

AS ABOVE SO BELOW ISSUE 7

Summer 2021

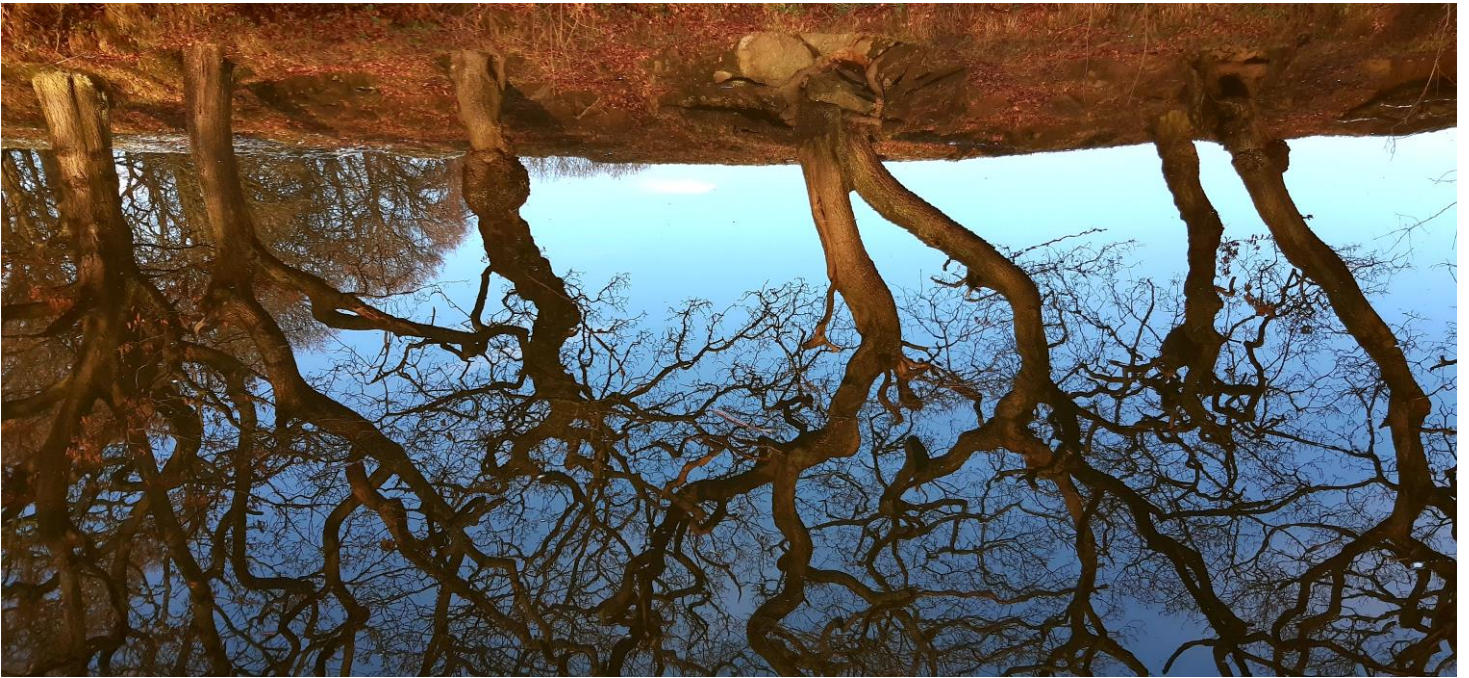


Photo by Mark Connors

'For the soul is a wanderer with many hands and feet.'

from A Map to the Next World by Joy Harjo

Foreword

This has been (dare I say it) an unprecedented 12 months!
For some it's been very hard, (including myself), incredibly very hard,
and for others it may have been easier.

Amidst the stresses and frustrations of trying to be creative,
keep a focus, remember what direction we're trying to head in, somehow,
Issue 7 has now been born!

I want to thank all the writers for their patience and support at this time,
and thank the readers for enabling As Above So Below to exist.
And thanks to Mark Connors for his wonderful photograph.

As ever, the poems are formatted to be as above, so below,
so if you have more than one poem published,
it will be reflected like a tree in water, and be equidistant
from the centre of the anthology.

I hope you enjoy this issue on the theme of hands and feet,
and whatever your creative passion is – FOLLOW IT, no matter what!
As Joseph Campbell says: 'Follow your bliss.'

Bethany Rivers
Editor

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A Medicine for Weltschmerz

Sartre: I have plunged my hands into shit and mud. They are dirty, up to the elbow.

When I knock at my heart's door
there is a muffled cry but no chink of light.

My hands are grimed with the love I gave a man
who would not dirty his shoes to walk a mile in mine.

My cuticles are carved into bloody half-moons
where I pressed together the wounds gaping in the earth's crust.

