



EMMA MUST

Notes on the Use of the Austrian Scythe

You can no more lend a man your scythe
than you can lend him your false teeth,
so take this day as green as harvest suppers,
borrow this meadow where the grass parts like butter,
I'll carry both in to your windowless ward,
heap sheaves of hours beside your bed,
then babble about what I've learnt of mowing:
nibs and tangs and snaths, heels and toes
and edges – esoteric glossaries
for parts of tools grown rusty through disuse;
the sharpening of blades; and principles
of movement, trimming techniques, windrows, spill.
I have a hunch all this might interest you –
who drove us at weekends to run round woods,
who pointed out sea-birds, steam trains, castles –
and knowing your appreciation of the technical,
if I can communicate how vital
it is to keep the hafting angle tight,
and how though the *neigung* doesn't simply
translate it can be altered with a shim
of plywood, it might transport you for an evening
from your fixed intravenous
existence where time is marked by the sickly
drip, drip, drip of antibiotics
disrupted only by the clatter of supper
sharp at six, the tea-girl's cheery 'Cuppa?
Orange squash? Hot chocolate? Champagne?'
I hesitate to dwell too long on sharpening
the blade . . . I'll paraphrase: with a quality
natural whetstone, never a *klumpat*,
make one complete pass from beard to point.
That's honing. Then there's peening:
to trick life from the scythe for years to come
tap the edge of the blade with a hammer,
tease it out like pastry . . . But time is getting tight
so what I want to finish on tonight
are those principles of movement: staying true,
the simple shift of weight from foot to foot,
keeping give in the knees and judging the lean,



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meditating on how we breathe
so we avoid those unexpected blips,
the woody stumps that send our pulses skittish.
Let's focus now on minimising spill
as late sun curves around the outfield,
concentrate on holding a line,
get satisfaction from a job well done,
hope that we have learnt enough to guide us
through the mass of grass as yet uncut.

Emma Must lives in Belfast. Formerly an environmental campaigner, she is currently studying for a PhD in Creative Writing at the Seamus Heaney Centre, Queen's University. She has had poems published in *The Open Ear* and *The Poet's Place*; two new poems will appear in the forthcoming issue of *Abridged*. The John Hewitt Society recently invited her to read at the Ulster Museum as a notable emerging poet alongside Michael Longley. On being shortlisted for the 2013 Strokestown International Poetry Award, Emma remarked: 'I'm absolutely delighted to be shortlisted. It feels lovely not to be just scribbling in the dark, for once. Thank you!'



CANDY NEUBERT

Opening the Atlas

Take an orange. Not for the moon/tide thing;
turn it until the bit that was attached
to the tree is angled towards your chin.
This is Antarctica. Think of a stone
being thrown into the Southern Ocean,
the ripples purling past the Equator
through the Bengal Plateau into Asia
where, for a moment, no one lives at all.
They are here, in the inset on the right,
on Rodriguez Island (to Mauritius)
or the scattered Crozet Islands (to France).
Some on Heard Island (to Australia),
but it looks like mostly ice and no trees.
That's all. Put it back in the fruit bowl, please.

Disconcerted by no coastline at all,
which is true of the Prairie Provinces,
my gaze plunges in free-fall through the air
and lands on Lucky Lake, Saskatchewan.
There's a hollow circle next to its name
indicating a medium sized town,
other similar circles all around
and a river within cycling distance
if you're fit, but no lake of any kind.
There is, too, a large amount of beige space
and the words Great Sand hills and Cypress Hills
written in curved script a short drive away.
It may be lucky, but from this great height,
like God, I haven't the faintest idea.

Almost certainly Magadanskaya
is not pronounced like that, and has by now
another name. Still I find myself here,
rather worryingly on a small horse.
It realises that I am a stranger
in these parts and I don't know how to ride,
but it's a patient beast and my saddle,
made of a strongly smelling hide, is quite



comfy. This last detail is just as well
as we're heading for Ayan, which will take
about a year. Mountains are all around;
my fur hood comes almost down to my eyes.
It's a funny thing but I'm quite happy
and may not come back, in spite of the flies.

