

# ON COURSE

## Vol 3

**POEMS FROM THE PK SUMMER SCHOOL POETS 2023**



Edited by Jim Bennett

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## 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 cafe'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 treesteepest 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 HUNT



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 tippie,  
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,  
intimate 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



Martha Landman writes in Adelaide, South Australia on Kurna 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  
enchanted 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)

## JOY LEBOF



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

### **Cast in Bronze**

(Response to bronze statue in Poetry Kit summer school's gallery 2022)

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



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, youthfully fleshed 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.

## G ALMEIDA R



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.