

POETiCA REViEW

Ukraine War Special Edition



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Jean O'Brien
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Spring 2022



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SPRiNG 2022

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POETiCA REVIEW

For the many, not just the few.

Trish Saunders 2 poems

Later, will be time to talk about a family killed on a bridge

The first years of their exile,
tell your children of the unheated train stations,
the bravery of mothers breathing warmth
on tiny fingers. Later, will be time
to describe the sounds of hundreds of sunflowers
falling on coffin lids,
four coffins holding two adults,
two children,
who ran for their lives
but not fast enough--
after which the noise
of an engine roaring into a station
will seem only a fairy tale, a television show
about the endless winter of '22 in Ukraine.

The trains are still running, Vladimir

Poem:

in the strangled throats of songbirds,
the poets you exiled,
fleeing mothers & fathers
waving to babies still with the down of innocence
upon them.
But you will have no heirs.
Your mouthful of grass, as you lie face down on earth,
will taste as bitter as any dead soldier's—
maybe worse. And how do we know this, little fuhrer?
Trains still hurtle down Odesa tracks.
Conductors with frayed sleeves
and broken-down heels wave the cars through.
While your convoy sits in weeds.

Because Maria bakes bread for Ukrainian soldiers,
day and night. While overhead in Moscow kitchens—
“We have nothing for you, Soldier”
and bare shelves get barer.
And your convoy sits in weeds.

Art Ó Súilleabháin 1 poem

Ná maireadh mo chlann cogadh riamh

Níor mhair mo phaistí cogadh choíche,
ní fhaca siad créachtaí
a shocraigh súile go ciúnas
níor chuala siad torainn riamh
a d'impigh críoch
níor bholadh siad bréan an bháis riamh
a chroch ar shróna eile
níor shiúil siad láthair chatha riamh
tar éis marú fuiltigh.

Níor fhill siad abhaile ina dtost choíche,
ag smaoineamh ar ghar-fhuaim
a léiríonn dúnmharú glórmhar
níor airigh siad uathu óg-dheartháir riamh
a thit mar dhuilleog taobh leo
fógraithe mar chostas chogaidh
níor fhoghlaím siad cacamas riamh
an chaint caite i leataobh
ó dhaoine le fios.

Níor mhair mise cogadh ach an oiread,
ach tá aithne agam ar roinnt a mhair
tá súil agam nach mairfidh mo pháistí
sin choíche
choíche
choíche.

May my children never live war

My children have never known war
have never seen wounds
that glazed eyes to stillness
never heard sounds
that prayed for an end
never smelled the stink of death
that lingered on other noses
never wandered a battlefield
in the aftermath of bloody carnage.

They never came home in silence
remembering imminent noises
that broadcast booming murder
never missed a younger brother
who fell quietly at their side
declared a casualty of battle
never knew the nonsense
of discarded discourse
from those who knew.

I have never known war either,
but I know some who have
I hope my children
will never know it
never
never.

Edel Burke 1 poem

Under Cloud

Gone the warm orange buff
of whinchats on bushes,
the streak of the white stork,
the songs of lark, nightingale
thrush. Instead you watch
the magpies that have bustled-in –

try to forestall the sorrow,
the ho-hum, what has become
of spring light, even the trees
take on the colour of night
and this is no gimmick.
Through blast and fume,

through crumbling walls,
to remember the fire in the stars,
even a pinprick pulse that flickers
on a nameless corner on an empty
street, where tonight you lay
your heads down on concrete.

Regina McGarrigle 1 poem

This is not reality TV

after Ilya Kaminsky

They tank the night with flames.

Fires send sparks shooting star-bound.

Explosions strobe in technicolour horror.

Air-raid sirens, frightened children.

Apocalyptic scenes.

There is neither a pause nor a

rewind button on this game of horror.

This is war.

silent lotus 1 poem

The Matriarch of
the sidewalk

*Pinocchio played pinochle Putin plays Pinocchio
the way the Popes used to do*

she tossed thoughts around as if they were
two for the price of one

Kathy Miles 2 poems

Starlings

The day that tanks rolled into Kyiv,
our starlings left for the summer. I imagined the flock
swooping across to Ukraine to fight the invaders.
Here, I trimmed back roses, watched the news,
grieved for the sight of those cheerful birds
who'd rocketed into the garden last November.

