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Editorial

I’m thinking about water and the colour blue. Henri Matisse maintained that a certain blue enters your soul. Certainly, water reflects different shades of the soul’s blues for the writers in this edition.

Water draws us to its shores, moves us to reflect, insists upon its presence in all its mysterious mutability, invites us to enter an otherworld. “My children climbed your barnacled rocks...looking for treasures: dog-whelks, hermit crabs, shrimps, blood-like anemones”, writes Deirdre mc Clay in ‘Walking Rathmullan Beach, Co. Donegal’. The fear of any source of water is called aquaphobia, and Shelley Tracey asks ' How could you begin to trust something which you cannot afterwards identify, even if everything depended on it? ' in her prose poem ' Water '. The power of those waters to lure us back to where our deceased loved ones visited is realised in Denise Blake’s elegy which marries place and memory in an eternal knot ; ' My mother went to drive here, alone / when she was anxious, in need of solace, / in need of a space to take a deep breath '. Space to breathe is vital to our co-habitants on this small blue sphere, and Gordon Meade continues to record and observe the plight of our caged brethren in what is surely becoming a new poetic form in his ' South American Sea Lion, Cuba, 2008 '. Poetry, as Carl Sandburg famously said, is the journal of a sea animal living on land, wanting to fly in the air. When a story or poem works it brings us into an eternal time, which is where Jo Nestor and David Green bring us to in their stories ' Swimming Donkeys' and ' A Memory of Robin' . The government happy pills issued to very citizen after the depression epidemic of 2020 in Green’s story have their antidote in some of the most humorous poems sent into this ezine in recent years. Read and enjoy Nigel Lloyd’s ' You can liven up a wake with a cake' and Susan Coyle's ' Literary Rev- olution ' with its array of reinvented faery tale characters ;

“ One by one, they line up to tell their story,
Wicked Witch, her PR cries fake news.
Snow White, diagnosed apple allergy.
Cinderella hired a maid, got a Tinder account.

As always a huge thank you to all of those writers who braved the submission
process. My co-editor Nick Griffiths invests a lot of time and energy in choosing each issue's contributors. Sometimes a poem or story is trying to say too many things at once, and our only advice would be to remember that the reader will in all probability know nothing about you the writer, and to that end, the piece of writing needs to be able to stand up on its own. And I am still thinking about water and all its shades of blue.

Deirdre Hines
Fanad Lighthouse by Ryan Patton
Walking Rathmullan Beach, Co. Donegal

Today is a sunny day and my walk on your sands has been a gift: Rathmullan Beach, Ráth Maoláin, "Maoláin's ringfort".

I start from your pier and dander to the pitch of your Summer Song - a sunny day melody. The Swilly ferry drones a bass line with two jet skis buzzing a wow-wow treble; children squeal in falsetto leaving the plashing of your waves as ambient tones. I catch in snatches the words of the verses from your sunbathers, paddlers, castle builders, sailboat scholars and lifeguards. While the chorus is repeated: ‘That’s some day!’

I am a frequent visitor. Way before your playpark was built, I was pushing my pram onto your perfect runway of a foreshore and up into your woodland walk. My children climbed your barnacled rocks dotted with limpets, and explored your rockpools, lifting bladderwrack and sea lettuce, looking for treasures: dog whelks, hermit crabs, shrimps, blood-like anemones. They paddled in your waves, built forts and castles, ate frenetic, sand-salted picnics, rode the ferry to Buncrana, and swung from the rope swings in your woodland. On rainy days, we sheltered under your ancient broadleaf trees, and in spring, gathered wild garlic.

I love when you write me a story in your sands and leave me to guess its plot. I read it now as I walk the beach - piecing the story from its traces. Sometimes I follow a stray theme: like the deep curve of a flapper’s hooves, or
patches of seagull dance, or a single, wide tyre track that puzzles me. Today is a summer story of bare footprints, pram tracks, dinghy trails, flip-flops and paw marks. Holes are dug near the tideline; there are mounds and moats, and initials drawn with drift-wood. Your tide erases them daily like a blackboard duster on chalk.

