

Soul Rice Issue 1:
Displacement

Soul Rice Issue 1 Displacement
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Editors Notes

Dear readers,

It has been an honour and an excitement to shape the first edition of SoulRice magazine. When Eltayeb approached me many months ago to offer me a role within the team, I was consumed within a canonical English curriculum, studying poetry, prose, and drama for hours each day. Now, half a year after my graduation, it is a joy to remain involved in the world of literature in such a distinct manner.

Contributors, your work is of the highest standard, eloquent, inventive, and truly moving. You have impressed and astounded us in both your content and your form. Thank you for allowing us to collate these pieces and to present them to the world.

I had a vision of what the poetry of displacement may look like, and, while many of these texts have fulfilled my initial conception, others have approached the theme at angles that I had never considered. There is such a range across this anthology, in tone, in perspective, and in lasting emotion. One of my roles within this process has been to organise and order these works in a way that tells a story. I hope that our readers can view these texts as both individual masterpieces, and as part of a unified, shifting tale about our current world.

The highlight of the collection for me is Diarmuid Cawley's 'Appropriate Response', which, in my mind, exists in conversation with Benjamin Zephaniah's 'Neighbours'. Cawley's piece speaks of an aimless masculine rage that fascinates and horrifies me, and that I witness every day in my customer service job. It reminds me of Christopher Andrews' 2024 film 'Bring Them Down', which follows two shepherds in rural Ireland as they feud with increasing violence, slaughtering and destroying whilst avoiding any verbalisation of their anger.

I have chosen to conclude the collection with a poem that was not written by one of our contributors. I stumbled across it on social media during the editing process, and felt compelled to place it here. Sources establishing its origins are contradictory and unclear, and it has never been ascribed to a particular individual. The story goes that it was found in the pocket of a deceased man who washed up ashore after attempting a treacherous migration across the Mediterranean Sea. It is tragic, fitting, and the product of great artistic talent.

Poppy – Executive Editor

Dear readers,

Collaboration is a fundamental pillar of Soul Rice's mission. I am excited that we feature two collaborative poems in this issue: Monday(Ferropolis) by Lea Steward (Jaymz Lea & Samuel Steward) and Real-Fake by Michel Borla & Jim Paterson. I reject that writing must be a lonely endeavor and love to see new ways of constructing poetry. These new methodologies of creation are exactly what the contemporary poetry movement needs. Check out page 44 to read their stories.

I would also like to thank everyone who submitted for issue one! Your work is interesting, evocative and a joy to read.

Jack - Founder

Dear readers,

Poetry is one of the most expressive and versatile mediums of human expression. It is a tool of the people, amplifying diverse voices that deserve to be heard and made accessible to all. Through their work, these poets have revealed the power of this art form to tell stories and inspire change in others. We are grateful to everyone who shared their pieces with us, and we look forward to continuing to platform and celebrate powerful poetry in the future.

Eltayeb - Founder

Dear readers and contributors,

We have spent months immersed in your reflections on displacement, witnessing the incredible breadth of the human experience. Selecting from such a high caliber of work was a daunting task, but the final pieces stand out for their profound artistry and thematic resonance.

Displacement is a word that carries immense weight, and this collection honors those emotions with beauty and sensitivity. What was once just a vision is now a reality, and we are deeply moved to share this journey with you.

Shreyashi - Public Outreach Editor

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Their Car, My Country: On hitchhiking

Diarmuid Cawley

We'd never have met if I hadn't stuck out my thumb.

Invisible to each other, in their car; in my country.

Midsummer verges sway in the wake of this angry

chariot, the cold war rages in Angola, not my war—

I cling to the animal-print seat covers as the car eats
corners. Stoned Lusophone brothers at dawn in Mayo,

holding fire. Their throbbing music shakes my obsessive

-compulsive disorder. I focus on the one not driving,

his skin glistens with scars, he gnashes his teeth to silence me.

I hate this country! These are not my people.

I am a warrior, a fighter!

I will go back to Angola and fight!