I wondered if they now lay in ruined streets,
breasts smashed to smithereens, or gathered
in railways stations and underground places,
singing of hope and the sunshine to come.
Somewhere among the rubble, a stirring,
granite brushed aside, the tangled heaps
of those who had tried to fly. Song rises
from the ground until it deafens the dead,
wings unfurl in their thousands.
The world is covered by the murmuration.

Postpartum

The birth was bloody. Bombs screamed from your thighs,
wombs turned to rubble. Once again it was the men
who decided the course of this parturition, their babies
entering life as a siren-wail, the shriek of a missile.
They were the ones who had stalked you in the park,
wolf-whistled as you passed, groped you in corners
at that party, slipped you their dodgy rhetoric.
They launched themselves across your borders,
and when you cried rape, claimed it was the clothes
you wore, the way you flirted with others, that women
were a country that was ripe for domination.
Now mothers press at the barriers, handing across
their dogs and cats, children, bits of their placenta.
wrap their pain inside a sheet of caul.

Paul Brookes 2 poems

Flowers

Amongst the ruins where some are cut down.
Sunflowers grow in their soil, where others
fall, Chamomile grows. Inbetween fired rounds
We harvest the dead, as oilseed croppers.

Make tea from our enemies, helps us sleep.
Carve sunflowers into wood furniture,
weave them into girls celebration wreaths.
They protect us from evil, provide cures.

Bullets, missiles and bombs are seeds blasted
into one another. Skin is good earth.
Violent kernels kill targets planted
in soil amongst ruins that hold their worth.

Victims of war always nation's flowers.
Memorialise in time's quiet hours.

This Exploded View

of abandoned rooms armsfull absence full,
Left when decisions are made what to leave
behind, bath bombs still tock in echoful
bathrooms. Memories of last year's grief

of fireworks war reminders are bullet
points to decisions mark walls. We are signs
posted by line of sight. Our rooms to let
memories are now escape rooms in minds.

Colour is now backpacked, bright loss cold stamps,
shuffles in queues for buses and trains, all
stopping places become refugee camps,
hastily made cities of recall.

How quickly we are wanderers on this
Earth, carry belongings with what we miss.

Anita Howard 1 poem

SHELL:

One half of the room

collaged in debris,

a broken, tumbled

waste of concrete.

The other stands intact

in pastel tints of order.

All playthings softly ranked,

squat little cupboards, each one with its label.

Still primed to share, take turns

and play like friends,

small hands make mute appeal

to shattered walls.

Tom Riordan 2 poems

Booing Russian Sports

I'm not a macho.
Riding pillion
is the secret of long life.
There's plenty of Type AAA's
who yap at threats and leap
in front of juggernauts

but I will sit in back
until it's safe,
then add my two cents
as the monster bites the dust.
They also serve who fight
too little and too late.

VERSUS ABRAMOVICH

As Liverpool and Chelsea
trumpet *solidarity* with
Ukraine's brave resisters,

one team's native Russian
oligarch and owner issues
PR notices about assigning

"stewardship and care"
of the club to his lieutenants
like Marina Granovskaia,

known as "The Iron Lady"
of football's administrators,
without any condemnation

of the attack on Ukraine
as he tries to keep himself
off the Putin sanctions list.

I root for Liverpool anyway
but today it feels *essential*
Reds outplay the Blues.

Cathy Conlon 1 poem

Resistance

In the cities of the dead.
In the shocked and shelled streets,
musicians play.
The sound of revolution
drifts across the barricade
of sandbags
on the shores of the Black Sea.
Don't Worry, Be Happy.

Like Kuprin's Sashka
nothing will stop their music.
When his broken hand
could not play the violin
his mouth found the sweet
notes of the harmonica
rising above the blast of bombs and guns,
the raging fire.

Vinny Stead 1 poem

Morning Ritual.

This morning, on your second helping of honey puffs
you'll observe them on your phone, play pass-the-parcel
with their children over broken rocks; uncontrollable tremors
flashed across their faces.

And as you drive your own to their respective schools,
you'll hear about the hospitals used for target practice.
The empty prams lined up at our borders in expectation.
You'll hear about the fight gone out of young men.

Or how history is a stuttering fool, hell-bent on spewing repetitious
lines that tell us we are not so far removed from acts like this.

And you'll think of how you laughed at medieval practices
of warfare at that time, when men would greet each other on their horses.
How nothing in the human psyche has really changed,
only weaponry has evolved.

And as you fix your suit in the mirror, you remember
that all of this is to be ignored.

For you are not that one person; and your children are not in hiding.

