

## Web supplement II

### For ‘Requiem: The Great War’ issue of *Agenda*

#### Featuring Brian Whelan’s ‘The Passion of Edith Cavell’

A commission by Norwich Cathedral

World Première Washington D.C. Cathedral 1914

An International Red Cross nurse, **Edith Cavell** (1865–1915) is known as a humanitarian who gave her life to the cause of her fellow human beings and who treated British, German, Belgian, and French soldiers alike during World War I. She is also known as a Christian martyr of the modern world who strove to model her own life and work after the example of Jesus Christ.

Cavell’s life offers a fresh perspective on the so-often-neglected impact of war on women’s lives. The piece that tells this narrative is making its world premiere at Washington National Cathedral before a brief tour of Europe and final installation in Great Britain.

**Brian Whelan**, an international artist (London-born; residing in Virginia), has been commissioned to create this piece for the Church of England’s Norwich Cathedral. His work can be viewed at [www.brianwhelan.co.uk](http://www.brianwhelan.co.uk). *Agenda Editions* published *An Unscheduled Life*, words by Joseph Horgan, pictures by Brian Whelan, in 2012.



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Arrest

**Velimir Khlebnikov**, the futurist Russian poet: his response in the poem to The Great War.

**An Appeal by the Governors of the Terrestrial Globe (III, 168)**

We alone, who have rolled *your* three years of war  
into the single scroll of a terrible trumpet –  
we alone sing and shout, sing and shout,  
drunk on the charm of the truth  
that the Government of the Terrestrial Globe  
already exists.  
We are it.  
We alone have pinned to our brows  
the wild wreaths of Governors of the Terrestrial Globe;  
implacable in our sunburnt severity,  
mounting the rock of the right of seizure,  
lifting high the standard of time,  
we fire the moist clays of humankind  
in time's own jugs and pitchers;  
we have instigated a hunt for human souls,  
we howl into grey sea horns,  
we call home the human flocks.  
Evo-e! Who's with us?  
Who is our comrade and friend?  
Thus we dance, shepherds of people  
and humankind, playing on our bagpipes.  
Evo-e! Who more?  
Evo-e! Who further?  
We alone wish, mounting the rock  
of ourselves and our names –  
we alone wish,  
amidst the sea of your angry eyes –  
eyes cut across by gallows-hunger  
and distorted by the horror that comes before death –  
we alone wish, beside the surf of human howls,  
to call ourselves and henceforth title ourselves  
Governors of the Terrestrial Globe.  
'What insolence!' some will say;  
and others will say, 'What saints!'  
But we will smile like gods  
and point to the sun.  
Drag it about, I say, on a lead for dogs!  
Hang it up on the words  
'Equality, Brotherhood, Freedom!'  
Let your kitchenmaid tribunal try it  
on the charge that on the threshold  
of a very smiley spring  
it instilled in us these beautiful thoughts,  
these words, and gave us  
these angry looks.

It is the guilty one.  
What we are doing when we burst in on you  
is to act on its sunny whisper;  
we are plenipotentiaries  
executing its orders,  
its strict decrees.  
Greasy crowds of humankind  
will trail along the trail  
we have made.  
London, Paris and Chicago  
will change their names to ours  
in gratitude;  
but we will forgive them their stupidity.  
This is the distant future.  
In the meantime, mothers,  
carry away your children  
if ever a state shows up anywhere.  
And you, young men, run away  
and hide in caves  
if you see a state anywhere.  
Young women, and anyone who can't bear the smell of the dead,  
fall into a faint at the word 'frontiers':  
they smell of corpses.  
Every executioner's block, after all,  
was once a fine pine tree,  
a curly-haired pine.  
An executioner's block is black,  
an executioner's block is a blot  
only because  
it's where people have their heads chopped off.  
It's no different with you, state.  
'State' is a very fine word from a dream.  
In it are five sounds,  
(or eleven in my original Russian)  
and much that is fresh and useful.  
You grew in a forest of words,  
same as an ash tray, a match or a fag end,  
an equal among equals.  
But why does a state feed on people?  
Why does a Fatherland become a people-eater,  
and a Motherland become his wife?  
Hey! Listen!  
In the name of all humanity  
we offer to negotiate  
with the states of the past:  
if you, O states, are as splendid  
as you like to make out you are,  
as you make your servants make out you are,  
then why this food of the gods?  
Why do we people get crunched up in your jaws

by your incisors and your molars?  
Listen, states that stretch over space,  
for three years now  
you have given the impression  
that humankind is no more than a pastry,  
a sweet rusk that melts in your mouth.  
But what if this rusk were to jump up like a razor  
and say, 'Màmochka!'  
What if we were sprinkled over it  
like poison?  
From now on we order that the words 'By the Grace of God'  
be changed to  
'By the Grace of Fiji'.<sup>1</sup>  
Is it seemly for the Lord Terrestrial Globe  
to encourage collective people-eating  
within his domain?  
And is it not the height of servility  
on the part of people, people who are being eaten,  
to defend their supreme Eater?  
Listen! Even an ant  
squirts formic acid on the tongue of a bear.  
If it should be objected  
that a state stretching over space,  
being a collective legal entity,  
is beyond jurisdiction,  
may we not reply that a man  
is also a two-handed state  
of blood corpuscles and no less of a collective?  
If our states are bad,  
then why should any of us lift a finger  
to prolong their sleep  
beneath a blanket  
forever?  
You are dissatisfied, O states  
and rulers of states;  
you click your teeth in warning  
and begin to jump about. What of it?  
We are a higher power  
and we will always be able to answer  
the insurrection of states –  
the insurrection of slaves –  
with well-aimed letters.  
Standing on the deck of the word 'star-suprastate',  
and needing no stick or crutch in this perilous hour,  
we ask, 'What is higher?'  
We – by virtue of our right of insurrection,  
incontestable in our supremacy,  
protected by the patents of true invention,

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<sup>1</sup> Khlebnikov wrongly imagining cannibalism to be widespread in Fiji.

we who have proclaimed ourselves Chairmen of the Terrestrial Globe –  
or you, governments  
of the separate countries of the past,  
those everyday remnants beside the slaughter-houses  
of the two-legged oxen  
with the moisture of whose corpses you have been smeared?  
As for us – leaders of a humankind  
that we have constructed according to the laws of rays  
and with the help of the equations of fate –  
we reject the lords  
who call themselves rulers,  
states, and other publishing houses  
and trading companies of ‘War and Co’  
and who claim to have placed the mills of a delightful prosperity  
beneath what is now a three-year waterfall  
of your beer and our blood, now flowing  
in a defencelessly red wave.  
We see states falling on their swords  
in despair at our coming.  
With the motherland on your lips,  
fanning yourselves with a copy  
of the military regulations,  
you have brazenly introduced war  
into the circle of the Brides of Man.  
As for you, states that stretch over space,  
don’t cry like little girls.  
As a private contract between private persons,  
along with societies for admirers of Dante,  
for the breeding of rabbits and the struggle against marmottes,  
you will come under the protection of the laws we have published.  
We will not touch you.  
Once a year, relying on the rights  
of unions, you will all gather  
for annual meetings  
to review your thinning forces.  
You will remain a private contract  
of private persons, needed by no one  
and important to no one,  
as boring as the toothache  
of a seventeenth-century grandmother.  
Your relationship to us  
is that of a monkey’s hairy hand or foot,  
singled by an unknown God-flame,  
in the hand of a thinker calmly  
directing the universe, the rider  
of a now saddled fate.  
Moreover: we are founding  
a society for the defence of states  
against rude and cruel treatment  
on the part of the communes of time.

