ON COURSE

Vol 3

POEMS FROM THE PK SUMMER SCHOOL POETS 2023

Edited by Jim Bennett
CONTENTS

CATHY DALTON
   Hibernia
   Ornithomancy
   Every Breath You Take

FRANCESCA HUNT
   Insomnia
   Who’s Doris?
   Radox Moments

MARTHA LANDMAN
   Sunday School Camp at Thathe Vondo, the Holy Forest
   On the Farm at Bela-Bela
   Some Days I See Bob Dylan in the Mall

JOY LEOBF
   Cast in Bronze
   Letting go
   No Longer on Paper

KATE MORGAN
   Perfume
   Lost Mary
   The Fruit Fields

G ALMEIDA R
   The Girl Without Hands
   The Egg
   The Grand Slam
CATHY DALTON

Cathy Dalton lives in County Kilkenny, in southeast Ireland. She has been writing sporadically for some years, but more frequently now. She is a recovering academic and architect, with an unhealthy interest in choral singing, cats, gothic cathedrals and dystopian digital technology.

Her poems have been shortlisted and longlisted in The Poetry Kit competitions in 2023, and included in the UCD Archive of Poetry of Commemoration, 2023.

She is hoping to publish a short collection in 2024.

Poems
Hibernia
Ornithomancy
Every Breath You Take
Hibernia

I
Another day breaks
pale fingers of light caught
among bare branches
first outriders
of the armies of the sun

II
The tireless winter moon
begs my confession
scowling clouds obscure
its tranquil face
within the café’s warmth
my coffee cools untouched

III
Spectral November dusk
leaches into the room
piling up in corners
last leaves rustle
wind rising and sighing
through the puzzled trees

a man walks by, collar turned
against the burgeoning chill
Ornithomancy

Side by side they flew
Straight as love's arrow and fast
Beneath treestep banks
Low to the tide-stilled valley
White flash searing Autumn dusk

Beating wingsong breaks
The still deepening silence
Between us we sense
Heartbeats measuring out time
Hanging on wintering air
Every Breath You Take

Blinking in the still half-light
First exhalation of the day
I reach blindly for you
Look at my face, embrace me

First exhalation of the day
Cool and smooth beneath my hand
Look at my face, embrace me
Stirring quietly into life

Cool and smooth beneath my hand
Answer to my waking touch
Stirring quietly into life
A brave new world awaits

Answer to my waking touch
Speak your first words to me
A brave new world awaits
the warmth of my fingertips

Speak your first words to me
What is it you want of me?
The warm touch of my fingertips
Eager to consume.

What is it you want of me?
Sensing my humanity
Eager to consume
Every heartbeat, every step, every breath I take?

Sensing my humanity
In every word I form and touch
Every heartbeat, every step, every breath I take
Capture analyse predict

In every word I form and touch
In my waking and my sleep
Capture analyse predict
Devouring every byte

In my waking and my sleep
I feel blindly for you
Devouring every byte
Blinking in the still half-light
Francesca has won minor competitions, had several poems published in magazines and anthologies. She has been shortlisted for a First Collection. Poetry is her life-force but she also writes fiction, having had short pieces published and a novel now being edited. She started writing after taking early retirement from a career as a Chemistry teacher.

**Poems**
- Insomnia
- Who’s Doris?
- Radox Moments
Insomnia

Sleep eludes
my tangled mind.
Insomnia grips
like a coffin, snug, this barren night.

Awake— but my dreams cast away
on the Mary Rose.
My sheets are sails trapping thoughts
in woven webs.
I toss on open deck,
relentless,
no peace is found below the mocking stars.

Hours blend to haze,
I listen for grandfather-clock chimes,
timpani beats that resonate my ear.
Morpheus fails to take my hand
and lead me to slumber’s shore.

Tea,
a read,
a blank page,
words churn like stomach acid,
a spark ignites, the taper’s lit
syllables and feet run across in lines.
In the owl-hoot black,
no counting defaid.
I laugh, and outstare sleep.

As night resolves towards the crimson hour,
a free man released from prison bars,
I kiss insomnia.