My wrists are ringed with soot bangles
from beating out forest fires.

My biceps ache from holding heads above water, close,
but not close enough, to hostile foreign shores.

My shoulders shudder from standing strong
against a mob of baton-wielding upholders of the law.

I open the padlock on the gate, fasten myself in.
Roll up my sleeves, decide against gloves.

The trowel tip dislodges a cache
of mollusc eggs gleaming like unstrung pearls.

A blackbird loops curlicues of song
through limbs of trees baroque with their harvest of plums.

I dig and pull, plant and prune,
harvest the good, compost the bad.

Rainwater in the tub rinses my hands cool and pale;
a rainbow of berries, beans and marigolds points the way home.

I knock again, and hear footsteps.
The door opens a crack.

Hannah Stone

Chestnut

have you noticed the half open umbrella
newborn, leaves of the chestnut?
they hang down like bats with their leafy wings cocked just so

my baby falls asleep satiated
her hands make the same shape
tipees of soft pink flesh, soft as down-turned lilies
forgotten in her sleepiness

ready to spread open when she wakes

I slide my finger into the socket of her palm
the heart of the leaf, centre of the flower
the tipi's fire

she unconsciously grips it

a stick to burn, a first wand
to wave and command

her face flickers in a small flame of a smile
I rock her gently
her quiet breathing whispers of her future self

a spirit spire
moving heavenward
like a twist of smoke

Susannah Violette

(Previously published by Writers' Cafe)

Looking through construction hoardings

Bangkok, Thailand

There's a sand mafia controlling supply,
I recently read. The hungrier they are,

the more sky devoured. Investors imagine
fast lifts, straight up to glory. Yet the greedy

reincarnate into starving ghosts, they say here,
with large hands and with mouths so tiny

no food can pass. Forever wanting more,
they stomp and rage, come below

dogs even in the karma ranking
of the next life. And here's another

stamped footprint, barging away
our finesse. Across the half-completed

condo entrance, my eyes make out
a trail of light paws, set firm in concrete.

Christopher M James

Walking back in time

My last steps lead me to my first
as sure as a reliable book of maps.
I start in comfort, sensible shoes,
flat like the lines on the monitor.
Frame holds me up, exoskeleton
for shuffling off. Next I chance
some sturdy boots, walking daily
while I still can, then click click
of kitten heels on polished floors.
Along the way, trainers, pumps,
Start-Rights measured in the shop,
until I'm wearing knitted booties.
In the beginning my ten tiny toes
kicked inside you, let you know,
until it was time to breach the dam.
All these steps, these steps in time,
back, back, back to when it was
all to come, everything ahead.
Walking back I see what made me
stumble, change route. But then
I couldn't know the podiatry
of digging in my heels, stepping out.

Pat Edwards

Handclasp After Lockdown

Ten months have wiped out
my image of your palm,
its heart-shaped curve.
But I know our handclasp is
Midas gold, coming home,
on wings of down,
a melody, a green shoot,
silver birch branches,
baskets of sweet pears,
sitting in your favourite lug chair,
fresh morning cheese scones
a hammock, swinging lightly.

Maggie Mackay

Chi – Standing Five Elements

Fiery magma slinking beneath thin Plates
erupting, forming this ancient isle
erupting, forming islands to the west
where the sun yet erupts in that fissure
between day & dusk

& we scoop the waters
from the sea, its tide rising,
spraying high over black lava boulders
over black iguanas crawling back to depths...
& let it flow over our calming spirits

Rough sand pebbled with small shells,
fragments of white coral, deep
purple sea urchin spines crunching
beneath our bare feet sinking into this earth,
hands rising like fair maidens working
a shuttle, weaving the day to a close

Upright like a strong tree, scalesia,
opuntia or candelaria—of mangrove
rooting into marshen shores—
peering through the branches
of our fingers, twisting trunks in the breeze
that is coming with this evening

Our hands push olivine, basalt,
plagioclase, metal flakes shimmering
& scoop their energy, bringing it forward again,
peridotite, pyroxene, metal flakes shimmering
in the fire of this sunset & that
magma beneath thin Plates

Lorraine Caputo

(Previously published in Peacock Journal)

A Winter Photograph

On a broken fence post
grapes hang, dripping
ice from last night's frost,
red like wine splashed
on winter's slushy floor,
and at the edge of the frame
a blackbird hovers. Peering. Uncertain.
Wondering whether to trust
the hands that placed them there.

Elodie Barnes

Liminalities

Green sheet shields
one lifesaver from another

the chaplain
prepares a soul for eternity
blessed oils anointing skin so thin
it barely separates
unripe organs from the sterile world

beyond the protecting veil
the surgeon's tools are sharper;
her hands enact the science of prayer
in the rethreading of a tube.