Like switchmen  
where the tracks of Past and Future meet,  
we look with the same composure  
on the replacement of your states  
by a scientifically constructed humanity  
as we do on the replacement of bast sandals  
by the hyaline glow of a train.  
Comrade workers, don't complain about us:  
we, as worker-architects,  
follow a special path, to a shared goal.  
We are a special kind of weapon.  
And so, the gauntlet of five words has been thrown down:  
Government of the Terrestrial Globe.  
Cut through by a red lightning,  
the pale blue banner of non-possession  
the banner of windy dawns, morning suns,  
now flutters high over the earth.  
There it is, my friends!  
The Government of the Terrestrial Globe!  
21 April, 1917

*Translated by* **Robert Chandler**

**Robert Chandler** studied Russian at Leeds University and spent the academic year 1973-74 as a British Council exchange scholar in Voronezh, a large city 200 miles south of Moscow. His translations of Sappho and Apollinaire are published in the series 'Everyman's Poetry', but he is best known for his translations from Russian. These include Alexander Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter*, Vasily Grossman's *Everything Flows*, *The Road* and *Life and Fate*, many works by Andrey Platonov and Hamid Ismailov's novel *The Railway*, set in Central Asia. He has compiled two anthologies for Penguin Classics, of Russian short stories and Russian magic tales. A third anthology, *The Penguin Book of Russian Poetry*, will be published in February 2015. He is also the author of a 'Brief Life' of Alexander Pushkin. For the last seven years he has taught classes in literature and in translation, part-time, at Queen Mary, University of London. He also works as a mentor for the BCLT mentorship scheme. His translations have won prizes in both the UK and the USA and his co-translation of Vasily Grossman's *An Armenian Sketchbook* is currently shortlisted for the PEN Translation Prize.



## **Jules Supervielle**

### **Whisper in Agony**

Do not be surprised,  
but close your eyes  
till they become  
opaque as stone.

And let the heart be,  
for should it stop  
it flutters still  
on its secret slope.

Your hands will lie  
at rest beside you  
in their barge of ice,

your forehead bare  
as the empty space  
dividing armies.

*Translated by* **David Cooke**



**David Cooke's** retrospective collection, *In the Distance*, was published in 2011 by Night Publishing. A new collection, *Work Horses*, was published by Ward Wood in 2012. His poems and reviews have appeared in journals such as *Agenda*, *The Bow Wow Shop*, *The Irish Press*, *The London Magazine*, *Magma*, *The North*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Poetry London*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *The Reader*, *The SHOp*, *Stand* and *The Use of English*. A new collection to be called *A Murmuration* is scheduled for publication by Two Rivers Press in 2015.



### **Martin Malone**

Born in West Hartlepool County Durham, **Martin Malone** now lives in Warwickshire. A winner of the 2011 Straid Poetry Award and the 2012 Mirehouse Prize, his first full collection, *The Waiting Hillside*, is published by Templar Poetry. Currently studying for a Ph.D in poetry at Sheffield University, he edits *The Interpreter's House* poetry journal.

### **Untitled**

*After Pierre Jean Jouve*

The man who'll be dead tomorrow  
may die no more today.  
He'll listen to his heart beating  
in the immensity of his flesh;  
and the million blue suns  
that can gild a single night,  
are not beyond his hopes.

Unable to recall what it's like  
to have never killed a man,  
could he, himself, be dead,  
breathing deep the darkness?

## **GHOSTS OF THE VORTEX**

(part of a sequence)

i

Prized assets of a ghost economy, we stand-by awaiting the orders of the day. Your quartermaster kits us out in party shades of khaki, issues plans for our deployment, draws down budget lines, hitherto unseen, across a broad front of commemoration. There's going to be a show and everybody knows that it's a big one. Shapeshifters all, we photo-bomb your every opportunity to rebuild bridges back to what is missing; to that unironic register of old words sweet upon your tongue. For, a nation dies when its gods are dead. The new one, then, is this, your profit our loss.

ii

A hometown drifts in on the fret, lives on in memorable information as answer to the security question for a damp December morning. On the Headland, this day's unknown stretches back beyond the fog bank, further out than Dogger and German Bight, to the bridge moored off Heligoland where an Admiral scrolls up his chart. Hipper's gamble needs no re-tweet; it's been coming for weeks and everyone knows that needs to know and they know better than to tell them that don't. At ten-past eight and 17-years old, Hilda Horsley is a tailoress on her way to work when the shell paints her Guernica. By half-past she is soul-sack and older than time.

**Laozi**

**The great rivers**

*chapter 32*

Berenice teaches the way is forever—  
though it has no name. The uncarved block,

though it may appear of little note,  
is greater than all things under heaven.

When the powerful possess themselves of it,  
the ten thousand pay them homage.

Both heaven and earth will then conspire  
to drop sweetest dews on the powerful.

Without recourse to compulsion or law,  
men live in harmony . . .

But as the block is cut, names spring to life.  
What we need to know is how to call a halt.

In knowing that, danger is avoided.  
All things come to those who follow the way

as wild streams and every unruly torrent  
eventually drive to great rivers, the sea.

*Translated by* **Martyn Crucefix**

**Martyn Crucefix**'s most recent full collection, *Hurt*, was published by Enitharmon. His translation of Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duino Elegies* (Enitharmon 2006) was shortlisted for the 2007 Popescu Prize for European Poetry Translation. His translation of Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus* (Enitharmon) was published in 2012. *The Time We Turned* (Shearsman, 2014) and *A Hatfield Mass* (Worple Press, 2014) have both recently appeared. For blog and more visit <http://www.martyncrucefix.com>



## ROLAND JOHN

**Roland John** has had long association with *Agenda*; his first full poetry collection *Believing Words are Real* was published by Agenda Editions. He is the author of *A Beginner's Guide to The Cantos of Ezra Pound*. His last poetry collection was *A Lament for England and other poems*.