Karin Molde 1 poem

Some Twisted Thoughts on Patience, Poetry and Power

I turn the wheel, haul up my bucket
from the well. It dangles on a rusty chain.
Metal chafes on metal. Mind chained

to the possible and what we believed.
Reality dries up the fountain pen.
There is no water of word nor sound nor

ink of image. I remember Enzensberger: *Don't
read odes, read timetables.*
They are more exact. Be on guard, don't sing.

I hear grandmother tease as I was waiting
for the cup of tea. Watched water never boils.
Memory hops in like a robin on winter mornings.

Granddad's feet in thick woollen socks
in the open door of the stove,
quoting from the paper. No talk of Glasnost

yet. I readjusted my button pins. *Nuclear
power? No thanks. Make Love not War.*
It was 1980. I was thirteen.

With my friend I joined a night class on Marx,
"Capital". We didn't understand why
the Russian invasion of Afghanistan was lauded

by the lecturer. We were the youngest; and I
don't know if the adults understood. A storm-
ruffled robin enjoys the tail wind, takes off

from the garden wall. This is 2022. I sit myself
in this chair, coax my voice, muted by news
about the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Is there a boiling point for those who are patient?

I remember Grandmother, generous with proverbial
wisdom: *Beware the fury of the patient man.*

Thomas Allbaugh 2 poems

Nothing So Universal as a Comma

Once they were able to follow, at least,
the grammar of the line, the ins
and the outs of the phrase, the clause, to arrive
without questions or, at least, without
being inchoate.

Once there seemed an agreed upon notion
of subordinate or main, of the comma as pawn
in some trick of hierarchy, not just
a pause but a signal toward something
to explain.

Now there appears the glint in the glare,
no line nor hint of linear, but charisma on a screen, in one
picture a thousand heroes where punctuation
brings no punch.

Where nothing so universal as the comma remains,
sectarian now, nothing has taken its place
for reading printed pages like screens or arrows

or street signs like some code, when
lines that come now, like foreign tongues,
only isolate.

After the Loss of a Son

I walk this way now,
old steps broken by old
brokenness of wings—

exposed to reveal new arthritis
against a cold,
grief this lifting of faces to the moon in its place,
and the dropping of glances to the sullen roofs of our homes
I do not see any more but remember
a shadowy expanse,
the rooms emptied, abandoned for the walks we make
now to graves,
not knowing

where

to begin

anything

again—

exposed and alone as we open
on steps in the market place,
where the smooth lanes make the ways
of partisans unconcerned.

Jennifer McBain-Stephens 4 poems

The Tyrant Whispers to His Victim

silence / don't / say thank you / finally / get your girl home / too suspicious/ with your
big sad eyes / too innocent / you're viral / you have potential / the change isn't instant
/ ya know / to slither / into a body / tag and colonize / listen for your name on the
radio / it's not my fault

This is a found poem. Text taken from: Grant, Mira. *Symbiont*. New York. Orbit, 2014. Print. Pages 107-108. In a symbiotic relationship: sometimes one species benefits at the other's expense, and in other cases neither species benefits.

The Tyrant Hides a Secret

*its unethical for people to
glare*

he knew better
this hostile interloper

fingerprints all over
kill your human half

reconsider what makes a person
but people are repellent to me

doesn't meet their eyes

a free man is inoffensive,
a sleepwalker

they convince themselves
the world is going to care about what they think.

try to take them over
body and mind

You're not going to melt?

This is a found poem. Text taken from: Grant, Mira. *Symbiont*. New York. Orbit, 2014. Print. Pages 37-42. In a symbiotic relationship: sometimes one species benefits at the other's expense, and in other cases neither species benefits.

The Tyrant Experiences Considerable Side Effects

He has a friend in the science department
a creature made up of bits and pieces

perform neural mapping
perform similar tests

say
that's an apocalypse number

my body wants to bleed
blur bright and beating

help me stay psychologically intact
view me as a true control group

spoil the data
disgust dawns on everyone

don't meet their eyes
Maybe I can bring about the end...

smash and spill

This is a found poem. Text taken from: Grant, Mira. *Symbiont*. New York. Orbit, 2014. Print. Pages 43-46. In a symbiotic relationship: sometimes one species benefits at the other's expense, and in other cases neither species benefits.