Hannah Stone

(Previously published in Missing Miles (Indigo Dreams, 2017)

What Remains

After the op
the hand's not itself

weakened and dull
in grasp and in reach

yet, it can still
do some of what's real

hold a pen
turn a page
wipe a tear
stroke a cheek

and perhaps, just
perhaps, it's enough

Lucy Heuschen

(Previously published by Irsi Magazine)

During the First Illness

Today the cabin smells of tobacco and cedar—
Bartok colours the silence—

To the east
the mountains stoop into nearby woods—

To the west
the leftover sun plays across the sky—

Turning north
I kill the pain with whiskey,
as laughter spills from my mouth,
like water dripping from a crack in the ceiling—

Facing south
I sit upon a log, calling your name with a desolate voice
from my alley of desperation, calling to a forgotten muse—

I notice autumn watching me like an old man,
wearing bright clothes, sitting by an open window,
toothless and haggard—

I attempt being professional, counting my days like pieces of gold,
listening to the concert of leaves, fading in motion,
like the last circular cycle of a disconnected fan,
flapping the breeze gently.

Another toast to another day
knowing that those my age are acting younger than I ...
even my fingernails feel the pain.

Tim Resau

(Previously published in 'The Beautiful Space' & 'Sideways')

Ascension

Your sunlit cairns sit
precariously stacked
stone placed upon stone placed
upon stone by hands over time
in memory of those that lost
their purchase on the scree
and ensuring newcomers do not
wander astray

all these pilgrimages
imbue you with meaning
build you up to celestial heights
stone upon stone upon stone like the cairns
and so, people come to potter their souls
upon your slopes

does a mountain remember
every person to ascend
and descend – the fleeting touch
of lineages, civilisations, through millennia?
our imprints known only to you

maybe one day you'll carry
the very last trace of us
to the firmament in your snow-capped rocket
and as sure as primordial ooze
once mouthed mouthlessly in your now silent
tributaries, hands and feet
will find you again

Kevin McGowan

Penance

He saw the painting
of the sky at dawn,
and the moon's retreat;
the horizon drew him on.

He watched an eagle's shadow hang
like a crucifix over ripening wheat,
and his feet took him
to the raw paradise of the garrigue,
wafting the scent of fragrant thorns.

Every bend intrigued,
with each climb suspense grew,
each fork in the road was a choice,
but he knew the way.
He felt the stretching out of time
and the seasons changed.

On Galicia's shore,
he fell to his knees
to pick a scallop shell;
His feet showed lines and hollows
like the tracks he had followed
in the Pyrenees.
A thousand miles
to save his soul,
walking to Santiago.

Olivia Brookfield

Walking With My Son's Shadow

When I walk in the dark,
I don't have to say hello to anyone.
And I'm not concerned how far I'll go.
It's no worry if the sun
doesn't shine.
Even if it's bitter cold
I can get my thoughts aligned.
There's no telling
what I may find.
When I walk in the dark,
I've made my choice to be alone.
I feel a little closer to those
I love who've gone home.
I don't even know
which way to turn.
But it's alright.
When I walk alone in the dark.
I can't define time or space.
It's simpler to feel the cold on my face.
It feels so honest to me.
Like a promise I can keep.
You by my side.
Calvin, my son.
Still sometimes
I get lost in reality.
My hand outstretches to clasp
your hand.
I feel the warmth
of your blood.
But in the end, there is nothing
but elusive air
for my hand to hold.

Robert Pegel

Has lost her sheep

These hands have performed
all the acts a good shepherdess could.
They've brought down a 13 stone Lincoln ram
to shear off his curly coat in swathes.

They've poked colonies of maggots
out of the holes
in a runt's crawling rump
that stank.

They've pulled hanks of lamb
from exhausted gimmers in the press of labour,
then buried their after-births;
marbleised bags of red, purple and pearl.

A Wiltshire Horn ewe named Gentle
followed like a dog at my heels for years.
But now, in the shade of the palm of my hand
I scan the hills, finding Gentle is gone.

Susan Taylor

Lord, Let Come With Nothing in My Hands

Tongues of fire burst out
in downtown streets.
The drunken riot of Pentecost.
Bewildered crowds gather.
The river swells
like the sound of violence.
Fear colours the scene.
Moments before the wind,
they were sitting in
peace. Secured
from authorities,
barricaded behind locks.
Sin is sandbags of unbelief,
but the Spirit splits untruth in two.
They are no longer
separate. They stand
outside, face to face,
speaking language
everyone understands.
Thousands join
the new baptism,
breathing
free at last.
Some see
an economy of blasphemies
shattering their temple.
Whatever they hold becomes a weapon.
Smoke, stones, status quo.
They can't grasp freedom;
and refuse to listen
to its gasps
and let go.