What’s more, I so admire the shape of your sands. Your backshore is silvery, dry and fringed by lacy bladderwrack popping with dark bubbles; that border of dried seaweed is sequined with stray feathers and driftwood, and alive with sand hoppers and kelp flies. Your foreshore, varying with the tide, is flat in parts with arteries and veins etched by receding water. Or, it is ridged in ribbed ripples, and now and then, a dense scattering of seashells crunch underfoot. Today your blue-grey, cold waters are crowded. They bounce with sailboats, dinghies and paddleboards. Lessons are floated all around me on your shoreline.

I’m also curious and I want to ask - why do you churn up sea creatures on your tideline? It might be starfish, sea urchin or mermaid’s purse, one day, or, oyster and maybe razor shell, another: when you strand them, they lie in great numbers. Today there are large, louse-like animals, half-burrowed all around my feet – they seem surprised by receding waves and desperate to escape the alien, afternoon sun. I watch the circling seagulls and hear their killing cries. You send me home, guessing - are they a sea slug, or a sea mouse perhaps?
For many years, I’ve brought my visitors to see and experience your beauty, your fun and the weight of your history. You wear that history lightly. Still, the striking Behan statue, Flight of the Earls, on your green, sends me to that desperate departure of 1607: Imeacht na nIarlaí, Hugh O’Neill, Earl of Tyrone, Rory O’Donnell, 1st Earl of Tyrconnell, and Cuchonnacht Maguire, Lord of Fermanagh. Your statue shows a screaming, grieving, starving crowd with one person kneeling to the front. They stand below the three Gaelic chieftains who hail from a gangplank with their cloaks rising on the wind.

All have their arms outstretched and reaching skywards; the earls are stoic yet seem to implore the heavens. They are bronzed ghosts before the vibrant and shifting colours of your sand, sea and sky. It reminds me that you are first witness to ‘the flight’, ‘the crossroads’, ‘the turning point’ in Irish history. The aftermath of that Leaving is still with us. Its layers have settled through our daily lives in Ulster like the intricate deposits that form your sands.

Deirdre McClay
Rathmullan Sunset by Ryan Patton
You can liven up a wake with a cake

Rosary beads, a crucifix, a photograph of nuns
Kimberley biscuits, a Mars, a Twix
And some brightly coloured buns
“Try and show some dignity, respect for goodness sake”
So says the local dignitary
Who knows you can liven up a wake with a cake.

Bitten nails and coffin nails conspire to lower the tone
The butter if used sparingly should cover each and every scone
We’ve cleared the shop of everything, no time to cook or bake
The boys from the village hostelry know
You can liven up a wake with a cake.

We’ve brought together the community and the ones from overseas
There's piled up plates of sandwiches in a choice of ham or cheese
Even the neighbouring farmer has rowed across the lake
The girls from the next door factory know
You can liven up a wake with a cake.
The house is private on Wednesday it’s what the family wants
There’s pickled onions, crisps, nuts and mushroom vol au vents
And to think there are those that consider the Turin shroud a fake
The man from the county mortuary knows
You can liven up a wake with a cake.

Nigel Lloyd
Blue.

and the way she held the cigarette
was very blue and delicate
in the delicate blue fingers
of her delicate left hand,
while with the right
she fiddled
her straw,
whirling about icecubes
and roughing up lime slices.

and I couldn't take my eyes
away from the delicate blue stone
on her delicate index finger
or away
from the fingers which surrounded it
like a collection of blue children
in a bare and brickbuilt room.

and I was myself
very blue
after a sudden split
with a long-term girlfriend
and very drunk also
trying to focus
my eyes on a book in the beergarden
with shadows over trees
and those fingers
like white
blue piano keys
over there
some holding that delicate cigarette,
some whirling some ice
all very moving
all very delicate
all very blue.

Diarmuid ó Maolalaí
Night-time by Ryan Patton
A Memory of Robin

This was it. This time there would be no changing her mind, no backing out like she’d done countless times before. No-one would miss her. People didn’t feel that way now. She drifted through life, a ghost haunted with the memory of who she once was. Reality was an iron lung, mechanically going through the motions because it was expected, it was her purpose to survive, even though her spirit had long since given up. She sat in the bedroom of her one bedroom apartment, a room identical to the other thousand or so in the high-rise. Each occupier leading the same meaningless, identical existence. Robin was different. She had stopped using the government issued “life satisfaction” packs, mandatory for every citizen since the Reform in 2024. A rebellious inkling had festered in her mind, had compelled her to see what living was like without it. She wished she never had. Ignorance really was bliss. She saw what the world had become, what the drones like her were blind to.