Lake Tiberias stands out clear and blue.
Around its shores are the dry rolling hills
of the Bible, where men with long beards
wearing pleated tunics sit on boulders.
There are men in the market place with hats,
beards again, dark eyes and wise expressions.
Always men. Women are within white walls
in cool rooms with jars. But what do I know.
Only that south of Lake Tiberias
a fertile valley runs to the Dead Sea,
the whole shape of it, that of the female.
Once from a plane I saw it spread below
until the hostess pulled the window shade.
It's too bright, she said. They want to watch films.

It can do your head in, looking at maps.
It becomes space and time, the chair covers
slightly furrowed, pouring like waterfalls
down its fat sides. I nestle between them,
willing myself into the Pacific,
a breathtaking place, not just no people
but nowhere for me to put my feet down,
not even a little barnacled rock,
only the sweep of continental shelf
sliding from pale blue to dark to purple.
Just turn on your back when you get tired
says my father; let the water hold you.
I do, spreading my arms and looking up
through sky, or time, into my own face.

Candy Neubert, on being shortlisted for the 2013 Stroketown International Poetry

Award: 'I've always written, having made a few forays into the short story and the novel, but poetry, always. News of this shortlisted poem just missed me at home; I had left for Scotland to take up a Hawthornden Fellowship - with the idea of working on an extended sequence of sonnets which lead on from this same poem. There's no internet at Hawthornden (lovely); I'd walked a couple of miles in a small blizzard, wrapped in so many layers I could hardly breathe, thinking I may as well check emails - and there was the news from Stroketown. Having to catch my breath all over again ...'



ERIN FORNOFF

Hymn to the Reckless (For my Brother)

Together we throw flame into orbit.
The frantic patter,
the volley, the hit.
From afar it's just stars
come down to flit.

We bend quick to the flame
and pull coals into flight
Delirious sleight of hand
with a teaspoon of light
Once one caught
between my fingers and seared
and that night I wrapped
my aching hand around cold beer.

We're boozy folk heroes
performing incredible feats
craft exquisite trajectories
with arms full of heat
Look! the arc as he sends it
hurdlng toward me
bending with some
eccentric choreography-

We burn.
Our power, to drag a new comet trail
across the evening
a hymn to the reckless,
so breathless it falls to earth,
the air singeing--
we smolder.
Gods of our own solstice,
and solace,
there's solace in this insane game;
in being the wild ones
who manhandle coals from the flames
and make them dance.

Oh! he catches behind the back,



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he's a one-man eclipse of the sun,
lays cursive lines across your eyelids
even once you've closed them
With a tap-tap-tap it comes flying to me
oh God--I got it! Lightning quick layup,
i shot it--always skyward.

We marvel at our savage skill,
at what we've harnessed.
Sleep hard with sooty hands,
flames peel us unvarnished.

One night in the smoke
with his throat full,
he turned, stilled, confessed:
You know,
I always thought
they loved you the best.

How long has he held that
pressed tight in his palm
as it scorched him?
Brave in the dim to de-clench that fist
from the ember within;
to admit what forges us.
The gentle soul who can cast flame
to the rim of the sky.
And the ember.
Exposed to air it glows,
it catches, it dies, it passes.
Toss it here.
We'll pass it back and forth
until it's ashes.

A native of the Appalachian Mountains of North Carolina, **Erin Fornoff** is a poet living and working in Ireland for the past four years. Called a "story-telling poet," she has performed her poetry at the Electric Picnic Word and Arts Council stages, and many other festivals including First Fortnight, Flatlakes Literary Festival, Tonehenge, Mindfield Festival, as well as Caca Milis Cabaret in Wexford and Medicine Sessions in Waterford. She is a regular at many spoken word nights around Dublin, including Brownbread Mixtape, Nighthawks, The Monday Echo, and many others. She has been featured live on RTE's Arena Stage with Sean Rocks, and was a finalist with Peter Sheridan in Literary Death Match Dublin. Her essays have been published in The Irish Times, and her poetry in Wordlegs, The Cellar Door, and Bare Hands Literary Journal. She won First Prize for Poetry in The Cellar Door and was



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shortlisted for the Over the Edge New Writer of the Year for 2012. Erin will be a guest artist at the Glastonbury Festival in June of this year.