Matthew Miller

Manchineel

You find my kind "vexatious". Why?

Is it because we take up space you're keen to claim your own?

(a place we've known for longer than you've yet learned how to count)

Or – worse, perhaps – the fact you can't make use of us

the way you're wont to think you should ...and do, with all that falls

within your view / your aim / your path / your avid, hot, rapacious grasp?

Is it outrage at our simple, mute insistence on existing

– or that we dare fight back –

that drives you on to slash and burn?

An inability to learn? ...or merely greed?

Vexatious? Hardly.

We harm only those that do us harm.

If you cut us... see? Do we not bleed?

Ken Cumberlidge

Must I die to be loved by you?

You didn't want me to be yours
full of midday excess,

where I could conjure a thousand hands
and all of them would be yours.

I didn't need to light candles,
set no scene. Just the oil of words
and the fresh folds of snow
forming us together.

The disappearance of us
in a puff of steam gave me nightmares.

I saw you pulse fire from your
wounds, I would rather have kissed them
than die.

I have bathed in salt, and dreamed
I forgive you, it stung like a paper cut.

There are still flowers here, floating
beside flowers, all sopping.

I am ready now you are gone. Of course.
When I die, wrists slit by the crisp edge
of a meteor.

Words will be an umbilicus
between us, we will shoot regular stars
from there to here.

Here to there.
Burning out like wishes.

Susannah Violette

My Native Tongue

I find it in the old rhythms of a Sunday morning
when time slips by uncounted
and I am caught in the completeness of my attention.
It is a tongue for listening more than speaking,
comfortable to lose itself to silence.

It is not generally taught to children
with squash and biscuits, crayons
colouring inside the lines.
If they know already
they are taught to forget its cadences.

Nor can it be corralled by theologians at their desks,
not unless they fling wide their windows,
let it blow in with the breeze.
Like all speech, it depends
on breath.

It is body and blood, spoken with knees
and hands and lips and nothing,
tasted as much as it is heard. Bread. Wine.
We speak it in jagged unisons.
It is never uniform.

It comes to me in partial vocabulary,
my gappy dictionary of words without definition,
definitions without words.
It holds facts as prepositions, being
more interested in names, hoarding verbs for later.

It is a language of margins, footnotes and white space.
It leaves me with hope,
a fragile fledgling in my hands,
a soft pulse against my fingers,
faint but clear.

Caroline Stewart

Sorcery

A charm from the book of spells. Since
those dummy runs and space creation,

the zone marking and possession play,
the closing down, pressing high, we forgot:

there was once a magic sponge land
where mud clung so hard to studs,

blending the laces into the body of the boot,
shin pads like growths, and the ball itself

zonking out in puddles, then growing
so big and burdened we pulled

our heads away. And tactics without
followers, which only the ball had

in its kicked-forwardness. We trooped off
spent, muddier, pounds heavier,

waddling to showers like penguins
on a slippery floor, our pretend wings

flapped out as if rescued,
soaring, defining.

Christopher M James

Contactless

You shouldn't, but
you're walking into Subway.

It's a festival of carbs
you know you're going to regret

and those gloves may be hygienic
but they're single-use and they
must get through hundreds in a day

but hell, it's cheap and hassle-free
and right now you're just not cut out
for complications,

not now you've seen him,
the new boy behind the counter:

the reason you're at this branch
for the eighth time in two weeks;

the reason you're at this branch,
not the one in the arcade,

in spite of that one being
down the hill, not half so busy
and a great deal more convenient for the bus;

the reason you've hung back,
let someone else get served before you,
made it certain you and he will synchronise.

It's the eyes. Of course!
It's always been the eyes with you

and his are proper drowners
– not that he lets you get to see them much:

keeps them downcast mostly,
busy, focussed on the job.
Well fair enough, you think: that knife is sharp.

Nearly as sharp as your own shame
at what a punchline you've become.
What is he... Nineteen? Twenty at a push?
Dear God, you're tragic! When will you grow up?

And now it's your turn, and you're praying
maybe this time you won't stammer
like you've done three times already,
when he halts you with that shy half-smile:
the one like sunlight just broke through a cliché.

"Don't tell me, let me guess: the usual?"

OMG he knows you've got a usual!
He checklists the ingredients to be certain.
No mistakes.

You watch his hands, bedazzled,
as he busies with the salads, deft
and dextrous, like a close-up magic trick.

The gloves come off; you
notice that his nail-varnish is new,

imagine an alternative reality
in which you comment casually on this:
the light, inconsequential conversation
that might feasibly ensue...

but now he's through,
is done with you, already busy
with the next one in the queue.

Tapped in, checked out,
pocketing your card,
you call out thanks;
he glances up. He smiles...

and you head out to the waiting day
– glad, just for the now,
to be hungry
to be here
to be alive.