(I am hardly made of steel)

She sat on her bed and looked at the gun. Government issued. Everyone had them. It fooled people into a sense of empowerment, but no-one outside of the armed patrols had used a firearm in nearly 25 years. The life satisfaction packs were certainly effective. Robin jammed the muzzle into her mouth and screwed her eyes tight. Just a little pressure on the trigger, that’s all it needs and I’ll be free Robin thought for what must have been the hundredth time. This was as far as she ever got. Her self-loathing spiked at the thought that deep down, she clung to this pitiful continuation. Not this time. A tear rolled down her cheek as she thought one last time of the journey she had, the happiness with her loving wife, her beautiful children. Who knew what had become of them. People like her weren’t allowed companionship these days. She applied gentle pressure to the trigger, and the gun roared through life.
Robin’s eyes flew open. A dream. Just another dream. A flickering sense of disappointment. She’d begun having these dreams a few weeks after she’d started dissolving the satisfaction packs. Apartments were routinely inspected, with great detail afforded to the consumption of the governments happy pills. The spin from those above were that the packs were there as a cure to the depression epidemic of 2020. Tabloids and social media platforms of the day had covered it at a seemingly secondly rate, convincing the masses that they too were included in the sweeping melancholy. Recently, the packs were positioned as a balm to ward off the effects of any secret chemical attacks launched by the plethora of terrorist groups that supposedly infected the globe. Robin knew them for what they really were. Another method of control. Like the government issued guns or the latest version of iPhone citizens were given every year from their first birthday, phones pre-programmed with state approved apps and YouTube channels. Not forgetting the “career” every citizen was assigned to at 16. Unemployment was a thing of the past. Every aspect of life was designed to keep normal people blunted and docile. Livestock to ensure the fat cats got fatter, and a phony peace reigned. Robin’s job for the last 25 years had been to ensure that the formulae that controlled citizens monthly pay rises went hand in hand with the amount of tax paid to the government. A better salary, same monthly pay. There was another 50 people who did the same job on the same grey office floor. Before the Reform, Robin had been a philosophy teacher. That job no longer existed.

(I just want to sleep)

She resolved that tonight would be the night, just like she did every time after
one of those dreams. She knew her life, if you could call it that, was an affront to the family she once had. Her youngest girl would be 31 now. She tried not to think of them too often, sheeplike appearances had to be kept, depression was eradicated, the drones were supposed to be content with their lot. She sometimes dreamt of them, despite herself. She’d wake from a pleasant dream and cry until her body was drained of moisture, desperate to live in the life her brain had conjured. Remembering the day she met Lauren. The news of her loves pregnancy. The birth of their children. Other times she was glad to wake, especially when she dreamt about her babies being a part of the control. These nightmares were made worse with the knowledge that this was most likely the case. Her children had grown up in this world, had been indoctrinated at the state schools from an early age. They wouldn’t need the satisfaction packs - they were true believers.

(Here at midnight, it is the answer)

Robin went about her day. Clocking out of her apartment at the same time she did every morning. Arriving at her office cubicle, same time she had the day before and the days before that. As she robotically checked each cell of her Excel sheet, she wondered if there had been any resistance to the Reform in the beginning. Her memories of that time were hazy, like a half-remembered fever dream. The press had championed the referendum result as a guarantee of societies continued survival and evolution. The journalists and politicians with dissenting voices had all retired, died or mysteriously had a change of heart in the frantic 6 months leading up to the vote. A result that was expected to keep things the way they were had ended up as a landslide victory for the Reformers. We have done this to ourselves, created our perfect bubbles Robin thought. It had become a mantra. Still, she liked to think that those young minds she had encountered in her classes hadn’t kept quiet, had refused to be cowed, if only for a moment. Any such voices were silent now.

(Repeating no matter what we do)
Robin sat on her bed, in the identical room in her identikit apartment and looked at her government issue gun. Tonight would be the night. This was it. This time. There was no going back, no changing her mind, no backing out like she’d done countless times before. She’d dreamt of this moment night after night, so vivid, so real. Felt like she’d lived it. A tear rolled down her cheek as she thought one last time of the journey she had, the happiness with her loving wife, her beautiful children. She applied gentle pressure to the trigger, just like she did in her sleeping mind. Only it wasn’t a dream, and we know how her story ends.