Scrambled eggs,
a TV nap,
clean mugs in a line
a new packet of Bourbons
ready — I must sharpen tonight’s pencils.
Le Fin.
**Who’s Doris?**

trouser eyes wearing talk
things only to be seen once
his six started dressing
healthy pizza and crockery

‘just phone his shop’
Mum dippy pretending
night-sofa privacy
to reflect on murder
I googled chin-wear

s’pose I am no pacifist
there’s the bad months
lumpy videos can’t lift
I know a moment lapsed
a baritone and that old Ring
nature crockery
tidy locked steps

everyone stupid
ABBA chat over Fish in freezer
naughty Fish say ‘what about salad?’
OMG mad ritual...
But... Yes

Mum over moment
into up-never room
no broken favour
‘Yes with Bells’
frosty madly checking
‘I’m early wearing twice drop’

when Doris forced chain 496
privacy always hid our videos
prime another another and books
there’s least an easy-always

It’ll cushion gold or good wag-wine
shuffle no chasm we blossom
Radox Moments

Lying, foot over the white enamel,  
random rhythm of water drops hitting  
the black tiled floor, I reach for tipple,  
a small glass of Stones Ginger Ale,  
the perfect lubricant for brain cogs.  

After years of practice one becomes proficient, iPad held tightly in one hand  
the other hand’s fingers type words,  
which may, one day, in a distant mist of dreams, become a prize-winning poem.  

Ceiling cobwebs caught by spot-lights,  
right foot back in bath, left climbs  
the tiled wall, above the Imperial Leather.  
Through the open window I hear Darren yelling at Nellie ‘rownd, rownd, yma, whoa.’

Few sounds travel these Llanfair lanes:  
the pot-hole clank of harvesters,  
the szsh szsh of squirrel, choir of birds,  
imimate spiel of farmer to dog, and lilt of Dick-the-Milk’s weather reports.

Our neighbours never say anything  
below their heavy slate slabs, no words of welcome as new bodies take residence  
in Capel Soar’s meadow-grass yard,  
and the Parch locks the ancient oak door.

The water’s getting cold, forgot to put the immersion on boost,  
still, the first draft’s nearly sorted.  
Where’s the towel? Blast—  
I saw it at the bottom of the stairs.

(Yma = here, rownd = round, Parch = vicar/minister)
Martha Landman writes in Adelaide, South Australia on Kaurna land. Her work appears in anthologies and journals in the UK, US, Australia, and South Africa. Her chapbook, Between Us, was published by Ginninderra Press, 2019. Her first single collection, Like Scavenger Birds, was published by ICOE press, June 2023.

**Poems**
Sunday School Camp at Thathe Vondo, the Holy Forest
On the Farm at Bela-Bela
Some Days I See Bob Dylan in the Mall
Sunday School Camp at Thathe Vondo, the Holy Forest

What we gained was unity with trees.
We were the trees, birds, soil, we were
God in the breeze, in the cooking fires,
in the dust rising under our bare feet.
We were God in the humidity, clouds,
in every leaf, grass blade, every stone,
curious squirrels playing in the sand.

I can’t remember if he preached
brimstone the way they normally do.
We were purity, hardly on the edge
of puberty and already they toiled
hard to protect our innocence, keep us
out of evil’s grip, God and the devil
vying for our souls.

But he should’ve told us the devil
comes to you in small proportions,
a master at grooming — toe in the water,
then a foot, a leg, up to the hips
and over your head. You commit one sin,
don’t die and next time it’s easier.

What I don’t remember sits in the body —
heart-song, heart-shake, belly-laugh,
gut-sense, nose-sense, throat-thrill, toe-curl.
Tree burls create illusions in the forest.

(First published in Stone Poetry Quarterly, Nov 2022)
On the Farm at Bela-Bela

They work in rhythm,
cast in a spell on a windless day
sing, then chat, then sing
in Tshivenda, a language
I heard in childhood
around cooking fires, children
enchanting us with the firestick dance,
their faces a shimmer of moon,
woodsmoke in our eyes and hair.

I’m a visitor now, watching from the veranda —
three women and a man
backs bent to the hot sun
hands in red fertile soil,
their sticks digging holes
for the beetroot they plant in stately rows.

I hear the timbre in their voices,
feel its vibration,
I mark this coordinate for life —
workers who own little,
no title deeds, no stakes
but they own this land
as bones own marrow.

(First published in *Stone Poetry Quarterly, Nov 2022*)
Some Days I See Bob Dylan in the Mall

Today it’s Allen Ginsberg.  
Bob calls him over, they talk Kerouac.  
Around them buskers cover a range  
from lonesomeness to love for all  
but no one sings Dylan in the Mall.  
It’s violin, banjo, and guitar,  
young ones singing *Hallelujah.*  
It’s winter and an idiot wind  
howls through the alleys  
too early for the city lights to come on.