We could have gone to war there on the back seat,

but there's no space for the colonised, on-edge in an

empty island, or on Africa's red earth, wet with women's

tears. We're all escaping, quitting habits, *sofrimento*.

At a fork in the road, they kick me out—*go that way,*

we go this way—no sweet goodbyes, no more kicking

Issue 1: Displacement

stones, avoiding cracks, I stop counting to seven
or seventy-seven, stop flicking light switches—
no more touching wood. They disappear like morning.

Viva... our wars are over.

Leavings

Elliot Wilner

1. When Lionel Left Margot

Margot sent me an email message saying

She was sorry to be dropping

Such terrible news on me:

Her husband/my friend Lionel went out

On his boat for a sail on Lake Ontario

And never came home.

The next day his boat was found

But not Lionel.

So that's how a life sometimes ends --

With a mystery.

I always thought that both Lionel and I

Would simply get old and dwindle away;

We did get old but Lionel never dwindled.

Was it an accident? Homicide? Suicide?

It seems certain that we'll never know

But what does it matter to Margot?

Lionel left. She is alone.

2. When Mercedes Left Steve

My patient Steve died a slow wretched death

From malignant multiple sclerosis.

He was thirty at the onset

Thirty-four at the end.

For a year his wife Mercedes

Never left his bedside

She fed him and bathed him and comforted him.

MS and Mercedes were the two constants in his life

For the first year.

Then Mercedes left. She left and never came back.

Where did she go? She didn't say.

Why did she leave? She didn't say.

Maybe she was tired of suffering

Maybe she wanted an erotic life

Or maybe she just wanted a life.

But what did it matter to Steve?

Mercedes left. He was alone.

Real-Fake

Michel Borla & Jim Paterson

REAL

Do you remember when
We used to live on the coast?
The bay of course
And the sun that would blind us
Each and every morning
The noisy people that pissed you off
The bustling streets and the sea
Of course
The dry beaches
The narrow staircase
We couldn't wait to be up there

Look at the rocks now
Look at the dark demented ocean
Look at the drenched paths
And the leaden sky
It's all real
You say
It's all real now
Just as real as
The rusty gate
The oblivious dog
The evening fire and
The wooden clock

FAKE

I remember a time
We used to live near a bay
Must have been the coast
Sunny days and Ray-Bans
Every time, more or less,
Kinda douce folk on busy streets
always some street drama
must have been
pebbles on the beach
how did we get that sideboard upstairs

Rocks are still rocking,
the sea is still wine-dark,
the wine is still blood red.
It is raining
even on wash day,
clothes horizontal in the wind.
No, I just made that up,
it's a painting on my wall.
It's fake,
fake as any memory,
fake as any perception,
like the gate, the dog, the fire and the clock.
I'm sure I remember the heft of the sideboard.
I think.

Virtual Friends

Elliot Wilner

I don't know how to tell you this, wrote Sarah his daughter,
But Lionel disappeared almost two weeks ago
While sailing his boat on Lake Ontario.
The boat was found intact, adrift in open water
Under fair skies, without any overt sign of foul play.
But Lionel was not aboard and is now presumed dead.
So wrote Lionel's daughter Sarah, who plaintively
Closed by confessing "I'm still in shock."
And the news shocked me too.
Once flat-mates and good friends during a year in London,
Lionel and I soon diverged and rarely met in person.
Although we kept in touch by email and Zoom,
The touch was no longer real, only virtual,
And we became friends virtually but not really.
Friendship takes effort, I've learned to my dismay,
It's not a prize that falls like manna straight from heaven,
But it's a seed planted in the soil, needing continual cultivation.
Yes, there are many distractions in our daily lives, a lot of
Perfectly understandable reasons to procrastinate.
So, if I neglected a friend, let a friendship wane,
It must be that we had only a virtual bond
Although, now, I have real remorse.

SOURDOUGH

Janina Aza Karpinska

Her memory's worn thin like pastry dough;
unable to hold its own weight; too soft
to support or contain any filling.