David Green
Aerial 2 by Ryan Patton
Water

I am afraid of water. Nothing less reliable. How could you begin to trust something which you cannot afterwards identify, even if everything depended on it? It could get away with anything.

Say you were asked to describe its colour, your language would heave and sweat; no words for less than green, more than brown, clear in places, brightened with the golden manacle of the morning, defiled by storms, bruised and mottled by the wind.

And if they asked about its voice, could you tell them how it sounded - is it a deliberate enigma, or random collusion between stone, reed and stream?.

On a blank blue day, even the trees are deceived; how willingly they drown themselves, all across the shattered lake top wavering, flimsy as ghosts.

Water is cunning: what’s visible may be trunk or underside; you cannot tell. You simply do not know what’s going on down below there; only the fish come briefly to murmur their tiny secrets. You think the waterfowl are simply skimming over the surface, but all the time their legs are moving furiously, pushing something terrible away.

Shelley Tracey
Handless Maiden

Once my hands were made of silver,
delicate, refined, needing to be polished
daily, glinting on sun-heavy days
until I made my way into the woods
listened for long while, ear pressed to soft earth
thirsty for the song I heard
among roots and moss, rumors
that spring was coming, could even hear
the magnolia bud rumbling.

I stayed that way for years, prone,
breathing in scent of fur and feather
until everything silver fell away
until flesh rose back up my arms
pink covered me like the promise
of that song I heard, now I’m eager
for callouses and blisters,
to mottle my fingers with ink,
to touch the world as if for the first time.

Christine Valters Paintner
South American Sea Lion, Cuba, 2008

It looks as if I am going
to be a bit overlooked
in my solitary confinement.

It looks as if I am going
to be a bit overlooked
in my solitary confinement;
concrete flooring and metal railings.

It looks as if I am going
to be a bit overlooked
in my solitary confinement;
concrete flooring and metal railings;
dodgy looking water and high-rise flats.

It looks as if I am going
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dodgy looking water and high-rise flats.
This is not what I was used to in the wild.

It looks as if I am going
to be a bit overlooked
in my solitary confinement;
concrete flooring and metal railings;
dodgy looking water and high-risk flats.
This is not what I was used to in the wild;
open water and secluded beaches.

It looks as if I am going
to be a bit overlooked
in my solitary confinement;
concrete flooring and metal railings;
dodgy looking water and high-risk flats.
This is not what I was used to in the wild;
open water and secluded beaches.
On land, I was a member of a colony.

It looks as if I am going
to be a bit overlooked
in my solitary confinement;
concrete flooring and metal railings;
dodgy looking water and high-rise flats.
This is not what I was used to in the wild;
open water and secluded beaches.
On land, I was a member of a colony.
In the sea, I helped to make a raft.

Gordon Meade
Glenveagh Stream by Ryan Patton
Swimming Donkeys

His thumb tucked into the crook of his right index finger, he knocks at our
door, head bowed, familiar face hidden. Rain slants in from the hill, muddy
yard water splashes up onto his boots. ‘Are ya there?’ Grey gales carry off his
words like crows at a carcass. I know he’s crying, his face all sleek with tears,
rain all over his beard. You couldn’t tell by looking, but I know: I’ve watched
him other nights and for a lifetime before that.

He knocks again, leaves his knuckles resting on the door, rain spitting down
inside his sleeve; he doesn’t notice, but I do. It’s funny, me worrying about
him catching his death; more fool him, back again on this sopping wet rag of a
night. He doesn’t know I’m here, in beside the horse, peeking through a gap in
the wall where the rasp is kept; I can smell the wet leather of his boots, the
tangy wax of his oilskin, his whisky breath. I want to shout, ‘She’s never going
to open the door to ya!’ I stay quiet, my tongue worrying a cold-sore on my
lip.

He wouldn’t hear me anyway; it’s not the whining of the wind, or the rattle of
rain on the tin roof: it’s his ears, all flaky skin and stubble; they’re tuned only
to her footsteps in the hall, the clunk of the door fob, the creak of the hinge.