### Condottiero

'And Carmagnola, between the two columns'  
Ezra Pound Canto XVII

I watch them return fatigued  
and bloody, but sharpened by spoil;  
the hard points of their weapons  
turned, the sweet jingle of their fine,  
swords dulled, the foppish banners torn.

Hopeful of soft boys or girls tucked up  
in truckle beds the captains stand  
unbuckled from their dented armour;  
soon the smells of oiled precision,  
burnishing of plate, repaired sollerets.

Later around campfires the old lies  
of great campaigns are trotted out,  
talk of Hawkwood and The Whites,  
memories of friends, how that one died,  
the calumnies of great battles.

The pike stacks, neat tripods of death,  
busy armourers polishing, shaping,  
sharpening barbs, points, blunt edges  
whetted. Time for soldiers to relax  
look for comforts outside the camp.

Give them their day, quiet moments  
touched with triumph, a quick surfeit  
of boys, girls, wine, food, the essentials  
of victory. Save for a few pent up  
and anxiously praying for forgiveness  
enduring the confession's rigours.

Time for me to give thanks, pay off  
my captains, another battle won  
more by negotiation and stratagem  
than by arms, now to assuage  
my paymasters, assure them  
of this success and its stability.

Anxious thoughts of return, but fearful  
of politics, clan loyalties, family feuds:  
I fear the city's strait streets  
where on some night assassins  
stealthy with blade or garrotte  
have brought down better men than me.

### **What she told the Hospital Chaplain**

He had no belief in an afterlife or gods,  
but saw something in the natural world  
and thought that there could be a god  
for everything, but he was not a Hindu.

There was no family, none she knew of,  
perhaps distant cousins in the Antilles,  
but no one to miss him, he would not  
want mourners, services, memorials.

Life had never been important; he  
thought humanity was just a superior form  
of cattle, pastured, tended and cut down  
before its prime and bundled off.

As to his body he left no detailed instructions, preferring it to be disposed of cheaply and hygienically as possible with the minimum inconvenience to others.

He had accepted life, worked hard enjoyed a few moments, probably too few, but had no complaints and in a sense was ready— not expecting anything extra.

## 2014

Acceptable carnage, canons, shells, torn horses, drumhead altars' faint choirs conspire to support the hypocrisy of those glorious dead snared in bronze with Latin quotes on marble courses.

Honoured with hymns, memorials for a lost grave; somewhere out there my grandfather drowned or ploughed deep into rich pasture. I have his medals, citations, memorabilia to place amidst dim photos of the brave.

This patriotism instilled in my generation, well schooled in its glory, school cadet forces preparing the next, gathering badges for marksmanship, *Scouting for Boys*, old manuals of woodcraft, subjugation of the ruled.

Moved by displays, shrill military bands, the mute appeal not to forget the nobility of death, its mutilation and malnutrition. Could a few faint hurrahs still demand, a last push, hold out to the end? The flicker of steel

on an autumn morning, the supple jungles, deserts, the barren places of the mind. Find now those lancers, dragoons, the serving men, let them march past through that commonwealth of hurts

and compliant emotions. The grand parade, for those who had no alternative but to enlist; a group photograph, a few friable documents, those names carved in stone their memories fade

with inevitable regret. He had no need to aspire, accepted through ignorance that country, God and Monarchy were right, needed him, and that all else was honest, took his cap fuelled their pyre.

Certain of paradise, they accepted oblivion,  
embraced steel, the arrow's flight; lost at sea  
or bound in keeps, diverse faiths bred to compliance  
trumped by authority into this prepared for condition.



### **Jim Newcombe**

**Jim Newcombe** was born in 1976 and attended Catholic school in Derby before moving to London in 2008, where he now lives in Mile End, working as a freelance transcription editor for the Royal Courts of Justice. He has had poetry published in various publications.

from **A SHAKE OF THE RIDDLE**

#### XI

At the dawn of a new millennium,  
in the wake of the most blood-soaked century,  
we are lost. Our only deliverance

a bird singing in surrounding darkness.  
Abased beatitudes. Coins, shed like seeds  
that are sown in usurious harvests.

Tight spires of havoc grip the world, seizing  
the seasonal germ of generation  
in the tentacles of a tangled vine.

Speels of ash fluttering. The shelving of  
unnatural cloud. Assorted bodies hacked up  
and chucked into the flak, which brings a sea

of trashed metals and floated pollutants  
groping hopelessly the whole world wide.  
Such a sea, with its flotsam of fragments,  
cannot be washed away by any tide.

## XV

One among many floundered in those fields,  
dragging his ruined limbs through mash and slag  
where split limbs rot into the soaking muck –

an amorphous mess for the gorging crows  
who come in their murder of ragged wings,  
death's dark familiars. The neutral fields glut

with rancid gore, the burning bones assumed  
into the light. Actual victims of  
the inconceivable. The millions dead

that no April will ever resurrect.  
No, there is no nectar for the mortals,  
no alchemy transmutes their blasted flesh

to gold, except the alchemy of fire.  
Husks, dregs, carnage, the imperial spoor:  
Here is the kingdom we never looked for,  
the roots we never sought to recover.

## **A POPPY GARLAND FOR THE CENTENARY OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR**

Farmed out to garrison towns, the incredible  
men to whom you owe leisure waited in barracks  
to entrench England's liberty – the syntax  
of the *avant guard* breaking as they fell.

To march on, suffering gangrene and sepsis  
and see their mates mown down. Some for disposal's sake  
upended as from a kiddies' dumping truck  
dispersing a cromlech of shovelled corpses.

These rocks are eggs the weasel smashed, burst boulders  
that incubate no growth, wounds that will not heal  
nor ever speak, as burst wallets reveal  
the importance of sweethearts to young soldiers.



The lads straight out of school, son, lover, soldier,  
in whom so many roles were played, now lie dead  
where blowflies frenzy in the webs of blood  
there to lust like harpies the carrion aura.

Ploughed into ruck and loam, where poppy flames  
are blood become the viaticum of Christ,  
their sacrifice has saved you, whose spirits were released  
like bullets into graves that bear no names.

If the temporal contains eternity  
then assuredly hell is here, for here heaves  
the stench of the damned cooking in their graves.  
No fresh May sprigs deodorize such history.

Gorging the blood of tyrants will not appease  
the earth or refresh the crops. Blood will spill  
and atone for nothing. The tyrants will  
rise again, among other flames than these.

## **BEFORE THE LIGHT COULD SCORN**

Tonight a breeze is speaking in the leaves  
like wind that haunts the hollow of bone,  
as I wander this thin fringe of shrubbery  
deep in the bowl of the dark.

A skein of stars

is blown from the spool of the moon; a twisted  
silhouette of trees brims the riverbank  
where the old boughs stoop to rekindle themselves.  
What lies under the whisper of lilies?  
How many have lost their beauty and youth  
in the flowing glassy face of water?