On being shortlisted for the 2013 Strokestown International Poetry Award, Erin remarked: 'Ireland is the place where I became a writer. Living in Ireland and amongst all these words has made me feel most deeply myself. Poetry is a natural resource and national monument here. I have found nowhere else in the world where a person can say a poem in a loud, crowded bar and feel the whole room quiet. It is a wonderful and rare thing. I'm so delighted to be shortlisted for the Strokestown International Poetry Award and to be in the company of so many inspiring artists.'



MARK GRANIER

Cochlear Implant

'I could actually hear the skin
separating. I'd peel a hundred satsumas
just to hear that.' And immediately
I wanted to reach for one, dig my thumbs in
for the zesty, whispery rip —

as the inner ear uncoils its stethoscope
for the endangered ghost of a foghorn, tyres
on a wet road's unpeeling tape, the little whinny
a dog sometimes makes in its sleep:

shoes creaking into the fresh snow's crust
in the library of small sounds where satsumas
get peeled very slowly and Basho's frog goes plop!
cupped in that haiku, along with its pond
and summer's trembling meniscus.

Born in London in 1957, Mark Granier was raised in Dublin, where he still lives. He has published three poetry collections, *Airborne* (Salmon, 2001), *The Sky Road* (Salmon, 2007) and *Fade Street* (Salt, 2010). His awards include two Arts Council Bursaries, the Vincent Buckley Poetry Prize in 2004, and The Patrick and Katherine Kavanagh Fellowship in 2011. He currently teaches Creative Writing in UCD.

I was delighted to be shortlisted for the Strokestown International Poetry Award. I suppose every village is unique in its own way but the generous shape of Strokestown, the two broad crossbeams of its main streets, make it unforgettable. There is the open secret of Beirne's pub, with its entrance at the back of the grocery shop. And of course there is Strokestown Park House, where I've occasionally been distracted by sheep peering in the windows. I have always found the place broadly and intimately welcoming, whether during the excitement of the festival or in quieter periods (visiting friends who had a house there) and it has always been a pleasure to read there. As for poetry's importance to me, when I'm asked this I always think of Patrick Kavanagh who said "I dabbled in verse and it became my life." Not to compare my dabbling to Kavanagh's unique genius, but the methods of immersion are similar. And I am still at it.



JENNIFER COPLEY

Being Haunted

How annoying the dead are.
They like to be near us, breathe noisily
behind the curtains or crouch
under the table while we eat.
The dog watches all their to-ings and fro-ings.
He's never seen so many bones.

How boastful the dead are.
They can recite all the countries on the globe,
quote extensively from Keats or Kipling,
know every fact about Mary Queen of Scots,
how she knelt to the axe,
her shivering dog under her skirts.

How spiteful the dead are.
Used to wintry weather, they relish it,
lash out at the postman blowing on his hands,
refuse to oil the gate.
They push the dog outside,
help themselves to his meat.

How scatterbrained the dead are.
We are forever picking up their stuff: spectacles,
the tea strainer, a small black paring knife.
The garden is littered with obituary notices.
Have a heart, we say, trying to rake the lawn
but only the dog reads our lips.

How nosy the dead are.
They peer round the wardrobe
as we lie in bed. They watch us sleep.
One of them goes through our In Box,
finds out what we've ordered for Christmas –
handcuffs, racy underwear, a chewy slipper.

How determined the dead are.
When the dog dies, they wait and wait
for us to follow suit and when we do,



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give us ice-cold tea so we never warm up.
They show us photos of God so we know what he looks like
but they won't tell us what to say.