Her mind rolls back – remembering – spreads:
different sizes; random shapes - holes in new places
a constant gathering up - and rolling out.

Pat-a-cake mind - without any hands.

Familiar faces now blank as filo, though
reunions with long-dead relatives
make up the short-fall.

A constant gathering up - and rolling out, but
everything skewed and wrong. Scales
out of balance. Nothing stable. Nothing
pinned down: butter fingers.

Drop scones. Tossed pancakes.

Battered fish. Waffle.

A constant gathering up - and dishing out.

Recipes missing - pages too close to a window ~
blown out by a storm.

75016, To Passy

Yisuann Wynn

Dear Ashley:

Postcard from you slipped inside softly, last night, inky cover

A cute postman made me swallow it with Gin

in a tumbler of clouded glass we bought together from a secondhand store,

blood orange dripping beneath, I asked him to stay

The first time the old, decaying apartment feels alive after you left

all the fevered evening, in Le Marais of blinding wind and unanswered
echoes I look at you,

warm laundry, wet ankles

spinning around with our thin bras on

Bubbles fly high as we drowned in the bathtub

We were translations of each other, poorly done, emotionally smashed.

Glad you found a wealthy boy, buying you Goose and Rings, saving your
soul

Now you live in your new apartment in Passy and he enjoys your tears,

I know. I imagine.

Things once made us kiss heavily, I do with someone else;

Tattoos on my bones you have the same-- blame me for getting lost but I'm
just having fun

Soul Rice

Ashley, we've learned, girly twins wouldn't last forever

In this city we are not dreamers

We suffer,

suffer, and wither

far away from home, the open road

and love, and you.

Dis junctions

DG Herring

Virtue signals are fine as far as they go, but
how far is that? They do not run inwards.
The mind is its own either/or place: you know
who you are! Semiotics is complex: think
of a watchman up on the roof, waiting
to witness a beacon from Troy. Iou, Iou!
Or hands by the shore, milking the murex
for purple. Does that spiky rock-snail tell how
its entrails are soon to be trampled? Might
ooze have a sight-line on Tyrian carpets
of gore? Neither/nor? You has a privileged
view-point: your bad is your bad and so is
the good that you do; keeping score. No
wonder Beckett and Joyce, and the who-
would-have-thought-so-many brigade, felt
that ours is an in-between realm. Few, here,
are totes evil or irremediably holy. Most are
just muddlers, bottom feeders whose eyes
dare to catch sunlight refracted from surfaces
we hardly hope for, yet stretch out our arms to;
windmill-mongers on tilt, who cry lololu at signs
in our timeline and like to be seen to like right.

The Same Changes

Tadg Harris

New Grey had stained the pavement I
searched for the girl who painted The
square my life was framed in And that
fourth corner that caved in

From the weight of too much waiting The
caution I risked taking
Until the cauldron started shaking
Strange dividing lines

Young skin was aging

The flight, we both feared making
But the light was near to fading
We climbed the cold steel railing Lined
the pylon cables

You jumped, your wings were stapled Birds
flew your wings weren't able

The Other Route

Igwe Shalom

Beneath the box
my clothes lie untouched, discarded
The uniform I once wore with pride

The road to my old school beckons to me
But is it still mine
When it's gates closed me out?

So I take the other route,
unfamiliar,
And trek to my new school

The teachers and students
all new, I have a clean slate
So they say

Yet the uniform on my back feels like a borrowed skin,
Itchy, uncomfortable

The girls who call me "friend"
would they still,
if they knew the slate I carried from the school I lost?

Ferropolis

Lea Steward

Already! Monday came with more fascism

We are so close now, my love

When we see each other shall we just scream?

And turn to dust

No,

glitter!

Rebirth from those impossible sequins

Labouring into fabulous queer phoenixes

Become part of the Whole community

And live there

Live off the land

By the lake

And life is good.

KEEP FEELING, STOP FEELING...