I watch his hand slide down the blistered paint and dangle at the end of his
sleeve, a weak and limp thing. I remember his hands different, full of life to
their fingertips when he’d played the fiddle, when he’d taught me to tie knots,
when he’d shown me how to pare a sheep’s hoof. He turns away now, hand
on cap, unsteady on his feet; he slips and slides and mutters across the yard,
one arm out for balance, and then he’s swallowed whole by the wind.

It wasn’t always like this, but like dandelions drooping in a jar, I know that nice
things never last. I have to close my eyes tight now to remember those days,
otherwise I might split and crack open, like an ash log in the shed. I can re-
member sunny summers lying under the bracken above the house, watching
clouds shift and butterflies flutter; tiny see-through worms squiggling on my
eyeballs, ‘floaters’ Mam calls them. Taking a grass stem I’d pulled from its
stalk, I’d nibble a bit first for the sweetness before using it to poke beetles.
Always listening for Dada’s shout, ‘Come here, Sonny, right now.’

Then there was Conal, small for his age, light as a sheep’s fleece, Mam said it
was his bad chest was to blame. He’d stand on my shoulders, lean over the
lintel in the byre, holding his breath to peek in at the jackdaws’ stinking nest.

‘How many?’ He’d climb back down, gasping, ‘Five.’

Then, I’d pull over the saw-horse, climb up, lean over to check and, right enough, there they were, five of them gawking at me. The ‘cag cag’ then of the parents. ‘Come on! Let’s skedaddle before they kill us!’ And we’d run and laugh our way out of the byre’s dusty half-light into the bright sunshine of the yard.

Another day, Conal and me were squatting in our yard over a puddle rippling with rainbows. He says, ‘We’ve found an oil well! We’ll be rich for ever!’ And me only after asking Dada that morning for a watch for my birthday. ‘No, I can’t afford one.’ Me gawking up at him, ‘Are we poor, Dada?’ Him going, ‘How can we be poor when we have hens layin’ eggs and a mountainside of sheep? Haven’t we food in our bellies and warm beds to lie in? Having no money doesn’t mean we’re poor.’ And me crying because Dada was vexed and I was too wee to understand.

A winter’s morning, me and Conal grinning at the gift of snow stretching like an invitation all the way down the footpath from the top byre to our bottom yard, us clinging onto each other for fear of falling. How long it took us, I can’t say, but we wheezed up and down yon footpath like two steam trains ‘til we had it polished good-oh, like Mam’s glass mirror. Conal polished away with his feet while I fetched an empty fertiliser bag from in among the cobwebs behind the bales. We flew down then, our faces on fire, puffing out steam clouds on our way back up. ‘Christ, Conal, aren’t we having some craic now!’

I don’t remember rightly when it started, only that after a while it was regular; Mam’d be riddling out the Stanley range, its enamel creamy as buttermilk; Dada’d be raking cold ashes from the dark yawn of the open hearth, their backs to one another, shouting curse words and everything. Her going, ‘I wish you wouldn’t shout at me...’ Him going, ‘You’ll know when I’m shouting!’ Me upstairs biting my nails, knowing better than to let on I’d heard.

The time Conal’s baby sister was christened, a squad of us in Michael Mick’s afterwards for bottles of pop and ridges of sandwiches. Conal’s aunt and uncle home from England, him standing as godfather, her talking like someone off the wireless; Conal’s uncle introducing her to everyone, her shaking Dada’s hand, ‘Pleased to meet you, Mr. Cunningham.’ And Dada snatching himself away like she’d scalded him. ‘I never seen ‘Mister’ on a tombstone yet ... call
me Willie.’

Then, Dada took the fiddle from its green velvet nest, his fingers tapping at the strings like a robin pecking crumbs. In jig-time the pool table was pushed back and there was wans up dancing. Something wasn’t right about the floor tiles but; I pulled Conal over to look. A barmaid clearing tables, four pint glasses gripped in each hand, all pushed against her apron, the slops making them slip, she goes, ‘Arragh, the day they laid them tiles ... an autumn day it was; the lads couldn’t wait to get dancing. Look at them, all crooked ... sure, the cement wasn’t near dry.’ Away with her then behind the bar and this blocky fella goes, ‘Why don’t you shut up to fuck and pull pints, it’s what you’re paid for.’