Guidance of owl in the quiet time, where the caterpillar  
bites through the leaf in secret,  
where the worms eavesdrop for my footfall  
and the mole burrows blindly underground.  
I am faithful to the flower's whorl of petals,  
to the rinsing lisp of flowing water,  
faithful to the cold blossom of the stars,  
and to whatever invited me here  
I am faithful.

Star and river, tree and flower –  
there is a riddle here I cannot solve;  
here, where the luminous newt offers  
no response; here, where I search for an answer  
lost in the world of a glistening leaf.  
And just when my ruminations reach their pitch,  
just as the jigsaw begins to make sense,  
then creeps in, like an uninvited guest,  
the cold, inexplicable colours of day.

## Roger Elkin

**Roger Elkin** has won 45 First Prizes and several awards internationally, including the *Sylvia Plath Award for Poems about Women*, and the *Howard Sergeant Memorial Award for Services to Poetry* (1987). His 11 collections include **Fixing Things** (2012); **Marking Time** (2012); **Bird in the Hand** (2012); **Chance Meetings** (2014). Editor of *Envoi*, (1991-2006), he is available for readings, workshops and poetry competition adjudication.

## More Than Orange

*Dong Minh Man tells us about the Cu Chi tunnel system*

The American they fire the babies  
fire the children      the woman  
fire cows      other animal  
They fire the Buddha even

They burn the house   the crop      burn trees  
Take their leaves      their fruits      burn them  
The American they burn them

They bomb    poison water    poison the river  
Spray chemical      you know agent orange  
flame napalm   the ground all burn    no grow rice  
Our family wasted    gone    still now born unformed  
in the second    the third generation

But the trees leafs back again  
The mangrove      the rubber      the bamboo  
they grow      their leaf they thick and strong  
They fruit four season      many fruit

Our people farmer by day soldier in night  
They dig pit make swing-trap  
American they step and swish it spin  
They fall in bamboo spike kill him he die

Some soldier of our they live ten eleven year  
under the ground dig deep three level  
Dig tunnel tunnel very dark No no light  
Have men and woman keep separate  
Have like hospital you know under the ground  
Have escape to keep safe  
But all no stay alive they die

Our soldier secret know only three thing  
walk without trace turn many leafs to hide  
cook without smoke give morning mist be brother to the smoke  
talk without speak teach fingers to walk words

Falling silent, his eyes deepen to grievances:  
forty years on, Man understands the ironies that lie  
in clichés such as actions speak louder than words  
and the future's bright, the future's orange.



## Stephen Claughton

**Stephen Claughton** read English at Oxford and worked for 34 years as a civil servant in London. His poems have appeared in *The Interpreter's House*, *Iota*, *London Grip*, *Other Poetry* and *The Warwick Review* and have been accepted by *Poetry Salzburg Review*. He has twice been nominated for the Forward Best Single Poem Prize.

### ARMISTICE DAY 1918

Everywhere people are singing; dead people are singing.  
They sing in the black-and-white newsreels of the time.  
They sing in old letters and diaries.  
They sing in Sassoon's famous poem, 'Everyone Sang'.  
They are singing because the war's over.  
They are singing because the Armistice has been signed.  
They are singing because they've come through.  
Unlike the war dead, the dead have survived the war  
(Mons, Arras, Loos, The Somme, Ypres, Passchendaele).  
They link arms together and make a chorus line.  
They all go down The Strand.  
They sing 'Rule Britannia', 'God Save The King',  
'Land of Hope and Glory'. They sing music-hall songs  
and trench songs the soldiers sang:  
'Tipperary', 'Pack up your Troubles',  
'Belgium Put the Kibosh on the Kaiser'.  
They're singing for joy; they're singing because they're there.  
'Goodbye, Piccadilly; farewell, Leicester Square,'  
they sing in the real Piccadilly, the real Leicester Square  
and 'Keep the Home Fires Burning'  
around bonfires made from signboards they've stolen from trams.  
'Hello, Hello, Who's your Lady Friend?'  
they sing to pairs of strangers, dancing in the street.  
They dance in triumph; they jig for victory.  
They dance holding hands in a line like the Dance of Death.  
There's nothing to hear in the newsreels of the time,  
but the sound of dead people, dead people singing and cheering.  
Light passes through them; they flicker across the screen  
like the spirits they'll try and summon after the war.  
They're all of them long gone, the crowds of dead people, singing.

## **Sue Mackrell**

**Sue Mackrell** teaches Creative Writing at Loughborough University. Her poems and short stories have been published in anthologies and magazines and in a poetry collection, *Rhythms*. She is co-director of Crystal Clear Creators, a not-for-profit organisation committed to promoting new writing. She is currently working on a Heritage Lottery funded project exploring the experiences of those on the Home Front in Leicester during the First World War.

### **South Wind**

Overhead, ragged flocks of geese  
rolling in the gusting upsurge  
of shell blasts,  
peeling away from  
sky high debris,  
autumnal auguries  
of battles lost and won at  
Ypres and Passchendaele  
Vimy Ridge and Cambrai,

Gaining height over  
Cap Gris Nez,  
then over the night dark Channel  
changing tack by starlight, moonlight, searchlight,  
glint of steel netting, shark-shadow of a U boat,

Dungeness, Romney Marsh, Sheerness,  
a south wind beating white sheets  
echoing wing beats, the low thunder of explosions,  
windows shudder in wooden frames,  
a bone china teacup rattles on the dresser, falls.

A booming rumble of gunfire  
familiar as the sob of the sea swell,  
familiar as the knife twist gut wrench,  
familiar as the litany of a swiftly muttered prayer.



## Alexandra Davis

**Alexandra Davis** recently returned to writing poetry after a decade spent bringing up her four young sons and working as an English teacher. Born in Kent, she has lived in Suffolk for fifteen years with her husband after graduating from St Edmund's College, Cambridge. Her favourite poets include Emily Dickinson, Hardy, Larkin, Duffy, Matt Harvey and Sinead Morrissey. She also works as a Zumba instructor, which ministers to the inner poet a dollop of something sufficiently Dionysian.

## War Games

Released into the forest, the boys.  
Each tiptoe tread fast learns the wild terrain  
of chips and stumps and hidden roots  
of trees long felled and conquered.  
Naturally they fall to business;  
someone's den, ripe for destruction.  
Logically deduce which log to lug  
to effect the most efficient levelling:  
a grand scale, anti-Kerplunk –  
and celebrate razing with apish whoops,  
of joy and something darker.

The forest releases the lid on an id of  
pungent instinct neat in this primal setting.  
Each branch and stick a weapon now,  
they gather together an organic arsenal  
from the lopped limbs around them.  
The smallest gathers pinecones and,  
poised with an archer's grace, cries:  
'Trebuchet!' These missiles miss –  
no target marked out yet.