Irsa Irfan

...till your tongue ties itself into a knot and you can speak no more. It resembles the knot in your throat, and your chest, and your stomach. It resembles the burning pit in your guts every time a robin graces you with its presence and song. How can such a little thing, so round and plump, so sweet with its wistful eyes, sicken you already? The fox has yet to leap out from behind the bushes, and you're *crying*? Let nature run its course, then perhaps you can let your tears run down your face.

Exulansis, said a voice floating past you, but you're too young to know it's not a made-up word, much to my dismay, even.

You're a grieving girl, you know that, right? You clutch your guts in disgust as you remember all the legs you've plucked from helpless little ants. You mourn the magpie with the broken leg and wonder if you should've lunged forward and grabbed it to take home and heal. You mourn all the horses in the world whose legs have ever been broken, and you never thought you'd agree that a bullet to the head was the most merciful outcome (how terrible your face when you learned this at the sad age of five). You mourn the extinct who have sunken into the earth and become one with the elements, pressed between layers upon layers of sediment and sentiment. They gave life in exchange for life. You love it, and you hate it. You'll fight these feelings even as you watch Prehistoric Planet two decades later. You'll mourn alongside all the mothers staring at her broken and bloodied eggs, all the fathers losing yet another baby to the oceans.

Let nature run its course, you need to keep reminding yourself. Because then, you'll be good for nothing. You'll become a grieving piece of shit and it'll haunt you for the rest of your life.

Appropriate Response

Diarmuid Cawley

I live on the same street
as a man I do not like.
We have never seen eye to eye
he watches my every move,
dumps his rubbish on my doorstep
intimidates me and takes my
belongings. I break the windows
in his house of stolen pieces,
he reports me, slashes my car tyres,
I poison his aggressive dog.
We both get on with life, sing our
music, eat our sun-drenched food.
The breeze on our street dries our clothes
equally, the salt in our blood
is the same. He's a bastard, as am I.
We both wander the street searching
for our way in swirling dust, making claims
about parking spaces and water usage.
I am telling you this from beyond
from a place between this street and the next
where I am now. When my neighbour's back
was turned, I slapped him very hard
across the cheek. When he stopped spinning,
he responded. I expected an equally hard slap,

maybe two, three, even ten. Instead, he dismembered
me, using my miles of veins to hang all my bits.
He scraped the marrow from my split bones
and pulled my teeth, burying each one separately
in the four corners. After that
he baked a cake from my blood
and ate it, my hair a dusty flag,
my house of rubble, my ribs
will become his garden fence.
Our street has changed, the local council
are reluctant to step in, they say
it is an appropriate response, something
we need to sort out amongst ourselves
but my hands are tied, to his front door,
I try knocking every day.

I Prefer Pandas Anyway

Eamonn O'Sullivan

riddle: how do you reconcile
celebrities in space and starvation?
answer: you don't,
but you don't sleep either.

another guy was shot in america last week i saw it all zoomed in
as the

hey fascist! CATCH!

caught his neck;
remembered that in ireland
people burned a boat
full of black mannequins in july.

i can't fall asleep without physicists
in my ears anymore –
when the sheep start laughing
i recite desiderata instead,
wonder at what *peace*
there may have been in silence.

“there are a few hundred billion stars in the galaxy”, brian cox reassures
me
(he used to be a popstar)
a milky way is still a chocolate bar.

i read that war is afoot in space,

one giant leap for who the fuck knows. and the climate is
probably worth saving but how many cardboard straws
to un-spill this year's oil slicks?

can you arm an astronaut?

my screen time today was nine hours and the ice face keeps
failing. i bought a steak

from a german supermarket that was cut from a
cow

in argentina for £2.99

how far can polar bears swim? i prefer pandas
anyway.

The First Hour

Natalie Korman

Out goes the sun, the end
of our own Jurassic.

The pieces hewn so fine they float unfelt
into the lungs, and lodge there,
settle in, for life.

What will the fossil record tell us—them—
of how we lived and how we fluttered out
beneath a chilly blotted star?

That first hour is indeed the crucial
one, determining if we're swept
into the vast shallow seas
or fly broken-winged for an unseen horizon.