Dada played a few tunes before laying the fiddle down nice and gentle in its case. He’d started spouting then, ‘What I couldn’t do with a horse and a bit of rope ...’ And I saw Mam watching him all ears, like the collie sheepdog back at the house, only pretend-listening to Conal’s Mam beside her. ‘Few can claim, as I can, to have swam donkeys on Christmas Day. Now for ya.’ But it was all for show, hoping for a free pint. He was away with the drink altogether them days; Mam said he must’ve been carrying-on with the barmaid for he did nothing only talk about her whenever he’d get home. She’d shoot that at him for spite as he’d come tripping in over the doorsill.

The donkeys got stranded in a flood, that I can tell you for nothing, down by the bridge; that’s what happened them; Dada had no choice but to swim them out of it, once he’d sobered up on Christmas morning.

Nights when Dada was on good form, he’d say when he was a gossoon, he’d walked miles to bring his she-goat to the buck; and many’s the long day he’d spent being a cowboy on the neighbour’s ass; that he’d gathered eggs in a paper bag to sell in town, replacing some with pebbles from the river ... ‘Mind you, never was I caught, hah!’

And I’d felt sorry then for our donkeys, having to swim the icy flood waters, their soft fur all stuck to them, like our cat when she was after giving herself a good licking. The donkeys shivered and trembled like soggy cardboard cut-outs of themselves, wobbling on their legs with their heads hung low while we rubbed them dry with straw in the byre.

Late summer, we’d gather the sheep from the hill, separating the lambs from the ewes. Dada penned the ram lambs in the crush and showed me how to
castrate them. I never knew the meaning of that word ‘til he took out the yoke for doing it; like a big heavy silver pliers it was, with two flattened pieces at the end, an inch or more across. I was fit to hold the lambs by then; catch one by the shoulder, throw my leg over its back, grab its front legs and kick it over onto its arse with my other leg, all its tackle showing. Dada would crunch with one sharp movement; they’d waddle off quiet enough then, back into the yard. I felt proud to be helping Dada, doing man’s work, not feeding hens like a girl.

‘We’ll trim the ewes’ feet while we’re at it.’ They were trickier to catch mind, but only one got past me that day. Dada took out his pocket knife, juniper handle, curved blade; I’d seen him sliding it over and back the whetstone earlier.

‘You can’t take too much off, it gets infected, in there, look: between the hoof and the pad. Like you and your goddamn fingernails.’ But I wasn’t bothering my nails that day; I was like the cat watching a gap in the hedge, ready to pounce, wishing Dada’d give me a go, knowing he wouldn’t offer.

Over steaming mugs of black tea and slabs of Mam’s soda bread, he’d say how he’d shared his bed with a calf or a dog when he was a boy, living with my grandparents in their tigeen; I never knew them. Sure, they were dead before I was born. Dada would speak in gushes of hot air, like he was writing a story with his breath just for the range and the table to hear. He was like that days he wasn’t drinking.

He’d take Dole Day in stages, four or five pints and then home to sleep. Mam seemed cagey them days, always down at the washing-line, fetching turf, cleaning out the byre, anywhere but around him. He’d head back an hour or so later, as Mam said, ‘For more of the same.’

I’d cycle down with Mam to Whelan’s grocery shop on Children’s Allowance day. Always a crowd of women there, bustling about like fussing hens, scratching out their change on the counter, old Mrs. Whelan pecking over it. I was sitting there swinging my legs off the windowsill when one old hen goes, ‘Was that your Willie’s mare I seen this morning over at the Bog Pass?’

Mam’s back straightened; she faced the woman full square. ‘And what of it?’ Her eyes like sparks on bonfire night, me saying nothing, only thinking, ya nos-ey old bitch...

‘Well, she’ll be horrid easy shod anymore.’
‘And why’s that?’

‘And her on the broad of her back in yon drain, with her four feet sticking up to the sky!’ I slid down then and started towards Mam; she grabbed my arm and we fair flew out the shop door. Gravel skited up from under my feet as she rushed us both to our bicycles.