Ken Cumberland

Her Wildness Will Preserve the World

Darkness eddies the forest floor in bands
of shade, sprinkled like bitter chocolates.
She tremolos wildflowers. Fluttered hands,
cool fingers, string bracelets of dew droplets.

Beneath black walnuts, her feet make no sound.
Her loose wisteria sun dress rippling
the deep green. Fine loam, warm as coffee grounds,
shadows her toes. She beholds each stripling,

then sashays from their paths. Leaving new tracks,
she plucks at taut stems like a mandolin,
wipes strands from her eyes, picks blue toadflax
and sweet woodruff. Her mother weaves them in

fairy spuds, wild phlox, and sugar-blond hair.
Spring beauty, tossing moxie through dark air.

Matthew Miller

Hard Hands

I have made a religion of motherhood
with strict codes of practice laid down
in case of all eventualities;
a system of reward and rebuke
with hold too strong
for one being to bear on another.
Life is more than blood bond,
much more than a mother gives.

I wish my hands could make more space;
hard hands that knew harvest
and remember themselves as a cup
to check the grains' cold flow,
and shelter flame to catch the straw
as weather changed.

I was strong and brown at the end of summer.
Born into Diana's family,
she taught me the grief of the fields.
On Saturdays, it was my job
to carry the spoils to the Market Square;
huge hares with globes for eyes,
their legs stiffly stretched
into forms half as tall as myself.
They smelt dangerously of blood.
Bare arms raised, I carried them like sisters,
and how the men stared.

Susan Taylor

Series of Haiku

mum's piano ...
her music still echoes
in a minor key

your silent guitar
gathers dust in the corner -
I draw a heart

my to-do list
folded into a paper plane
launched into the wind

moon and stars
held in a curl of twigs ...
dreamcatcher

potting tomatoes...
sweet scent of summer
filling the greenhouse

a curled feather
drifting downstream ...
your absent touch

Annie Wilson

Green fingers

She had gardener's hands
never quite clean at the edges, the cracks,
always dirt in between the layers of skin
they took on the green of the leaves
she clipped and the weeds she pulled.
The brown of the soil washed off in the sink
but the chlorophyll stain, more permanently
inked, a determined tattoo, a visible clue
to the labour of her afternoons.
She swore by Atrixo but it never smoothed
sharp creases on her index fingers
nothing removed those thorns, pointed
perfect for snagging a pair of tights
new from the packet.

Emily Reynolds

Kick

Faint as a drumbeat's ghost
from within aquatic sphere
a not-quite-foot announces:
I am here.

Kevin McGowan

Anna's Words

Her love-photos pressed anonymously in small gilt frames...
her unhoused paintings like Maxfield Parrish's still brush,
or the stark, white canvas, too naked.
Her artistic hands left grasping leaves from last year's garden—
Anna sighs ... whispers ... waits.
Anna's storybook window is seen from the street,
but there from within, where carnivals are held on amaranthine days,
beneath Tiffany fixtures, pink rooms—
flute ... harp music ... *laughter* ... she lives her secrets,
then pointedly rests her hands in place and begins again.

Tim Resau

The Mouse

Soft to the touch, he was given a sweet name
that made him sound normal and reassuring.

*What you've found is most likely a breast mouse.
A medieval term. Women have always had them.
Let's book you in for some checks after Christmas.*

My mouse endured the crash-bang of panto,
children shrieking *Oh yes he is – oh no he's not.*

Only I could feel him scuttling as mice do,
feel whiskers tickling me, his blood vessels
merging with mine, his body gaining mass.

A touch of fibreglass in place of smooth flesh,
the tail of my breast, the slim tip of a teardrop.

Mouse didn't like light, so I silently apologised
as we went through ultrasound, CT scan, MRI,
a biopsy instrument that penetrated his organs.

*It's just like an injection, I have heard. Punch-quick,
nothing to worry about. All quite routine, I said.*

At follow-up, he didn't think much of the nurse,
her neutral face. Neither of us knew the meaning
of her presence, the solemn purple of her uniform.

Until we did.

Slow fingers of dusk tapered across the corridor.
My mouse vanished; a dark thing took his place.

Lucy Heuschen

Discalced

'He's fine', your carer says,
'he's lost a shoe but happy going barefoot.'
I thank her and return to my meeting
Where I'm distracted by the thought
Of you steadying one foot at a time
On the fifteen treads of the stairs,
Your toes leaning into the deep pile
As you go up, then down because
You don't remember why up or even
What 'up' is.
And I try to take an interest
In a smart spreadsheet,
Pleased to think you'll be wearing socks
In a nice shade of fawn
(the colour of post-war frugality)
And that she made these for you,
Fingers flashing the four silver spears
Which clacked and chattered as she turned the heel,
Knitting her love into each pair,
Something you can run your fingers over
Because now that words are treacherous
Textures console.
And I plan to make, for your birthday,
A patchwork cushion from scraps
Of warm Welsh wool, edged
With blanket stitch,
And I'll show your hands its narrative
Of elusive shades from a forgotten land,
And this seems suddenly so much more urgent
Than commenting on the coded cells
Which populate the page –
A necessary ministry, a laying on of hands.