That first hour, as the wood breaks,
becomes the heap on which our
flesh and bones are so carelessly flung.

Displaced in the Shadow of War

Precious Suremi

I came with a bag full, not only of clothes but of hopes,
A stranger to a land so strange that the only word I knew was “hi.”
A land home to my dreams and expectations,
Now traumas and past.

A sky once blue, now grey.
A skyscraper once high, now in shambles.
A city so peaceful, now roars thunderously.
A people once settled, now wanderers.

I hear mothers call out their children,
And their children screaming “mama.”
I see a country lost in fear and panic,
And its citizens screaming “help.”

I’m an echo in this foreign song,
A witness to a world that exists in history,
Trying to grasp what words cannot hold,
While trying to find words for those at home.

Yet even here amid the ruin,
A stubborn light that refuses to dim,
A flame that survives the wreckage
A heart that startles at sudden noise,
A lip that still moves to pray.

And yet, hope remains,

"For I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end."

Jeremiah 29:11 KJV

What I Remember When Ripped from your Arms

Freya Calcluth

I remember that night like scars on skin,
a city collapsed and my home haunted.
the journey we took left me with no hope.
there, my nightmares of losing you begin
and each day since I have lived in torment
with only your memories to help cope.

i remember how horror scenes erupt
in fractured families and broken bones.
you shield my eyes and whisper lullabies;
shelter my soul from remnants turned to dust,
and a life remembered by echoed groans.
still, i'm haunted by the sound of your cry.

i remember the last time you held me:
gripped so tight with promise to never leave.
but fate twisted its cruellest hook in me first
with no goodbye, they took me to the sea.
were you just as scared as me, did you grieve?
could you imagine me amongst the dirt?

i remember the sun shining no more.
your golden eyes have darkened to greyscale,
in a mind cascading melancholy,
shattered when awoken on cobbled floor.
where clouds turn to frosted mists in exhale,
only tracings of a ghostly body.

i remember every moment since you.
ripped from safe arms into earth's misery,
waiting to find my way back to you, mum.
your memory is all i can cling to.
my life called a crime with no history
but all I live for is to be your son.

“If I See You Tomorrow”

Sam Hendrian

A bedtime story on the Gaza Strip
Padded with euphemisms
Lest the child in question
Wonder if something is terribly wrong.

Used to talk about the morning
In the manner of a prophecy
But lately it's been more of a pipe dream,
A theory that may never be proved.

Innocence is a privilege
Just like rhetoric and other symptoms of education
Which can easily depict a mangled body
As necessary collateral damage.

6 years old going on 60,
A cosmic gift of sorts
Since actually turning 60
Rivals double lightning for poor odds.

The bedtime story concludes
With an accidental slip of truth:
*“Sleep well and see you tomorrow
Assuming we both wake up.”*

The Looking Glass (based on true events)

Edel Molloy

Beauty be a beast,
Slashes and cuts,
Kills and freezes-
Stagnating wisdom
In pools of poison.
It costs.
We pay.
Death and decay
Cloaked by flawlessness.
Bloody lips stem the silence
Of 'the never good enough' reflection-
We are dying for perfection.

Heads hang low over the bow.
Dark shadows trapped by sunlight.
Fingertips trail through water
leeching pain into the softness.
How can this boat move with so much pain?
A freshly inked tattoo nestled between fingertip and thumb
bobs in and out of the ripples-
A relic of mother.
Leaving conflict in Eritrea, crossing desert, car wreck kills a mother,
A brother and sister left with strangers in a tent with a red cross.
She is now that dream- afloat.
When this tattooed hand touches land,
Will it lie still in the sand?

Flood

Natalie Korman

Back in the jail, the children were still there.

The jail was in the lowlands. The children were in the jail.

After dredging the swamps, and rerouting the streams, the adults didn't realize

that the water would still flow. Toward the children. But maybe they did. Because the children

were in the jail. And the water was coming. The storm had stalled. It had parked

like an old VW bus some of the children remembered. That would roll up and down the Hwy 1

or 5 or any of the boulevards. Out here, it was dry, so they didn't really think

the water would be coming. But they were in the lowlands; they were near the sea.