Dada’s been gone this good while now; my legs are all pins and needles, my vigil over, for tonight. I pat the piebald, ‘You’re a great girl, so you are.’ Lifting the door latch, I hurry out, shoulders hunched, dodging raindrops; I’m across the yard in four strides. Indoors, I shake off my boots, hang up my coat and get the smell of dinner. I’ve an ache in my belly, knowing he’ll be back. There’s Mam, slumped in a chair beside the range, and I think back on different times, when she’d be happy making soda bread and singing ‘The Black Hills of Dakota’.

Jo Nestor
Nevada Falls by Ryan Patton
Lough Salt; Salt-less

There are contradictions to this
and to this place, where it has settled
like a tarn, shaped into my psyche.

My mother used to drive here, alone,
when she was anxious, in need of solace,
in need of a space to take a deep breath.

Lough Salt; the mountain lake, salt-less,
filled with pure spring water,
Lough agus Altan; lake and cliff, deep
as the mountain is high. Mysterious.

My mother used to drive here, when stressed.
She told me this, but I was too teenaged
to hear, to listen, to give her wonder.

Here, Lough Salt, where the air is salt-less.
She, the returned emigrant who loved
long beach walks, to fill her lungs with sea air.

Lough Salt, excavated by a glacier,
the place that holds the purest sense of her,
where I visit now to rekindle ease.
This centre of enlightenment and strength,
serene as a full moon reflecting on water.
Salt-less, spirit-full, an end and a beginning,
eternal, allowing the universe to be as it is.

Denise Blake
University and Dundas Station, Sam

in the morning
I would pass streetcars
going the same way
I was going. I would pass gardens
rattled with raccoons, wonderful,
like fat dogs sniffing corners,
pulling down dustbins
by hanging from their lids. I remember light rising,
high in the financial district
and spreading downtown, the colour
of butter on toast. the way buildings cut wind
when you stepped around corners - concentrated
like rain through a conifer tree. coffee from tim hortons
and waiting for the train
on the corner of dundas and uni.
homeless people shuffling up
asking for cash, for coffee or a cigarette.
giving them a dollar
instead of the turnstile
if I saw no staff
around.

Diarmuid ó Maolalaí
So Soon to be Lying There

In a place much closer to heaven
high up on a hill
lie many, six foot after six foot
for whom time now stands still.

In a north facing corner
cold stone walls all around
a bleak and dismal resting place
for those ‘til eternity bound.

So tragic and so sudden
so young and how unfair
so much unspent of the life that you leased
incredulous to think of you, so soon to be lying there.

I still see you in the classroom
or playing pool soon after school
smoking cigarettes with the other lads
you silly, stupid, reckless fool.

Remembering you as I often do
fast, vibrant and without a care
my heart still freezes in terror
thinking of you, so soon to be lying there
Robbed of the future stretched out before you
like the roadway on which you gave your last
and in that final fatal moment
the present and the future, both mangled in the past.

I never did get to say goodbye
wasn’t at your funeral to shed a tear
now nothing left but memories
and thinking of you, so soon to be lying there.

Sarah Coyle
Slieve League by Ryan Patton
Literary Revolution

Once upon a story time, reverent silence,
Enchanted faces, adventures enthralling.
Today chaos reigns.
Books tumbling from shelves, pages explode.

Stories reorganise their plots,
Authors despair, words are innocent victims.
Characters emerge from fairytales to chaos
Unheard voices, jostling to be finally heard.

We discuss their demands,
For recognition of their fundamental truth.
Not the sugar coated, air brushed perfection.
They ask will I be their advocate, speak their truth.

One by one, they line up to tell their story.
Wicked witch, her PR cries fake news.
Snow White, diagnosed apple allergy.
Cinderella hired a maid, got a Tinder account.

Red Riding Hood seduced the wolf,
She always had a thing for bad boys.
Jack’s bean investment is in NAMA.
Ugly duckling embraces the natural look.

Alice killed the red queen, now is supreme leader.
Hansel and Gretel, gingerbread type 2 diabetes.
Goldilocks squatting, refusing bears house access.
The little matchgirl taken into care.
Princess and the pea, bed retail frenzy, debts spiralling.
Rapunzel tresses cut, escaped detention centre.
Dorothy’s eBay Imelda Marcos shoe collection.
Beauty and the beast cite irreconcilable differences.