### **Alwyn Marriage**

**Alwyn Marriage's** poetry is widely published in magazines and anthologies, and three of her seven published books have been poetry. She has won and been placed in competitions, and held Poet in Residence posts with Ballet Rambert and the Winchester Arts Festival. She is Managing Editor of Oversteps Books, holds a research fellowship at the University of Surrey, and gives readings all over Britain and abroad. Previously she has been a university lecturer, chief executive of two NGOs and Editor of a journal.

### **Buzzard's breakfast**

I glide from nowhere, ride  
in lazy circles round the edges  
of the sky

feigning nonchalance while  
all my being concentrates itself  
into an eye

propelled by gnawing hunger  
as kitten soft and sharp my cry  
baffles the wind.

Catching sight of scurrying  
sustenance below, I plummet,  
snatch and fly away.



## Denise McSheehy

**Denise McSheehy's** collection *Salt*, funded by an Art's Council bursary, was published by the Poetry Can in 2008. She recently received an Author's Foundation Grant towards her second collection. Her work has appeared in many magazines including *The Rialto*, *New Welsh Review*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *The SHop*, *Artemis*, *The Frogmore Papers*, *Stand*, also forthcoming in the anthologies *Her Wings of Glass* and *The Book of Love & Loss*.

## See-through

*'Opposite her was a window luminous and cool as aquarium glass  
and warped as water'*

*Marilynne Robinson*

The childhood window  
new light pouring in, a white rat  
running the drain pipe.

A veranda glassed, stuffy  
jammed with boots and bikes, ill-fitting windows  
vaulting the room into yellow.

The narrow window in that first house, jerked  
open, the crumbly lilac giving off  
its sweet cool thread.



Night, the children sleeping – a window cracked  
for air, your face  
pressed against the cold glass.

Found windows, framing roof tops, chimneys  
their intricate arrangement  
of levels and slopes.

A room with a wall of glass, its interplay  
of green and steady north light  
swapped with black.

Windows scored with rain.  
The brutal slots in castle walls.  
Light's geometry.

**Donald Avery** was the librarian of a bioethics centre in London for over 20 years. Born in New Brunswick, Canada, he won the UNB Alumni prize for poetry at 16. He has written and recited since 1959, when Robert Frost advised: "Keep the boy talking. One day he may have something to say." Among those who have wished him a wider audience were John Betjeman and Kathleen Raine. His poem 'A Man of Letters' is included in the online supplement to the *Agenda* number in honour of Rilke, and 'The Final Page' in the Fiftieth Anniversary issue.

## VETERANS

1924

Among the living, wounded, left for dead,  
they walk the longest street without intent  
and momentary rainprints mark their tread.  
The War recurs between the quick descent  
and slow ascent of narrow stairs. Half ten,  
they leave 'The Volunteer'; wet alley wall  
and stagger home for one last game, again.  
Meanwhile, the gentlemen at Manor Hall.

sit round and quaff the port, as one in play  
(admired for having been so bravely wild)  
recounts the day 'The common man today  
lacks nerve for - like a woman, or a child.'  
The clock, as though agreeing, tuts away;  
and luck in guineas, not in pence, is piled.

## The White Star Band

*On the decks of RMS Titanic*

The White Star Band is playing  
the latest rag-time tune;  
beneath the stars, betraying  
the absence of the moon.

The iceberg's breath is numbing,  
the sea like winter lawn.  
The only hope that's coming  
is distant as the dawn.

His love to lifeboat bringing  
the lover must endure;  
for her the strings are singing  
the song *Salut d'Amour*.

The boats are going, going.  
So few they could afford  
that gentlemen are throwing  
the deckchairs overboard.

The rockets are exploding.  
*Oh! You beautiful Doll*  
is for the women loading;  
not coward in a shawl.

The Quintet and the Trio  
are Orchestra of eight  
and William Tell *con brio*  
the Overture to fate.

On Starboard disappearing,  
on Port they reappear:  
the pieces we are hearing  
they have to play by ear.

We can't push your piano;  
play piccolo instead!  
Wish I'd played the *P&O*,  
another wryly said.

Boys, I have heard the rumour  
our breakfast will be sand!  
He keeps his sense of humour,  
the leader of the Band.

Where humour is sincerest,  
the tear is never false;  
and, thinking of his dearest,  
he calls the final *Valse*.

Their sacrifice we cherish:  
the men who music give  
to those of us who perish;  
to those of us who live.

Enough of songs and dances!  
Be ready, Boys, to swim!  
Before we take our chances,  
though, let us play a Hymn.

\*



## Duncan Fraser

**Duncan Fraser** took a B.A. in English and Related Literatures at York University in 1969. For the greater part of a varied working life he taught English, Photography and Media Production, ending up as a qualification developer in Creative Arts and Media for an exam board. He completed the doctorate he started in 1978 in November 2013. At that point he also returned to writing poetry. He is currently an honorary visiting research fellow in Early Modern Literature at Sussex University working on an edition of the letters of the great-great-grandson of the poet Edmund Spenser, and on London as a focus of comedic literatures.

### At the war memorial of Locquirec in Brittany

*"My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:  
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"*  
(Shelley, *Ozymandias*)

I met one once, when travelling in France,  
who sat by a memorial to two wars.

Observe, he said, this monument to  
shattered families,  
colossal wreck,  
the consequence of cold  
political command  
that mocked these men to names on  
pedestals supporting age-old frauds,  
who died  
not 'sacrificed themselves,'  
*were*  
sacrificed  
on altars to decayed  
corrupted gods  
'ses morts pour la France.'

And out of eighty graved upon that plaque  
he pointed out on either side to me:



## Jacci Garside

**Jacci Garside** grew up in Accrington, Lancashire, studied at Oxford, dealt with a brain tumour, began to learn about healing and develop her faith, is published in a variety of poetry magazines and anthologies, including *Acumen*, *Iota*, *Envoi*, *The North*, and her first collection, *A Whole Day Through From Waking*, is to be published in 2016 (Cinnamon Press). She is now working on a sequence of dramatic comedy monologues, for a street full of characters from Lancashire.

### A Young Queen Victoria Visits ‘The Devil’s Arse’

*(early name for Peak Cavern, Derbyshire, re-named for the royal visit)*

The stench was of living corpses:  
wretches who live in the entranceway to this cave,  
gathering like rats.

I almost turned around when  
I was informed that one  
would carry me, on his back,  
through foul muddy slops  
down a tunnel lit by tallow candles  
clenched in the hands of urchins.

Yes, it was a glimpse of hell.  
Neither warm nor cold, the place  
called from the devil.