The children had been put in the jail for stealing candy, and running in the street, like children

do. They couldn't be contained otherwise, like children can't. Like the water

and the children, things flowed uncontrollably in all directions. They were in the jail

when the adults left them. The adults fled for the foothills. For the small mountains.

For the low volcanoes. They left them in the lowlands, once dry, now abundant with water

and soon to be abundant with children. The children burst through the door in all directions.

Some of them could swim.

SEE

Lukundo Siwila

I sit down in my garden,

And take a look at the wonderful space around me. Squirrels swing from tree to tree,

Birds swoop down to catch worms, maybe two or three. Life ever flowing, green ever growing.

As the seasons change I watch as my garden

Turns pages like a wise old sage,

Each leaf a lesson, each breeze a poem of peace.

But far from here, no birds sing sweet,

No green grass grows beneath their feet. The trees don't dance they fall in flame, And earth is carved with war's cruel name.

The squirrels that leap in playful flight Now echo children lost in night.

The bees that hum in busy glee

Are drones that buzz where joy should be.

And while I sip from nature's cup, Their wells run dry, their skies erupt.
The flowers here are bright, alive

There, gardens die and dreams don't thrive.

I see a butterfly brush past my hand,

Free to wander, free to land.

But what of those who cannot flee? Caged in concrete, not by choice, not free.

So I must speak for leaf and land, For olive trees and Gaza sand.

For every child beneath the sun

Who dreams of peace and not the gun.

Nature is breath it gives, it grows, It shelters hearts, it softens blows. But if we crush it, turn away,

We lose more than green we lose the day.

So may my garden always bloom, But may no garden be a tomb.

Let justice flow like rivers wide,

And may the Earth green be on every side

Gone wid de Windrush

Joy Getliffe

As I plant me feet on solid ground,
Relieved that it doesn't rock beneath
Me feet, I am greeted wid wind
And rain like whips, de icy
Fingers of the mum country brushing
Me cheek in greetin', breathin'

Me first breath of English air, oozin'
With de smog of smoke and damp
Makin' me cough, Marmie frowns
Sayin' 'Stop that.', her voice takin' on
an accent I've never heard her speak wid
before, so posh an' cold.

A thin drizzle skates across me
Cheeks, or that could be me own tears,
As I stand amazed and lost
At de same time in Tilbury docks,
Me socks wrinkled like paper and
Soaked trough, in me bright

Silk shirt I feel like a tropical flower,
Fragile an' outta place, too bright
For dis grey sky and de grey suits
That ripple and murmur like de sea
That I have spent four weeks travelling
On, aboard de massive Empire Windrush.

De sky seems to brighten with a flash
Of light, and for a moment I am transported
Back t' Trinidad, to me home an'
Tropical storms but as me Marmie snatches
At me hand and marches along I see
That it is just de pop of de cameras

From journalists waiting at de docks
One man is talkin' wid dem an' wid a
Wink and a grin he perform his song

London is the place for me
London, this lovely city
You can go to France or America,
India or Asia or Australia
but you must come back to London city.

Well believe me I am speaking broad-mindedly
I am glad to know my mother country
I been travelling the countries years ago
But this is the place I wanted to know
Darling London, this the place for me.

Dere is eager applause and I
Start to wonder whether dat man
Was right and about everything dat
I have heard about de street being
Paved wid gold, but as we leave da
Empire Windrush towerin' behind us,

Me gaze finds a sign sayin' 'No coloured,
no Irish, no dogs' an' hope sinks inside me,
wonderin' can dis strange place wid
mean weather an' people really be home?
When Marmie reminds me of what
We here for, to see Dardie again
After he left to work in Britain makin'
car parts, sweatin' away all day 'til
his clothes be black and greasy.

Every step sends shivers up me,
but Marmie like an angel
Swoops in wid a blanket that
Settles softly around me shoulders
I miss de the chickens and pigs we
sold for a prized ticket on de Windrush.