Hannah Stone

(Previously published in An After Dinner's Sleep (with Gill Lambert and Maria Preston, Indigo Dreams Publishing)).

The Escape Plot

From the bones of dead comrades shall I
Create a ladder to climb from this trench
Lashed with the sinews and rags of those
I barely knew who perished,
But who now guide my hands with their pale presences
Willing me on without rage and with courage
From the quiet of their perfumed clouds.

As for me, I am a zone for flies,
A stench to feed on. I fend them off.
They shall not have my tongue and eyes
They shall not have my sweat to suck on.
Give me nets and fever candles...toll the bell...
A stretcher comes...oh send me home in a nest of a cradle
Wake up Billy! Wake up!

Oh shoot me my friend, shoot me
In the foot. I'll do the same for you but in the hand
So then the sergeant don't suspect;
And we will tramp through Flanders,
Crawl through shit and hitch a chugging ferry over sea
And as English heroes we will be
On the deck of an ambulance ship...

I can see us now drinking watered beer in the pub
And in the peace of our own dear wood
Crouched low among the pheasants.
Oh Billy, they cut down that wood last year
- Did you not hear?
'Tis what they make our trenches from...

Clive Donovan

(First published Atlantean Publishing 'Great war booklet')

Knowing Art

Handprints, older than the pyramids, adorning rock walls in caves and on cliffs, delicately painted in charcoal and ochre by the rough, hairy hands of our oldest upright ancestors, or stencilled in vermilion cinnabar dust, blown over, around and past an *actual hand* by musky-sweet breathe to stick to the stone for a dozen millennia. On an exposed cliff face, they signal – Stop! – Go no further! The jinn of this place welcome you not. At the entrance to the cave, though, they wave and beckon, reach out to take hold of my strange, strange clothes and lead me inwards to the cool and to the gloom, to a low, low murmur seeping softly from the fissures. Mesmerised, drawn deeper, ever further, until suddenly, startlingly, deep within the subterranean labyrinth, more prints appear, by the light of electricity and reason, scaring me, admonishing me, silently berating me for penetrating too far into the Sacred Mountain, into the Goddess, into the Dream. Back. Go back. You are like a child. Back, finally, at the gaping mouth of the cave – the extravagant window onto the wall-less vastness of the outside world – I finally find a perfect pair of ochre-blown handprints among the hundreds that are gathered, ready, or so I thought, to bid me farewell. These hands knew ice, intimately; knew fire, intimately; knew fear and love, intimately; knew the jinn, intimately; these are hands that knew art. I place my own, blood-warm hands tentatively upon them, and they immediately sink up to the wrists in the suddenly softening stone, while a voice far, far away in time and yet so close I can smell her musky-sweet breath, says, “Anchor yourself”.

Robert Best

South Side of the Sky

That's me, to the far right of a hawthorn tree: a water hydrant silhouette, an impromptu self-portrait on a crumbling dry stone wall. The air is bristling for a kestrel; I can hear it on the wind. They never come when you expect them. A pigeon has to do. And it looks comfortable up here, pretending to be something it is not, another version of itself, yet no less *it* than if it fed from hands in City Square. It's a matter of context. And this is one place to be thankful for your lot. I dread my steep descent back through wild woods: bloated sluices chortling, in sly anticipation of my inevitable downfall, via water or by dead drop from a rotting branch above. So I'll stay up here a while, listen to the wind, waiting for a kestrel that will never come.

Mark Connors

On Pointe

Sunday afternoons in Raheny, me in the garden
with Deanna Durbin tapping ours hearts out –
begging my sisters to come out and play.

Later it was the kitchen with Fred and Ginger
transported to a place of ease, of grace
of movement and joy.

Yet ballet was where my heart and soul resided.
At eleven I saw the Bolshoi, cloud soft tutus,
wafting dancers, wonderous uplifting music.

All my senses stirred. I begged for ballet classes.
No money, my athletic build and size eight feet
were barriers for years. I gave up.

At fifty, an adult ballet class lifted my spirits,
encouraged my gnarled feet to bend, to float.
Brought me home.

Rona Fitzgerald

Confirm Humanity

*Before we subscribe you, we need to confirm
you are a human*

Again!? I have to type in
a crude barcode of twig letters,
to prolong my shelf life
on this poetry site.