After many yards on this horrid thrill-reek  
we entered a new tunnel, dug out  
in my honour, to save me from  
making passageway  
in a boat through a narrow hole,  
prostrate on my back, as friends have before.

But when I walked through,  
we came upon  
yet another big cavern, which did not excite me,  
to the obvious disappointment of faces  
all about, wide eyes hoping  
for my withheld royal approval.

I requested to be taken  
to the daylight – never more appreciative  
of the good air of my country.

As I was leaving, I turned and observed  
those who live their poor lives in that cave: a child,  
perhaps four, turning the handle on a metal contraption  
while his father made rope.

We had tea at Chatsworth.  
But in the night, I confess, I was haunted  
by those eyes in the gloom,  
that small fist  
turning a massive handle.

### **Jesus on the wall**

I'd love to go to my favourite church  
and let him down,  
shake loose his arms,  
watch him have a runabout  
before they put him back.

I want to fly to mountain bars above Gois,  
hide in a nook till just before dawn,  
open the doors of metal cages  
where café owners keep canaries,

listen as owners rise for chores –  
wonder what is missing.

One bird might stay,  
loyal, confined,  
to stop the silence shaking them.



## Jessamine O'Connor

**Jessamine O Connor** comes from Dublin, and lives in rural Sligo.

In 2013 she was short-listed for the *Hennessy Literary Award*, the *Red Line Book Festival* competition, and the *Dead Good Poetry* competition; in 2012 short-listed for the *Bradshaw Books* manuscript competition; and in 2011 she won both the *iYeats*, and the *Francis Ledwidge* awards. One of her poems is installed in the Hawkswell Theatre, Sligo. Publications include *The Stinging Fly*, *Abridged*, *The Stony Thursday Book*, *New Irish Writing*, the *Leaf Books* magazine and anthology *Balancing Act*, *Ropes*, *Crannog*, and the online journals *The First Cut*, *Shot Glass Journal*, and *The Galway Review*. In 2013 she received an artist's bursary to publish her first chapbook *Hellsteeth*, available from [www.jessamineoconnor.com](http://www.jessamineoconnor.com)

### Great

Banging the drum,  
the bloodbath remembered  
now in slow motion sepia  
reconstructions.

Boys and men smart  
in starched uniforms,  
stoically going up and over,  
charging on as ordered.

Their annihilation on screen:  
fluttering petals,  
poppies gorged red  
fed on young men's blood.

Time again to cull the poor,  
make them some costumes,  
make up some story,  
and send them off killing each other;  
just call it war.



## Joseph Krebs

**Josef Kreb**'s poetry is published in *the Bicycle Review*, *Calliope*, *The FictionWeek Literary Review*, and *The Corner Club Press*. He's had nonfiction work published in other journals, written three novels and five screenplays, and had a short film successfully screened at the Santa Cruz Film Festival and at the Short Film Corner of the Cannes Film Festival. Mr. Krebs has spent the past 5 years working as a freelance writer for *Sound & Vision* Magazine having previously worked at the magazine fulltime for 15 years as a staff writer and editor.

### **You can still smell the chimneys**

You can still smell the chimneys  
Amongst heavy ginger-breaded houses  
And the sausages in mountains  
Arch while the architecture changes  
As you're crossing over the river  
And they say the "work makes you free"  
And a heaviness descends  
While the stubborn autobahn stretches

Credibility  
And the tanks are rolling in your mind  
And the gypsy guitar player  
You're traveling with is oblivious  
Concerned more with lacquer on ghost nails  
To build countless layers of history  
That will protect the claws  
That allow him to play  
The cruel music that saddens all  
While lifting the soul  
To join countless other souls  
In the ashes floating above  
To be breathed in by all descendants  
And traveling strangers



## Judith Taylor

**Judith Taylor** was born in Perthshire in 1963, and now lives and works in Aberdeen. She is the author of two pamphlet collections *Earthlight*, (Koo Press, 2006), and *Local Colour* (Calder Wood Press, 2010) - and in 2013 she was a runner-up in both the Cardiff International Poetry Competition and the Herald McCash Poetry Competition.

### Nor the years condemn

*12021 L/Cpl David Taylor, 11<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal Scots (Lothian Regiment)  
Killed in action, France and Flanders, 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1915*

If there were photographs  
– and surely there were photographs –  
we don't have them now.

There isn't a headstone:  
just the record, 'Killed in Action'.

A shell-burst  
I imagine. Or I try  
not to imagine.

There's a database  
his name is in. A memorial  
somewhere in the Pas de Calais

has him listed among the 13,000 men  
killed in the first year  
for whom there is no known grave.

There were campaign medals, at one time.  
Depends which aunt you listen to, why  
we don't have them now.

His nephew buried them  
with his brother's, in the garden  
playing Captain Kidd, and couldn't find the treasure again

or else his brother's wife  
pawned the whole lot in the Thirties  
and never went to redeem them.

There's the sad refrain  
follows the dead  
of this war in particular:

the missing generation  
who would have made a better world  
afterwards

and a footnote  
from my grandfather  
(his brother

joined up later, survived  
the Somme, came home  
to live in David's shadow)

one Hogmanay in his eighties  
when nobody saying 'Poor David  
died so young' was old enough to remember him

and the old man said  
(so quietly almost nobody heard)  
if David had come back

things would be different. If he'd come back  
and taken up his old life, they'd remember  
he was a waster.

He was David  
after their father  
who had drunk them into poverty;

who died when he was seven  
and his little brother  
newly born. Maybe the apple

didn't roll too far:  
we have no evidence  
one way or the other.

If there were letters...  
but we know that there were letters.  
Mother dead

before he volunteered, he wrote  
to his eldest sister. Maybe  
she couldn't bear to keep those letters;

maybe they were passed along  
some other line of the family  
as it peeled apart, after the war.

What we have  
are seven words  
handed down a century

probably sent from Festubert  
the place we know he ended up, in the front line  
after a failed offensive

and thinking of the brother  
who was desperate to follow him into uniform  
as he wrote home:

'Don't let the kid come out here!'

## **K.E. Duffin**

**K.E. Duffin** has had poems in *Agni*, *Bellingham Review*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Harvard Review*, *Kestrel*, *Louisville Review*, *Pleiades*, *Ploughshares*, *Poetry*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Sewanee Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Southwest Review*, *The Sun*, *Verse*, and many other journals. *King Vulture*, a book of poetry, was published by the University of Arkansas Press.

### **Stasis and Flux**

See the root suspended above the falls  
like a many-fingered limb out of Goya's night,  
its blackened tips just touching the gush of white -  
this is reach, a grasping that entralls

and fascinates, a yearning that fails to forgive  
itself and the river. Forever sieving, dabbling,  
grieving, it can't hold on to the turbulent babbling  
current, whose envied journey will outlive

any tree. Chicken foot, Gretel broom -  
the forest's cruel nicknames for longing bloom.  
Mere cage through which the waters pound,  
never caring. They know that getting around

and through is all there is to do. What a root  
is made to grasp and claw at, to refute.