There is pushin' and shovin' as we leave
The docks, me and Marmie dragged
Away by de tide of bodies, and
As we step into our new life in de
Land of hope and glory, de Empire Windrush
towers over us, left behind wid home.

anywhere will do

Diarmuid Cawley

Scene 1

On the platform of Palermo Centrale
the hum of engines, diesel grind, the tannoy
barks and pigeon's coo. I'm early, cannot decide,
Napoli or Bari, overstayed my welcome,
it doesn't matter, anywhere will do. A month
in the chaos of *La Vucciria*, the back streets
of Castellammare, infested by history—the Genius
of Palermo looks on, the serpent, *Scipio Africanus*
sucking at his breast.

Scene 2

In 1999 they couldn't give a fuck about the EU here,
the entrails of animals drying in the sun, the hubbub
of Brussels no match for the millennia of sagas. Sheep's lung
on crisp bread, with a squeeze of lemon juice, you share
all you've got with the flies, the eye of a swordfish stares
you down, the sea comes to the island, and the island comes
to the sea. At night the prostitutes sit on car bonnets and smoke,
crowds of unemployed young people pool their money and laughter,
and I drink it all in.

Scene 3

Out of the crowd like a startled gazelle comes George.
He is out of Africa, he is out of empire, like the sirocco winds
he is blown north, his long white scarf flapping. He spots me
and makes a beeline yelling *where's the train to Napoli, which one is it?!*
He's covered in dust, carrying papers and a satchel, looks like a cross
between a mad professor and Indiana Jones, turns out
he is both, in a George kind of way. No choice in the matter,
like that we're connected, travel companions, in between
breaths he holds my forearm and bleats. I tell him there's twenty
minutes before either departs, that I might go to Bari—*No, no!*
We must see Pompeii, climb Vesuvius, and then head for Monte Cassino!
Let's get on and get a good seat.

Scene 4

I'm travelling with a strange man, he's hyperactive, naïve,
almost three times my age. We share beer and bread in the sun
of some graveyard at Herculaneum. We visit many graveyards.
I'm grateful for separate hotel rooms, though I trust him
in all his unpredictability. He's as generous as the sun, I offer
nothing except company and young wisdom, get us out
of trouble a few times, the sensible one, though I think
I'm holding back the child in him. We take sulphuric photos
atop that coughing mountain. George is a geologist, sleeps in
dormant volcanos, studies sediment, teaches me to love stones.
In Pompeii the ancient street tremors as we chat. The brothel

where slaves provided pleasure, has murals of sex and big cocks.
The Romans were fuckers, in every sense of the word.

Scene 5

He is not afraid to rough it, the next night we sleep
in freezing conditions in his tent on a piece of wasteland,
but we don't really sleep.

He has a sleeping bag but refuses to use it in solidarity,
unprepared as I am for this sudden lifestyle change.

The warmth of late-autumn Sicily still in my bones,
though I've never been colder than that night in the Latin Valley.
I yield to nature and ask for the sleeping bag.

Of course, my boy, there you go, try to rest. I am ashamed.

He'd already cut his sponge mat in two with a penknife
to keep the solid wintery earth off our backs.

Scene 6

At dawn we rise, the first clanks from a nearby railyard,
our frozen breath hanging in the air. Before the gates of the war
memorial cemeteries open we are out front. Lines of white crosses
and small headstones in brilliant sunlight, the dew soaks my shoes.

My heart jumps when I see *Ballymote, County Sligo, Ireland*
on a random headstone among thousands. I take a picture
for his descendants, practically neighbours after all.

This is what they call the Commonwealth graveyard,
we visit the Polish and German ones too. All those boys,
the same age as me, could have died anywhere, died here.