Librarian takes charge, storytime cancelled.
Silenced characters gather, books reshelved.
Stories advised of contractual obligations.
Gag orders enforced by Brothers Grimm and associates

Susan Coyle
Biographies

Denise Blake’s third collection, *Invocation* was published by Revival Press, Limerick Writers Centre. Her poem, And They All Lived Happily, was part of Poetry Ireland’s Poetry Day ’19 promotion. She is a regular contributor to *Sunday Miscellany* RTE Radio 1. Denise facilitates creative writing workshops.

[www.deniseblake.com](http://www.deniseblake.com)

Sarah Coyle has worked in international education and university administration for over twenty years. She is writing a novel, but also writes poetry. She has an M.Phil. in Popular Literature and lives in Co. Monaghan. She had a poem (Wash Cycle) published in NWW Magazine in 2014.

Susan Coyle is based in Galway. She only started writing in 2019 and was longlisted for the “Over the Edge” poetry competition 2019.
David Green, a fiction writer based in Co Galway, has lived in Manchester, UK and New Inn, Ireland. He is the founder of Off The Page: a monthly open mic based in Athenry, Co. Galway, focused on giving new and unpublished writers a platform to share fiction and poetry. David has had short-stories in various publications and has been long-listed for Over The Edge New Writer of the Year 2019.

Nigel Lloyd lives in County Donegal. His poetry has been published in various magazines from Crannog to Ancient Egypt magazine, in 2018 he was a finalist in the Bring your Limericks to Limerick Competition, he has also had an audio poem played on BBC Radio Ulster. www.nigellloydpoet.com.

Deirdre McClay has published fiction, non-fiction and poetry, including work in The Irish Times, Crannog, The Sunday Tribune New Irish Writing, Wordlegs, Boyne Berries, North West Words and The Honest Ulsterman. She was nominated for a Hennessy First Fiction Award in 2005, has won and been shortlisted in a number of national competitions, and is a member of the Garden Room Writers in Donegal. She holds a Doctorate in Education from Queen’s University Belfast and blogs at http://gardenroomwritersdonegal.blogspot.com/
Gordon Meade is a Scottish poet based in the East Neuk of Fife. He divides his time between his own writing and developing creative writing courses for vulnerable people in a variety of settings. His most recent collection of poems, The Year of the Crab, a poetic exploration of the diagnosis and early treatment of cancer, was published in 2017 by Cultured Llama Publishing in Kent, England.

Jo Nestor is an emerging writer who got first prize for her poem “Atonement” in the 2015 edition of the Leitrim Guardian. In the spring of 2019 she was awarded an Irish Literary Mentoring Bursary from Creative Frame through the Arts Office within Leitrim County Council. Over the past four years she has been working on a memoir, “Salvaging Sweetness”.

DS Maolalai has been nominated four times for Best of the Net and twice for the Pushcart Prize. His poetry has been released in two collections, ”Love is Breaking Plates in the Garden” (Encircle Press, 2016) and ”Sad Havoc Among the Birds” (Turas Press, 2019).
Ryan Patton is 18 years old and lives in Rathmullan, County Donegal. He has a keen interest in photography which began when he was 12 years old and he was especially interested in landscape photography. In 2016 Ryan was a runner up in the Irish Daily Mail ‘My Favourite Place’ competition. His winning entry was a photograph of Fanad Light House. Ryan’s website is: https://ryanpattonphotography.com

Shelley Tracey’s first poetry collection, Elements of Distance, was published by Lapwing in 2017. Shelley’s poems and stories have been published in Artemis, Abridged, The Honest Ulsterman, North West Words, Skylight 47, The North and other magazines. Shelley is currently writer in residence in a Belfast primary school and literature and verbal arts coordinator for Community Arts Partnership.

Christine Valters Paintner is an American poet living in Galway, Ireland and the author of twelve books of nonfiction and a collection of poems titled Dreaming of Stones. Her poems have appeared in several journals in North America, UK, and Ireland including Tales from the Forest, Crannog, Stinging Fly, The Blue Nib, Headstuff, The Galway Review, Boyne Berries, Tiferet, Spiritus, Presence, and Anchor. You can find more of her writing and poetry at AbbeyoftheArts.com.
Aerial 3 by Ryan Patton