### **Yellowthroat**

Lurker in thickets, bramble-lover peering  
furtively through a black carnival mask  
from a tangle of undeciphered text, cheering  
his leafy haunt and home, he has the task

of striking a match, a syrupy, melodic scrape  
within his rounded tent of greenery  
to lure the ear and tickle the nape,  
a reverberant hymn in scrubland scenery.

At first he believes he really has no rivals.  
But when his brushfire of song begins to jump  
from kingdom to adjacent kingdom stretching for miles  
beyond the familiar world of his single clump

the ardent singer becomes aware of a coast  
alive with other paeans to *me*,  
his inquiry flaring up like a challenged boast:  
'Which is he, which is he, which is he, which is he, which is he?'



## **Karen Izod**

**Karen Izod** is a consultant, academic and writer working independently in the field of organisational and cultural change, and is the author of a number of academic articles and books. Karen has recently published poetry and creative non-fiction in the *Journal of Attachment Studies*, and focusses on attachment to landscape and memories that weave through generations.

## **Runner**

I knew how to tell a tale, of course.  
it's the Irish in me, the gap in the teeth.

Had me for a Catholic, those Jerries.  
Coming back for me like that, on account

of the Rosary. All that specs-flies rigmarole  
worked for something. He was on my side that day.

Lying there a week I was. Lost to the East Surrey's,  
what a turn-up! Five inches they added to my boot

and a hero's welcome on the Wickersley Road.  
Not much shout now for a bookie's runner what with the leg

an' all. An' the skinners few and far between.  
I take my dues, y'know? Minding the book

from the comfort of the Beaufoy Arms,  
and my girl running rings around the coppers,

keeping them talking with a draught or two.  
It's all in the strategy, I know that. Up and down

the line I'd go, a real sprinter, passing the message,  
and them in their mess chairs - doing the sums.

### **Michael Curtis**

**Michael Curtis** grew up in Liverpool, attended Oxford and Sheffield universities, worked in library and cultural services and lives in Kent. He is widely published in magazines and anthologies and has given readings and workshops in England, Ireland, the Isle of Man, Belgium, France, Finland, Germany, Latvia and Cyprus. His work has been broadcast on radio in England, Ireland, Romania and Latvia. *Horizon*, a collection of poems set on the Isle of Man, was launched at the first Manx Litfest in 2012 and his latest collection, *The Fire in Me Now*, was published by Cultured Llama in autumn 2014.

### **Why Not**

set the temperature to new September  
and walk out early between the tunnels  
bivouacked in tense rows across the fields?  
Land is air, air is water, and poles pitch over  
the valley to armistice mist that blinkers  
the Downs. Two attendant horses, one dappled,  
one white, wait under green trees, a startled  
blackbird bursts a sudden upward horizontal  
and if, somewhere across the channel, rumbles  
of heavy howitzer threaten invading weather,  
here the sun slants smoke and laughter  
rising from young reveille camps where  
berries ripen and foreign mercenaries fill  
our coffers with all the pickings Kent can offer.



## **Olivia Walwyn**

**Olivia Walwyn**, 30, years old, has a BA in English Literature and Philosophy from Durham University. She then went on to York University to do an MA in Political Philosophy before qualifying as a librarian. She now lives with her husband in Macclesfield and works as a school librarian. Among her other interests, she has been an international mountain runner for several years.

## **The Deserter**

Everything was still there  
exactly as it was.

As though the pines  
had splintered their eye lashes

in squinting at the sun  
they hung and slowed the air

in falling. Still there. Nothing lost.  
I was listening for the guns – the thud

of feet on the firm brown dome  
of earth that seemed to pulse

back up at me from the pulsing  
membrane of the sky



so I was caused  
to curl and rock with the hotchpotch

twiggery of pines above  
pine needles on my skin, my palms

and sticking to my cheek. The feel  
of things drifting

apart from me – unsteady  
ball of gravity. I can't say

if I prayed. I wanted only  
to remain

in contact somehow.  
The bliss of non-discovery.

### **No-Man's Land**

*after 'The Drummers' by Glyn Maxwell*

In my imagination the real me and you  
still exist, somewhere in the mire of no - man's land  
quite near the place that Wilfred Owen met the man  
he killed. And it's not that bad so I've no excuse

for this; for thinking as if we tried to conjure  
a way backwards to that earlier time before  
the gas gas gas of cyber space took hold  
dispersing from our dugouts and separating us

from the two who knew each other once and responded  
more or less with what the other liked to hear.  
A heady scent that's very difficult to clear  
and seemed to close the gap but pushed us further off

from our actual selves, injured but not fatally  
and searching only for a solid shape or sound  
to take form through the gloom where I am holding out  
my hand. It is mid-air. It is a gesture of peace.

## Richard Ormrod

**Richard Ormrod** is a published biographer, journalist and reviewer. He is currently writing the authorised biography of the poet Andrew Young and is working towards his own first volume of poems. He is married and lives in East Sussex and was, for some years, a Head of English in several schools in Kent.

### At Arras

Yes, perhaps you remembered Adlestrop  
and the birds of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire  
in the space between that last early line  
inspection and the unexpected lethal drop  
of the nearby bomb that blasted you,  
unblemished, into eternity; or perhaps  
you entered the dark wood of deeper,  
sweeter sleep than you ever knew?

Was it, perhaps, poor gentle Helen who  
flashed through your mind in those few seconds  
between realities? Or did sudden oblivion  
like a black hole, simply swallow you?  
Joining up, with doubts filling your head

surely folly: and at thirty-nine  
rather late for heroics— yet you're known  
still, for the power of what you said.



**Steve Sawyer's** passion for poetry and the stage began at an early age. Before completing a M.A. in creative writing at Manchester University, he had already worked amongst other things as an actor, stand-up comic and most recently, as a university lecturer in philosophy and the social sciences. Steve's work reflects his humour and his strong ties with the north of England where he was born. His poems have been published in magazines including *Iota*, *Long Poem*, *Brittle Star*, *Tears in the Fence*, *Cake Lancaster* and *Obsessed with Pipework*.

### **Picasso's Bull.**

This bull, made of nitrates and onions  
from the veins of the earth. Pyrenees  
under pelt; skin, tight and ticking,  
a grandfather clock, a flutter  
of goldfinch, a bald man turning his  
back, on a bald man turning his back –  
tattoo on his armpit; a tumult  
of face flesh dragging on fastenings:  
bloodshot orbs, almost eyeless.