Jennifer Copley lives in Barrow-in-Furness in her grandmother's house, a place that has informed much of her poetry. She has published 5 collections of poetry including *Ice* (Smith/Doorstop), *Unsafe Monuments* (Arrowhead), *Beans in Snow* (Smokestack) and *Living Daylights* (Happenstance). Her work has appeared in *The Rialto*, *The North*, the *Independent on Sunday*, the *Forward Prize Anthology* and *GCSE Poetry Unseen* revision papers. Her latest collection is *Mr Trickfeather* published by Like This Press.

Jennifer Copley on being shortlisted for the 2013 Strokestown International: 'I'd just like to say how delighted I am to be coming to Strokestown for the second time having been previously shortlisted in 2005. I had a wonderful time with such a feast of poetry on offer and the atmosphere was amazing. What struck me most was the way that everyone I met, from the waiter in the hotel to the landlady in our B&B, was interested in poetry. I wish this was the case in England!'



ALISON PRINCE

The Form

Is there water within 30 metres of your house?

The burn swallows the lawn sometimes.
It is running brown today because the rain
has washed a bank away
somewhere up there in the forestry.
When it is well behaved
the heron comes and stands in it
as though in a stone pond at Versailles.

Is your house within 50 metres of the sea?

On the high tide and a south-east wind
it burst over the sea wall last week,
drowning a lorry piled with Sitka spruce.
You need not know that I drove through
a sky as full of tossed water as a fairground ride,
chugging the engine so that the exhaust pipe
would blow hot gas out in some frail defence
against ingress of brine and bladderwrack.
The brakes still squeal but Angus says
they will dry out if frequently hard-used.

Are there trees within 10 metres of your house?

The vast laburnum, you will be glad to hear,
blew down when its load of yellow blooms
proved too heavy in a summer storm.
A wood-turner made a smooth pear from it
with circles of pale heartwood on each side
revealing strange truth from its dense darkness.
You need not know the bird cherry still stands.
Its branches keep the telephone line
from harm in winter gales.

*Failure to answer any of these questions
may invalidate your application.*

Had I not re-hocked the house years back
I'd bin your form, enjoy again the absence



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of this illusion of security. It did me very well
when I owned nothing, and will do well again
when nothing owns me; when I have gone
into the wind and the heartwood
and the outrageous power of the sea.

Born in London, **Alison Prince** is the author of biographies of Kenneth Grahame and Hans Christian Anderson. She has also written numerous children's books, as well as being an artist and poet. She is also well known for her children's television programmes, particularly Trumpton with its popular catch-phrase 'Pugh, Pugh, Barney McGrew ...' She lives in Scotland on the Isle of Arran.

Alison Prince on poetry: 'The way we are being governed now is so grotesque that my writing has taken a new turn. I want to find a way to point up the black comedy of what is going on, while ducking the solemn trading of political views. Poetry, for me, has always been a matter of finding the numinous quality that is present in common, real things, and this is not insuperably hard to do from within the inherent potential beauty of domestic objects and a loved landscape. How to have a smack at absurdity without getting dragged into a boring polemical ding-dong is something quite else, and it interests me immensely. I'd like to be a poetic gadfly, delivering a bite and never hanging around long enough to be trapped in a box and labelled Leftie Protester. Such classification makes you easy to kill, but a quick joke can deliver its point before anyone reaches for the aerosol can. It's difficult to do, because the balance has to be light and adroit. Self-indulgence is fatally heavy, and fatuity doesn't deliver enough punch. I can only keep moving and keep trying. There's nothing more intriguing, and all else apart, it gives me huge amounts of fun.'



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MARY ROZMUS WEST

We Go to Buy a Second-Hand Travel Cot

slept in once or twice by someone's infant
or grandchild or friend's baby. The trip

to Roundabout offers a winter excursion
through six-day old snow finally beginning

to turn to slush. Not certain whether we'll ever
actually use the cot but excited by the prospect

that we'll pay less than half the previous owner's
purchase price, we pile into the car,

which swivels and skids a bit on the last of the ice,
squint into sparkle, the first sunlight in over

a week, breathe in new prospects, sigh our security,
our well-planned, well-played providence.