The Tyrant's Mother

his dog
ran out of food and water

She was willing to do that to him
Hoped she didn't remember anything

about the woman she used to be
Do you understand

this is all about your well being?
things will get worse before they get better

show you can let us go
you can play fair

which are you— a good mother
Or a jailer?

part of his recovery left him
with a phobia of cars

she shouldn't have
damaged him just to see what would

happen

twisted into something
pounding and wrong

This is a found poem. Text taken from: Grant, Mira. *Symbiont*. New York. Orbit, 2014. Print. Pages 47-49. In a symbiotic relationship: sometimes one species benefits at the other's expense, and in other cases neither species benefits.

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The Tyrant Finds Ways to Get Out

any sign

that you aren't alone

let go, mongrel

pants unfastened

the sirens are coming for you
the world burning
the private hallway
the elevator
cut out
eight flights of stairs getting worse
a bus to nowhere
a turning door handle
all the doors are open
see her face
It wasn't a good start.

This is a found poem. Text taken from: Grant, Mira. *Symbiont*. New York. Orbit, 2014. Print. Pages 54-56. In a symbiotic relationship: sometimes one species benefits at the other's expense, and in other cases neither species benefits.

Joanna Chamberlin 1 poem

Ukraine

Glancing up as embers rain
destruction Children drown
in the ash of war

Life once flourished
but now gun-fire bombards
the sky

Her lion's mane
giving way
to resilient sapphire eyes

Alyson Plante 1 poem

Painting As Prayer

a giant canvas painted blue and yellow
like fields of wheat under clear blue skies

abstracted bursts, bold and gestural
a meditation in motion

if I were a believer
this would be my prayer

for children on trains, hands pressed against windows
tearful goodbyes met with questioning eyes

for mothers and fathers who carry on
step by step and breath after breath

for soldiers who face the unthinkable
on desolate streets filled with snow and ash and rubble

for citizens who stay and hold their ground
aching souls who carry on, as long as it takes

for survivors who sing as they sweep up debris
broken shards come like waves upon ravaged shores

for those who give bread and shelter and light
to the millions bound by blood and land and hope

Jean O'Brien 1 poem

The Swans are leaving Kyiv

Our t.v. screen is blitzed with snow-white wings
working an evening sky, backlit with
an orange glow. Even with the sound turned
down we can hear the thud and crash of battle,
the steady flow of rockets.

This is no display of fireworks. This is war,
the real deal and the swans know it is time
to leave, to take flight, test their wings
on the burning breeze, we can almost smell
the singe of feathers, nearly taste the acrid air
of an open fly zone. Who knows where they are going?

The swans are leaving Kyiv.
Their flight path follows the snaking Dnieper
that runs through the heart of the city,
they are not singing as they go, for who could follow?
We see their huge collective wingspan and hear
the echo of their humming throb in flight
as they ride the swells and troughs of air.
In the sky there are no borders or boundaries
as they fade from sight we see the defiant V
they form as they leave Kyiv.

Mark A. Murphy 1 poem

Leningrad Ghosts

Who could forget the destruction
of Leningrad
as the all-powerful *Wehrmacht*
blockaded the city
laying siege for 872 days and nights

No way to know
whether the German OKW imagined
Stalin's decree, Order 227
'Not One Step Back'
would level the field at 2 million dead

Now the oligarchs are at it again
expecting Kharkiv, Mariupol, Kherson
and Kyiv to 'fall
like leaves' as soldiers
and civilians count the cost of war

No way to know
whether the ghosts of Leningrad
would stop the killing
even if they could, as the 40 mile convoy
of Russian armour advances

on all the innocent and the damned

Contributors

Trish Saunders lives in Seattle and Honolulu. Her poems are published or forthcoming in Off The Coast Literary Journal, Seattle Poetry Bus, Pacifica, The American Journal of Poetry and other places.

Art Ó Súilleabháin was born in Corr na Móna, Co. Galway and spent some years in Boston USA. He worked in Dublin, Castlebar and Washington DC before returning to Corr na Móna. He won North West Words Poetry and he has been featured in Poetry Ireland, Boyne Berries, Skylight 47, Salt on the Coals (Winchester) and with Cinnamon Press (UK). He has published books for children and has read on Sunday Miscellany in English and Irish. His first collection of poetry for adults (Mayflies in the Heather) was published by Revival Press in April 2021.

Edel Burke, lives in Co. Mayo Ireland. She is the recipient of the Words Ireland National Mentorship programme, 2021; winner of Dromineer Poetry Competition 2017, and highly commended iYeats Poetry Competition 2017. She was longlisted for The Aryamati Prize (Pamphlet) 2021. She has been published in a number of journals including Crannóg, Banshee Literary Journal, Boyne Berries, The Cormorant Broadsheet and Book, Drawn to the Light Press. She is working towards a first collection of poetry.