Stripping down - lines, tones, styles -  
wanting less than a shrug of the scruff.  
This bull escapes itself, returning half-  
human, rivet-stitched, armour-plated,  
a winged minotaur of immolation.

He is a boy playing blind man's bluff  
by a dried oak-stump before the attack  
and he's not wearing a shirt.

Throwing out the bell and rosette art  
history, with nothing left over; self  
-possessed in emptiness, incubating  
death's deceit, he walks towards you.

**Colin Ian Jeffery**

## **PIPER OF THE TRENCHES**

*The bloodcurdling swirl of bagpipes boosted the morale for men of the Scottish regiments, and intimidated the enemy during World War One. Unarmed, drawing attention to himself the piper would lead the men 'over the top' of the trenches and into battle. Over 1000 pipers died.*

Up and out of the trench he goes  
The regiment's piper with only his bagpipes  
Standing exposed he plays  
from the top of the trench. *If he is standing, why walking? Can you mention his clothes, shape of bagpipes etc*

Soldiers hear the swirl of the pipes  
facing enemy fire alone *deleted a bit here*  
Swarming from the trench, they follow  
the piper over no-man's land.  
*Could he be a pied piper?*  
Over shell craters, through barbed wire  
With German machine guns raking the lines  
And While still hearing the swirl of pipes  
Many fall in valour never to rise again.

*The second last line is not good.  
You have the 'swirl of the pipes' verse 2; can you find a different image here?  
Perhaps start with/:*  
*'While still in earshot of the ..... pipes*



## Robyn Rowland

**Robyn Rowland** has ten books, seven of poetry. Her forthcoming books are *This Intimate War. Gallipoli/Canakkale 1915* (bi-lingual, Pitt Street Poetry, Sydney 2015) and *Line of drift* (Doire Press, Ireland, 2015) *Seasons of doubt & burning. New & Selected Poems* (Five Islands Press, Melbourne, 2010) represented 40 years of work.

Her poetry has appeared in *Being Human*, ed. Neil Astley, (Bloodaxe Books, UK, 2011). *Silence & its tongues* (2006) was shortlisted for the 2007 ACT Judith Wright Poetry Prize. Robyn is winner of poetry prizes, including the *Writing Spirit Poetry Award*, Ireland 2010. Robyn has created two CD's: *Off the tongue* and *Silver Leaving - Poems & Harp* with Irish harpist Lynn Saoirse. She has read her poetry in Portugal, Ireland, UK, USA, Greece, India, Austria, Bosnia, Serbia, Turkey & Italy, where, along with Canada, Spain and Japan she has been published.

## Children of Gallipoli

*for all the 'boys', çocuk askerler (child soldiers)*

Bare of beard or stubble, glum young faces,  
unsmiling photos of boys in trenches or standing  
holding the canon too tight, or gun slightly wonky  
in their powder-soft hands. Chin out. Eyes sunken.  
Posters told the colonies it was to stop the Germans.  
'Free trip to Europe' they blared, 'Full of adventure and interest'  
and landed them in Egypt. Then, a small beach under a big cliff,  
sphinx looming that seemed to have travelled with them like an albatross.  
'Dig. Dig. Dig', 'Fix bayonets', 'Make a man of yourself'.  
Their reward for survival, the killing fields of France.

First they were the fittest, the strongest, between 19 and 38 years  
but with the Western Front, numbers were shrinking.  
'bring honour to King and country', 'they're holding on at Ypres  
til you come', 'are you going brother'?  
But there are limits to the generations of men.  
So the young ones came, lied about their age.  
Recruiters knew, slid their eyes away.  
Boys who changed their names were hidden in their lists  
while mothers searched for them to drag them home. Futile.  
And the great mincing machine moved on with them bold-eyed.

Eighteen thousand English boys under 19 were killed at the Somme.  
In tales of Lancelot and daring feats, the hero always returns,  
but not limbless to an English hospital at 17,  
screaming in anticipation of pain as the 'dresser' approaches to  
open his wounds to the air, dead-eyed future awry.  
At Gallipoli 'colonial lad' Jim Martin was dead at 14  
from typhoid and heart failure. Newsreels show  
every one of them thought they were coming back.

Except the Turks. Their mothers knew. And their sons.  
Ismail Hassan's mother Hatice hennaed his hair as a goat  
about to be sacrificed, knowing her loss to the war before he did.  
One photo shows a battalion of young boys aged about 13  
well-clad in their uniforms, still chubby of cheek,  
guns shouldered and marching straight towards the lens.  
Two look directly at the camera, mouths set, determined.  
'Is it them?' you wonder, 'the class from Mektebi Sultani?'  
Azman, the sergeant, was saddened when they said;  
'we came to die for our country'.

They did not know how to fix a bayonet.  
His job was to drill them, teach them how to hold the rifle,  
how to load its knife edge, drilling with those short swords  
all night in the moonlight. Just one night for training.  
At dawn, canon from British ships started punching into trenches  
and the boys were afraid. Their captain feared it might spread  
when suddenly one started singing loudly about his country  
and they all sang it over and over until '*attack*' and  
the children rushed over the trenches into machine-gun fire,  
falling back into the lap of Azman behind.

Every country had them. They left no wills,  
no children to grand-children, no mark on the earth  
but some fading photo. If there is no stone for them,  
their brief breath disappears into the vapour of history  
unremembered. Just the image of a boy  
dead in the trenches. Not humped like an older man.  
The boy still threw himself down as if to sleep on his back  
hands thrown back like a baby, head lolling a little  
tucked into the trench. In his hand where a rattle might be,  
a grenade.



**Trial**

## Patricia McCarthy

(from a recent collection, *Horses Between Our Legs*)

### Her body returned

*i.m. Edith Cavell, a member of the FANY whose body  
was returned to Britain at the end of World War 1*

She rides our memories of her.  
Bareback, she bends through trunks  
that hold, in rings, the years she had.

Through the blue flax in fields,  
Elysian, without risk of crossfire now,  
she canters, sequined and plumed,

her noble profile turned to the south  
into the space taken by cherry blossom  
wind-woven, gold limned. All the horses

ever hers: greys, skewbalds, bays  
and roans, even those she drew on walls,  
pages, come to the call of her voice

echoing gently to another call:  
of the first cuckoo that keeps us here  
The wings she gave them, they give back

to her. While we scatter her ashes,  
and the ground gives under the green  
badged by primroses, they graze,

heads down, sure she will feed them still  
without bowls in mud, drought and storm.  
A carthorse in blinkers whickers

to the little girl she was who sat  
backwards on his quarters. She can be  
in every age at once: a horse goddess –

Epona, Macha – hair unplaited,  
eyes shining where she dismounts,  
a war heroine, to grace our hearts.





The narrative in pictures of Edith Cavell by Brian Whelan

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