Mary Rozmus West grew up in the United States and has lived in Bath, England, for 24 years. She holds a doctorate in English literature from Fordham University in New York. She has remarked that, following a career in the commercial and public sectors, she has 'returned to [my] first love, literature, with an enthusiasm which perforce had to be side-lined for many years.'



JUDE NUTTER

Field Notes: Watching the Crew of Atlantis Renovating the Hubble Telescope

What comforts me most is imagining the regular, calm draw
and blow of their breathing, and that they are floating,
for a while, in exile

and surviving, because, after weeks of drifting, tethered
to a machine the size of tea trolley that pulled in
the room's ambient air, compressed it
and vented off its nitrogen with such a quiet, relentless
suck and surge, my mother had crossed
into the homeland no one is equipped to travel through. Tethered

securely, and laden with tools
and equipment, the astronauts bury their arms,
elbow-deep, into the golden torso
of the telescope. Beneath them, across the earth,
night's precise curve approaching and nothing
around them but the constant
wash of their own breathing. What I remember most

about my mother's last breath was the way her eyes
opened slightly—slim buttonholes
in the body's fabric—and my father rising
out of his chair and leaning over
the bed's chrome railing to get as close
to her as he could, to rest his forehead against hers
and whisper hello, Eileen, and I found myself thinking

about that white and half-wild pony
in the pasture next door; the way, each morning,
it was a solid, pale patience behind a single
strand of fence wire as it waited for my father
to trail through the damp nap of the lawn
with his small offering; the way it would lower
its head, then, to press against him, with such
restraint, the long, heavy treasure of its skull.
The thick plate of the forehead. Each nostril's
soft cuff. But it was over

already and that machine went on breathing
without her until I rocked its small, red switch



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into silence. There was the fixed curve
of my father's spine. There was the still weight
of his head against hers. Our first night on earth
without her. Wind in the hawthorn.
The great carnival wheel of stars. The astronauts

are repairing the gyros; they are fitting the spectrograph
and the wide-field cameras that will allow us to gaze
right onto to the cosmic frontier. And the undertaker unzipped the dark

bloom of his body bag. Later, the froth
of the first birds and the lights of the fleet roped
three deep along the quay fraying
in a dawn that arrived like wood smoke and,
for a while, my father and I not knowing how
to be with each other. With their gentle

and deliberate gestures the two astronauts
appear almost tender, like lovers.
The visors of their helmets are golden
blisters of reflected light. It is impossible to gauge
the ferocity of thought inside them.

Jude Nutter was born in North Yorkshire, England, and grew up near Hannover, in northern Germany. She has been living and teaching in The Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota, since 1998. Her poems have appeared in numerous national and international journals and have received over 30 awards and grants, including three fellowships from the Minnesota State Arts Board, two McKnight Foundation Fellowships, The Listowel Prize, The Larry Levis Prize, The Robinson Jeffers Prize, the Marjorie J. Wilson Award for Excellence in Poetry, as well as grants from The Jerome Foundation, The Elizabeth George Foundation and the National Science Foundation's Writers and Artists Program in Antarctica.

Her first book-length collection, *Pictures of the Afterlife (Salmon)*, was published in 2002. *The Curator of Silence* (University of Notre Dame Press), her second collection, won the Ernest Sandeen Prize from the University of Notre Dame and was awarded the 2007 Minnesota Book Award in poetry. A third collection, *I Wish I Had a Heart Like Yours, Walt Whitman* (University of Notre Dame Press), was awarded the 2010 Minnesota Book Award in poetry and voted Poetry Book of the Year by ForeWord Review in New York.

Jude Nutter has remarked: 'Being shortlisted for the Strokestown International Poetry Award is, if course, a great honour. As a Brit currently living and teaching in the US, I work hard to maintain my European identity and connections; to be acknowledged in this way by the Strokestown Festival is deeply meaningful. As a poet, my connections to Ireland are strong:



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it was winning the Listowel Writers' Week Poetry Award in 2000 and the subsequent publication of my first collection by Salmon Poetry in 2002 that really launched my career in the US. With family living in County Kerry for over 30 years, I now spend more time visiting Ireland each year than I do the UK, and the Irish landscape itself is the predominate landscape in many of my poems. And as for poetry's place and importance in my life? This is probably best answered by these words from Rilke: "...ask yourself in the stillest hour of the night, "Must I write?" Dig deep into yourself for an answer. And if this answer should be in the affirmative, if you can meet this solemn question with a simple, strong "I must," then build up your life according to this necessity."