But like something prodded,
I'm back in the blanket bogs
of the Maumturk Mountains
wrestling my wheel into bends
for a late poetry reading.
Drizzle around has drenched
rushes and moor grass into pastel,
mist has so clouded the land
sheep barely stain into it,
mountains are rubbed out, like
elementary school mistakes.

The road is demented by turns,
I'm an inpatient in padded air.
A junction yawns abruptly:
I hesitate, feeling called again
to feed a cuckoo. Still,
an idea hooks into the space
like sheep's fleece on a wire;
a tip-off of an unlikely verse
crosses before me,
mist to mist, ruminant
yet to turn its head.

So, I'll click the self-fulfilling
prophecy. Human then
but with wadding. Contents
may have settled in transit.

Christopher M James

With Laura, a Microdot and the Universe

A half blind girl in the midst of a thunderstorm sky cracked itself like a purple egg, eggs can be purple in this universe, where we are all connected. I read it's a silver thread, but on this acid I see a rainbow, bursting from us to the inverse lightning of a tree branching your names in the sky, where I dissolve. Where I dissolve I am holding your hand, I am a spinning top human, and so are you and we, we are all holding hands. And is it your hand or my own hand that is dizzy? Have you ever felt dizziness in your hand? In your palm flinging out fingertips like a Catherine wheel? This is a million million hands overlaying, inter-being mine and I am you and you are me and there is no separation there-is-no-goddamn-separation. How am I so alone?

Susannah Violette

Patched up

This old pashmina weaves strength and softness
with its silk and cashmere.
One side is bleached
from where it covered my head in a hot country,
where women veil themselves
from the gaze of men.
It is punctured in places,
where moths sated their appetite
while I was busy laying plans.
So I sat with a needle-ful of yarn,
darning new substance across the holes.
It is finished now, warm and flawed.
I would like to find a man I could wear with such ease,
or someone with cold shoulders
I could drape it round.
I will search for someone who will let me bring
my patient mending to the fabric of their life.

Hannah Stone

BIOGRAPHIES

Elodie Barnes is a poet and essayist who can be found writing in France, Spain or the UK (usually mixing up her languages). Her work has been nominated for Best of the Net and the Pushcart Prize, and she is Books Editor at Lucy Writers Platform. Find her online at <http://elodierosebarnes.weebly.com>, and on Twitter @BarnesElodie.

Robert Best is a writer, poet and shaman living in the wilds of Northumberland who has also dabbled in teaching, broking and banking. His published poems and poetry reviews can be found at www.shamanicpoet.com and he has a collection due for release in 2022 from Iron Press. In 1992 he became the first novice ever to win the Stock Exchange London to Brighton Walking Race, and in 1999 he completed a 36-day visionary fast. Om.

Olivia Brookfield is still enjoying walks in the countryside, notebook and camera to hand, whilst endeavouring to stay active in body and mind, learning to speak French, and being very grateful for a happy retirement. She is finding it easy to write copious descriptions, but less so to edit her ideas meaningfully. She is an active contributor to her village magazine, which is published monthly, and an avid reader with eclectic tastes.

Lorraine Caputo is a poet-translator works appear in over 200 journals on six continents; and 12 chapbooks of poetry – including *On Galápagos Shores* (dancing girl press, 2019). She has done literary readings, from Alaska to the Patagonia. Caputo travels through Latin America, listening to the voices of the pueblos and Earth.

Mark Connors is a poet, novelist and creative writing facilitator from Leeds, UK. His debut poetry pamphlet, *Life is a Long Song* was published by OWF Press in 2015. His first full length collection, *Nothing is Meant to be Broken* was published by Stairwell Books in 2017. His second poetry collection, *Optics*, was published in 2019. His third collection, *After*, will be published in 2021. Mark is a co-founder of the indie publishers, YAFFLE.

Ken Cumberlidge cut his performance teeth on the Liverpool pub poetry scene of the 1970s. Nowadays based in Norwich, Ken can be lured out of cover by good company and an open mic - a proclivity that has led him to become an habitué of the slam poetry/spoken word stage. He likes it. A lot.

Clive Donovan devotes himself full-time to poetry and has published in a wide variety of magazines including The Journal, Agenda, Acumen, As Above So Below, Poetry Salzburg Review, Prole, Sentinel Literary Quarterly and Stand. He lives in the creative atmosphere of Totnes in Devon, U.K. often walking along the River Dart for inspiration. He is hoping to entice a publisher to print a first collection.

Pat Edwards is a writer, reviewer and workshop leader. She hosts Verbatim open mic nights and curates Welshpool Poetry Festival. Pat's debut pamphlet, *Only Blood*, was published in 2019 by Yaffle Press. Her next, *Kissing in the Dark*, has just been released from Indigo Dreams.