Bob shows Allen some chords,  
he plucks to the beat of the street  
and Allen makes him cry  
for the babies on Jessore Road.  
They sit there, tight, talk  
of when it was easy  
to tell wrong from right.  
*Has much changed?* Allen asks.  
*I’m another character,* says Bob.

They get up and walk, dropping  
a coin in a blind man’s cup.  
Around them buskers cover a range  
from lonesomeness to love for all  
but no one sings Dylan in the Mall.

(First published in *Friendly Street Poets*, anthology 47)
A child of the 60s, Joy is a born and bred Londoner. Married, she has a son and a daughter. Joy is currently living in a village in West Yorkshire, but is looking forward to a return to London in Summer 2024. She is a teaching assistant by training and of long experience. Her poetry began as a vehicle to help her pupils with their understanding of phonics. Her favourite poet is John Betjeman, but she has an ever expanding list of many others. However, her poetic style and voice are her own.

Poems
Cast in Bronze
Letting go
No Longer on Paper
Man to man
they stand their ground
locked in statis
as if, having glanced Medusa,
petrified, they became,
the curse of stone,
standing eternal
In silent conference,
gesticulation set.
Questioning?
Enlightening?
Collaborating?
No clue to their discussion,
only to unite
in choreographed tribal dance.
Choreographed,
yet not quite in sync
as if timing were awry,
the harmony broken,
no bead of sweat in sight
on cold, hard, bronzed bodies,
bronze glow gifted not
by virtue of sun's incessant spotlight,
but rather of the creator's
handicraft and flaming,
fiery furnace.
Letting Go

After 18 years, he's off
to see the world. Alone!
You'd like to go with him
but he'd never allow
and you know he needs
to spread his wings,
to learn to fly alone.
You tell yourself that work
won't let you go anyway
but it's of no comfort.
You tell him to take care.
His reply is not to worry.
He's an adult and can manage.
He promises to keep in touch
With loss in your heart,
even though he hasn't left
you hope this promise is kept.
"I love you, Mum," he says.
You fight to hold back tears
No Longer On Paper

Messages no longer rely on strokes of pen and ink. Now nothing can be implied from the defunct, crossed out words or smudges of hand-written dispatch.

The crinkle of crisp paper is almost a thing of the past. It’s the lucky few today who receive that scented letter from a devoted lover, or long letter from absent brood travelling the world or holidaying friend. Today with time so short words are the sacrifice; ‘IDK’, ‘OLO’, ‘OMG’, ‘THX’ may be what one gets behind the glass surface of a text.
Kate Morgan is from Carlow, Ireland. She has been writing poetry for a number of years and will be pursuing an MA in Poetry at Queen's University Belfast this September.

Poems
Perfume
Lost Mary
The Fruit Fields
Perfume

When he left her, she took the
Map off the wall and thought of
All the places they would not be together.

She walked down streets, glimpsed
Into windows, not of shops, but of homes—
Where things belonged after they had been sold:

Jars of sweets, mirrors with battered frames
Under dust and sunlight, marked with
One word: possession— so certain a thing
In monetary exchange.

He spent the summer rotting under her skin
Never washed away by showers
But there, and there again, and by
The staircase calling to her to hurry up.

She sprayed herself with her perfume—
His perfume, or the one he had gifted her:
The things he wanted her to taste of.
“This is mine, and no one else’s.”

She adored every note it played upon her:
Marine, in its fresh water florals,
Heavy, at times, in its musk.
She knew when it was gone
There would be no other gifts—

Its scent wouldn’t dress her neck,
Or scarves she wore;
The fragrance would no longer cling
To her smooth, bracelet-covered wrists, or twist
Like a memory in the air she passed through.

Instead, it greeted her redolently in perfumeries:
Places where aromas were bought and sold,
And any woman could smell as sweet.
Lost Mary

All night the lub-dub of cars in short skirts brace themselves against the cool effacing hand of traffic calming measures.

A dog howls for love of pavement pounding. A streetlight flickers in acknowledgement. A witch awakes and awaits her kin.

Music sweeps in high street tides. People come and go in pulls and puffs—single-use vapes, single-use shoes, single-use lovers.

Within the pub’s dark safe wood pint froth is suspended from lips and bristles—friends light up and leave on communal rollies.