Regina McGarrigle has published poems, short stories and memoirs in Irish publications since 2004.

silent lotus is a spiritual advisor. His poetry has been published in Europe, England, America, Canada and Australia. For significant portions of his life he has resided in the Caribbean, The Netherlands and America, having been raised in the unique community of Roosevelt, N.J. designed by Louis Kahn. His life is entwined with the artist Nermin Kura.

Kathy Miles lives in West Wales. Her work has appeared widely in magazines and anthologies, and her fourth full poetry collection, Bone House, was published by Indigo Dreams in 2020. She is a previous winner of the Bridport Prize, and took first place in this year's Shepton Mallet Snowdrop Festival competition.

Paul Brookes is a shop asst. Poet and interviewer. Work broadcast on BBC Radio Three, The Verb. He edits The Wombwell Rainbow. Most recent is a poetry collaboration with artworker Jane Cornwell: "Wonderland in Alice, plus other ways of seeing", (JCStudio Press, 2021)

Anita Howard is a writer, storyteller and actor who grew up between Liverpool and Cork. She now lives in Passage West, Co. Cork, and is a member of the Cork Yarnspinners storytelling group, the Hunter's Moon Theatre Company, and the Inkwell Theatre Drama Group in Minane Bridge, Co. Cork.

Tom Riordan lives in Hoboken, New Jersey.

Cathy Conlon was joint winner of PENfro First Chapter Competition 2016 and was shortlisted for the RTE P.J. O'Connor Radio Drama Awards. She has won several awards for her poems which have appeared in *Poetry Ireland Review*, *The Irish Times*, *Books Ireland*, *Cuirt Journal*, *Ropes*, *Skylight 47*, *The Poet's Republic* and in various anthologies.

Vinny Stead from Galway is an award winning poet who has published widely abroad and at home. His debut chapbook *Catching Air* was published in December 2020 by Maytree Press.

Karin Molde feels at home in Germany, Ireland and Tanzania. She teaches languages and has published in magazines like *Honest Ulsterman*, *Light Journal*, *The Blue Nib*, and in anthologies, e.g. *Everything that can happen. Poems about the Future* (Emma Press, 2019), *Identity* (Fly on the Wall, 2020), *Remembering Toni Morrison* (Moonstone Press, 2020), and "New Beginnings" (Renard Press, 2021).

Thomas Allbaugh is the author of *Apocalypse TV*, a novel, *Subtle Man Loses His Day Job and Other Stories*, and *The View from January*, a poetry chapbook. My poems and stories have appeared in *Modern Poetry Quarterly Review*, *Amethyst Review*, *Broken Sky 67*, *Relief*, *Whale Road Review*, and other journals. I am a professor of English at Azusa Pacific University, where I teach composition and creative writing.

Jennifer MacBain-Stephens (she/her) went to NYU's Tisch School of the Arts and now lives in Iowa where she is landlocked. Her fifth, full length poetry collection, "Pool Parties" is forthcoming from Unsolicited Press in 2023. She is also the author of fifteen chapbooks and enjoys exploring how to blend creativity with nurturing the earth. Recent work appears in *The Westchester Review*, *Cleaver*, *Dream Pop*, and *Grist*. She is the director of the monthly reading series *Today You are Perfect*, sponsored by the non-profit Iowa City Poetry. Find more of her work at <http://jennifermacbainstephens.com/>.

Joanna Chamberlin volunteers at her local church collecting supplies to be sent to the Polish border. She has been writing for 36 years.

Alyson Plante is a visual artist, designer, and writer who has nurtured a lifelong creative habit. Her poetry chapbooks include *Void Darlings* and *Overgrown Gardens*. Her poems have appeared on street murals in Charlotte, in exhibitions in Richmond, and in art vending machines in DC. She currently lives in Virginia with her husband and children. (Learn more at www.plantecreativestudio.com)

Jean O'Brien's 6th collection *Stars Burn Regardless* has been published by Salmon Publishing. She was poet in residence for November (2021) in the Centre Cultural Irlandais in Paris and was awarded a Kavanagh fellowship in 2017/18. Amongst others she has won the Arvon International and the Fish International poetry competitions.

Mark A. Murphy's 7th full-length poetry collection 'The Ruin of Eleanor Marx' is due out this spring (2022) from Moloko Plus, Germany, and as an Ebook from Venetian Spider Press, USA.