Rona Fitzgerald has poems in UK, Scottish, Irish and US publications, in print and online. Highlights include featured poet in the *Stinging Fly* 2011, *Aiblins: New Scottish Political Poetry* 2016, *Oxford Poetry XVI.iii Winter* 2016-17. Ten poems in *Resurrection of a Sunflower*, Pski's *Porch* 2017. Recent publications are *Poems for Grenfell Tower*, Onslaught Press 2018 and *#Me Too*, Fair Acre Press, 2018.

Lucy Heuschen is a British poet living in Germany. Publications include *Reach*, *Irisi*, *The Great Margin*, *Covid Narratives*, *FEED*, *Unlimited*, *Beyond Words*, *Poetry & Covid* and *Green Ink*. Lucy is the founder of *The Rainbow Poems* and the *Sonnets for Shakespeare Anthology* and leads the Poetry Society Stanza for Germany.

Christopher M James, a dual British/French national, has published in *Aesthetica*, *Ink*, *Sweat and Tears*, *The Journal*, and in numerous anthologies (*Live Canon*, *WoLF*, *Canterbury POTY*, *Verve*, and *Dempsey & Windle*). He has been a prizewinner in several competitions (*Sentinel*, *Yeovil*, *Stroud*, *Poets meet Politics*, *Wirral*, *Maria Edgeworth*, and *Earlyworks*).

Maggie Mackay's pamphlet 'The Heart of the Run' is published by Picaroon Poetry and her full collection 'A West Coast Psalter', Kelsay Books, is available now. She reviews pamphlets at www.sphinx.co.uk and loves to daydream with a dram.

Kevin McGowan is a writer based in Stirling, Scotland. He has had numerous poems and short stories published. His first chapbook, 'Eastern Thistles', was printed by Dreich in 2020.

Matthew Miller teaches social studies, swings tennis rackets, and writes poetry - all hoping to create home. He and his wife live beside a dilapidating orchard in Indiana, where he tries to shape dead trees into playhouses for his four boys. His poetry has been featured in *River Mouth Review*, *Whale Road Review*, *Club Plum Journal* and *Ekstasis Magazine*.

Robert Pegel is a father who lost his only child, his son Calvin, four years ago. Calvin died in his sleep. In an effort to deal with the unimaginable, Robert began writing a lot of poetry. Most of the poetry tries to make sense of loss and grief, and connecting this world and the afterlife. Robert hopes to help others struggling with loss and grief in his writing. He hopes they find perseverance and inspiration from his work. Robert was an English major at Columbia University. He has just begun submitting poetry. He has been published by Unique Poetry.

Timothy Resau is an American writer of fiction and poetry, currently residing in coastal North Carolina, and he's just completed a novel, *Three Gates East*. His career has been in the international wine industry. His writings have appeared in *Anti-Heroic Chic*, *Eskimo Pie*, *Scarlet Leaf Review*, *Down in the Dirt*, *Covid-19* University of Plymouth & Nottingham Trent University, and *The Poet*

Emily Reynolds lives in Bristol with her family. She spends her days working with new mothers and writes after bedtime, when everything is quiet.

Caroline Stewart works for the NHS as a clinical scientist and is also a part time academic at Keele University. In her working life she studies biomechanics, analysing how people move. She's particularly interested in the mechanics of walking. Practicing science involves curiosity and paying close attention. She enjoys taking the same approach to writing poetry.'

Hannah Stone has published four volumes of poetry, edits Dream Catcher journal, curates Nowt but Verse for Leeds Library and the Poets/Composers forum for Leeds Lieder. In 2020, she was Poet Theologian in Virtual Residence for Leeds Church Institute. Her background is in academic Theology as well as creative writing.

Susan Taylor began writing in her teens in the idyllic setting of her family farm in the Lincolnshire Wolds – Tennyson country. An ex-shepherd, she's a turncoat now, with much sympathy for the plight of the wild wolf. She has eight published poetry collections and a new solo poetry show, 'La Loba Enchanting the Wolf' www.susantaylor.co.uk

Susannah Violette has had poems placed or commended in the Plough Prize, Westival International Poetry Prize, the Frogmore poetry prize, Coast to Coast to Coast Pamphlet Competition and appeared in various publications worldwide most recently Pale Fire (anthology of contemporary writing on the moon), For the Silent (anthology supporting the work of the LACS), You Are Not Your Rape (anthology of empowerment and overcoming rape) Strix and Eyeflash.

Annie Wilson started out writing for *Holiday Which?*, various women's magazines and travel guidebooks. She moved from London to the Welsh Borders 30 years ago. Reading, writing and listening to poetry has lit up her life over the last 10 years. She belongs to a writing group, and has occasionally read at Shrewsbury Poetry.