Right folks, it’s time.

Crowds charge the nightclub and the nightclub charges them—paper tickets blot sweaty palms, their inky dampness discarded in plastic sacks stretched over steel frames.

€15 in and the band doesn’t take requests. Numb toes and the band doesn’t take requests. Teeth chipped and the band doesn’t take requests. How are you now? The band doesn’t take requests.

Tampons pass under toilet stalls. Minerals fizz assaulted by vodka smuggled on a bottle-tanned leg. Hair is ruffled, rearranged, reattached. Lost Mary meets a friend in the mirror.

At 2am the blue steely light of the chipper casts its judgment. Taxis and impatience thin the ranks. Punches land on eyes, jaws, youthly fleshted cheeks. The care doc takes names, DOBs and card payments. A helicopter gives up its search of the riverbank.

Cont...
Lost Mary turns in a fresh bed
made strange by inebriation.
She leans to a basin, its
shining curvature catches her face.
She opens her mouth and disappears.

Downstairs, arguments punctuate
kettle clicks and well-worn yawns.
It is agreed not to talk about girls from school.
Conversation lulls.
Everyone goes to bed.
The Fruit Fields

She was Curly and I was Moe.
We knew no other Stooge.
That summer we picked fruit
for newly-minted money.

Almost everyone made me nervous but
anything made her so.
Curly and I visited the graveyard often.
Travellers’ graves were grandest
but unkempt—
their headstones yellowed with flaky lichen.

We liked to roam fields, scaring livestock.
The priest’s avenue was a favourite of ours.
She and I scaled its high granite walls
for the sake of the overgrown garden—
always where we weren’t supposed to be
and ready to fall silent.
Curly had great ears, and I gave a good leg-up.

Some days we went to church and prayed for people,
other times we cycled our bikes up and down the aisles.
Things took our fancy.
During dress-up she peeped at me to figure herself out.
I glanced back at her crystal-blue eye
and nothing had happened.

We grew tired of fishing for stubs to smoke.
On a walk back to her matchbox house
Curly spotted a damp pack of Silk-Cut Purple:
long skinny 100s like Our Lady’s pale fingers.

I lit some off the Sanctuary Lamp in St Joseph’s and
told her those things were always burning.
We smoked and our heavy summer
slipped from around us—
like another mirage on the road to the fruit fields.
After leaving Oxford, I embarked on a life framed by professional deadlines and commitments. I worked in Lisbon, London, Washington D.C. and elsewhere. I can finally afford the time to play. PK gave me the chance to write poetry.

**POEMS**
The Girl Without Hands
The Egg
The Grand Slam
The Girl Without Hands

You won't be missing anything
You’ll have food on the table
Clean sheets on your bed
A roof over your head.
We’ll take care of you
The father promised.
The mother cried.

I can’t do this! the girl thought.
Something will come my way.
She looked out of the window
The earth was asleep
And well before the sun had risen,
She quietly left through the back door.
The air smelt of sea salt and pine trees.

She run to the bus station.
The bus was leaving in ten minutes.
A boy sat next to her -
What happened to you?
You look tired.
I want to see the city
And what I can find there.

What do you do, the girl asked?
I work in a Call Center, was the reply,
You can also work there, you know,
They are always looking for people
The pay is low and the hours long
But we share rooms
And have fun.

The bus entered the city
Street lights were still on
They were dim as going through thick fog
A garbage car passed by
The stench came through the window.
She looked straight ahead.

At night they gathered round the table
Someone had found a bottle of red wine
A woman brought garlic spaghetti.
There were no clean sheets
The roof was leaking,
She dreamt of the prince
Who would make her hands grow again.
The Egg

every spring the seller said
pointing to the far corner of the roof
a swallow comes and builds a nest

It travels from south of the Sahara
thousands of miles away
to lay her eggs just here

do not destroy it he asked

and I thought of the swallow
flying across a continent
the winds it faced the feathers it lost

and what the eggs meant to her
was it a continuation of her life
the meaning for her existence?

for years I kept that corner untouched

each egg represented a new life
needing care warmth a presence
as we all do

from zero life
to one two three and eventually four
all the stages of life

one day builders came and erased that corner
THE GRAND SLAM

We start early
The world watching
One ace here deuce there
Tentative points tiebreak

As time passes
Service improves there are sets to win
Eventually matches
And the world applauds

Later less points less sets no matches
When we realize
There is not even a ball
There was never a ball there.