortlisted in the top five for the BBC Young Writers' Award, her work is observational and intimate. They are particularly passionate about foraging, archives, and Polish jazz. Find more of their work at tallulahhowarth.com.

Iannucci, Nancy Byrne

Nancy Byrne Iannucci is a librarian and poet who lives with her two cats: Nash and Emily Dickinson. *San Pedro River Review*, *34 Orchard*, *Bending Genres*, *The Mantle*, *Typehouse Literary Magazine*, and *Glass: a Poetry Journal* are some of the places you will find her. She is the author of four chapbooks, *Temptation of Wood* (Nixes Mate Review, 2018), *Goblin Fruit* (Impspired, 2021), *Primitive Prayer* (Plan B Press, 2022), and *Hummingbirds and Cigarettes* (forthcoming via *Bottlecap Press*). Visit her at www.nancybyrneiannucci.com Instagram: @nancybyrneiannucci .

Khalsa, Gurupreet K.

Gurupreet K. Khalsa is a current resident of Alabama, having lived previously in Ohio, Washington State, India, New Mexico, and California. She holds a Ph.D. in Instructional Design, and is a part time instructor in graduate education programs. Her work has appeared in multiple journals; many poems have received awards.

Kretzschmer, Alex

Alex Kretzschmer is a Sport Management student at the University of Michigan with a Minor in Creative Writing. He was drawn to writing one day when trying to reconcile simultaneous feelings of hope and despair. Since then, he has committed to exploring reality, the human mind, and play in his poetry.

Lecrivain, Marie C

Marie C. Lecrivain curates *Dashboard Horus: A Bird's Eye of the Universe* (<https://dashboardhorus.blogspot.com/>). Her writing has appeared in *bottle rockets*, *Nonbinary Review*, *Orbis*, and *Pirene's Fountain*. She's the editor of *Ashes to Stardust: A David Bowie Tribute Anthology* (2023 Sybaritic Press, www.sybpress.com).

Lodyga, Dobrochna

Dobrochna Lodyga is a student from Poland who has spent the last year studying in Malta on an Erasmus exchange. The experience encouraged Dobrochna to step out of her comfort zone and create more works in English. She lives close to her parents, sister, and her wonderful cat. Dobrochna loves music and (for the most part) writing.

Loydell, Rupert M.

Rupert Loydell is a senior lecturer in the School of Communication at Falmouth University, the editor of *Stride*, and a contributing editor to *International Times*. He is a widely published poet and has written about Brian Eno, David Lynch, industrial music, Christian rock, collaboration, pedagogy, and creative writing for academic journals and books.

Morrissey, Ted

Ted Morrissey's novel excerpts, short stories, poems, critical articles, reviews, and translations have appeared in more than 120 publications. His most recent books are the novel *The Strophes of Job* and *Delta of Cassiopeia: Collected Stories and Sonnets*. He co-hosts the podcast *A Lesson before Writing*.

Murphy, Sheila E.

Sheila E. Murphy's poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Hanging Loose*, *Fortnightly Review*, and numerous others. Most recent: *Permission to Relax* (BlazeVOX Books, 2023). She won the Gertrude Stein Award for *Letters to Unfinished J.* (Green Integer Press, 2003). *Reporting Live from You Know Where* (2018) won the Hay(na)Ku Poetry Book Prize Competition from Meritage Press. Her Wikipedia page can be found at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sheila_Murphy.

Nardolilli, Ben

Ben Nardolilli is an MFA candidate at Long Island University. His work has appeared in *Perigee Magazine*, *Door Is a Jar*, *The Delmarva Review*, *Red Fez*, *The Oklahoma Review*, *Quail Bell Magazine*, and *Slab*. Follow his publishing journey at mirrorsponge.blogspot.com.

Terkaoui, Sarah

Sarah Terkaoui is an Irish/Syrian poet. She was shortlisted for the Cinnamon Press Poetry Pamphlet Award 2022, commended for the Goldsmiths Poetry Festival and the Hippocrates Poetry Prize 2021, and longlisted for the Live Canon international poetry Prize 2021. She has been published in *Fragmented Voices*, *Ink Sweat & Tears*, *Imposter*, *Porridge*, *Green Ink Poetry*, *Lucent Dreaming*, *Propel*, *The Storms*, *Visual Verse*, and *Dreich*. She has an MA in Writing Poetry (Newcastle University/Poetry School London) and is working on her first collection.

Ward, Christian

Christian Ward is a UK-based poet with recent work in *Dust*, *Outcrop Poetry*, *Free the Verse*, *Loch Raven Review*, *Cider Press Review*, and elsewhere.