JULIET AYKROYD

Quietus

It's not the dying but having to quit that's hard:
to be cut from the tumult reeling in moments like this:
a house waking to the east and pooling gold
not battled for. Illumination. Sharpness.
A walk into a needle-fall of rain.
Lifting your face to ash trees and sky,
ash-riddled sky, then home to a friend being glad.
Turning seed into food, colours. Making good.
A night on the glide with Jupiter guiding you back
and the heart at ease. A dog let to sleep.
All these you must leave.

It was far ahead, now it's here.
You stare down days, with spiders wefting your hair
into their plans, watch dots stretch away.
You stand by the gate. Poplars rattle and shake
and doves rave answers to devious prayers.

Do not quit yet, they say. Be quiet and hear.
Hours, minutes, seconds. The music they make.

Juliet Aykroyd's poems have been placed in several competitions, and appeared in a number of magazines. She was shortlisted for both the Torbay and Wells festival competitions in 2012. Juliet is also an actor and playwright, and her play Nancy Cunard won first prize in the Oz Whitehead/Irish Pen competition in 2003. She lives on a smallholding in Somerset, UK. She was a prizewinner in the Strokestown International Poetry Competition in 2009, but was unable to attend the festival that year, and has told us that she will be 'very excited to be present for the first time at this famously wonderful occasion.'



JOHN WHITWORTH

Wittgenstein's Beetle

My mind is like a beetle in a box.
I open up the box to see it go.
It scuttles up and down and to and fro,
Telling me everything I want to know.
You have to be a hedgehog or a fox.
My mind is like a beetle in a box.

My universes are unnumbered clocks
And every one displays a different face
For each exigency of time and space,
Another person and another place,
Another bastard set of building blocks.
My mind is like a beetle in a box.

Beached and benighted by a paradox,
Our age has lost the concept of degree.
I grieve for it myself incessantly.
If you weren't you who would you wish to be?
You love the freedoms, can't abide the frocks.
My mind is like a beetle in a box.

Pull down your knickers or pull up your socks.
It's sex or standards and I don't care which.
Now is decision time (the rest is kitsch)
And plans for getting seriously rich
Despite portfolios of falling stocks.
My mind is like a beetle in a box.

Is it Christ's blood or whisky on the rocks?
Is it the answer or the seventh clue?
Is it the angel or the bugaboo?
Who would you wish to be, if you weren't you?
Is it the upsurge or the aftershocks?
My mind is like a beetle in a box.

Tick-tock. Tick-tock. Throw out those bloody clocks!
But yours and yours and yours are just the same.
We're on a losing streak. We play the game.
The whole thing's fucked and nobody's to blame.



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They're digging down behind the hollyhocks.
My mind is like a beetle in a box.

They sank the blackened bodies in the docks
Which previously were given to the flame.
Who went is clear, a good deal less who came;
It all comes down to claim and counter-claim,
A neat solution, if unorthodox.
My mind is like a beetle in a box.

John Whitworth has published ten books of poems and one about how to write them. He lives in Canterbury where he enjoys food, drink, cricket, and poetry of course. He is married to Doreen Roberts with two grown-up daughters, two cats, and newts in the garden pond. His poems are published irregularly in many magazines here and in the United States, and regularly in *Quadrant*, an Australian journal rather like *Encounter*, if you are old enough to remember it, whose literary editor is the great Les Murray. He has won lots of prizes but 'thinks it un-English to boast.' *Girlie Gangs* (Enitharmon) was published in 2012.

John has remarked: 'Being short-listed for the Strokestown International Award is very gratifying, winning it would be even more so. Only the Daily Mail has given me more than 3,000 euros for a poem.'