Final Act

The further north I go the more winter closes in
on the 20th century. There's talk of Y2K. I now have
an email address and a mobile phone, one foot in the past
and another in the future. George drags me up
to *Monte Cassino* abbey, tells me all its terrible histories.
In late afternoon, after a spill of rain the sun lights
the entire valley through dark clouds. From the cloisters
I watch the peaceful glory of it and promise never to forget.
George sends a postcard to someone he loves. I leave
for the east coast on a slow train into the mountains.
I sense his sadness, asks me to stay, to keep up our
adventures, says he will send the photos as soon as possible.
A few years later he does. In the Apennines I must change
train. My guidebook reminds me that there are wolves
in this national park. I sit in a bar with coffee
and write. In 1982 my parents brought us to Italy
for a month, the first place I see outside of Ireland.
Now, back in the middle of things, anywhere will do.

Feathers For Flags

Mary Howlett

I pass them on Clonea strand, Syrian
refugees come to put down roots.

They leave behind their chattels,
carry with them scars of war.

Their children build sandcastles,
orange and white buckets, sea green shovels,

shells for windows, driftwood for towers,
feathers for flags, shingle for walls.

Teenagers kick battered balls
into discarded nets, score goals

for Aleppo, Damascus, Idleb, in time
they will play for Cork, Kerry, Clare.

Boys jump in white waves, memory
of crossings to Waterford forgotten, for now.

Women, heads covered, gather in sunshine, chat,
laugh, gossip like Irish women on school sports day.

A Farewell Letter Written By A Migrant Before Drowning In The Mediterranean Sea

Unknown

"I am sorry, mother, because the ship sank with us and I couldn't get there. Nor will I be able to send the money I borrowed to pay for the trip. Don't be sad, mother, if they don't find my body; what good will it do you now except the costs of transportation, shipping, burial, and condolences.

I am sorry, mother, but I had to travel like other people. Note that my dreams were not as big as others'. As you know, all my dreams were the size of a box of colon medicine for you, and the price of fixing your teeth. I am sorry, my love, because I built you a house of illusion, a beautiful home like the ones we used to watch in the movies. I am sorry, my brother, because I will not be able to send the fifty euros I promised to send you monthly to enjoy yourself before graduation.

I am sorry, my sister, because I will not send you the modern phone with 'Wi-Fi' like your well-off friend. I am sorry, my beautiful home, because I will not hang my coat behind the door. I am sorry, divers and search teams for the missing, for I do not know the name of the sea I drowned in. Rest assured, asylum office, I will not be a heavy burden on you.

Thank you, sea, for welcoming us without a visa or a passport. Thank you to the fish that will share my flesh and will not ask me about my religion or political affiliation. Thank you to the news channels that will report the news of our death for five minutes every hour for two days.

Thank you for you will grieve for us when you hear the news. I am not sorry that I drowned. I have rested and brought relief [to others]."

Stories of Collaboration

Real-Fake by Michel Borla & Jim Paterson: Michel wrote 'Real' thinking about Jim's experience. It was his perception of an experience. He mentioned a possible return to Scotland. Jim didn't see these episodes the same way and he wrote 'Fake' in return. They found that their approaches, no matter how different they are, responded to and complemented each other. These poems became the kernel of a collection, RSVP, in French and English.

Ferropolis by Lea Steward (Jaymz Lea & Samuel Steward): The bones of this poem came from a text exchange between us. We saw the possible poem about the displacement and colonisation of our queerness in certain contexts - how to harness, create and revel in it.

Authors Notes

Sourdough by Janina Aza Karpinska: I was thinking about memory lapses: remembering my own phase of 'menopause mind', and the mind-freeze of performing poems without using paper copies or hand-held screen at open mics, and looked for an image or metaphor to capture those struggles - which led to addressing the irregular lapses and recollections of those with dementia.

Disjunctions by DG Herring: From Greek tragedy to modern modes of showing off positive versions of ourselves, this poem teases away at the ways in which signals can be misread, life becomes a dantean purgatory of failing to take a stand and our natural place in the world is... displaced.

Displaced in the Shadow of War by Precious Suremi: I hope you all (readers and the team) feel the emotions behind this poem, written literally yet expressed through metaphor.

The Looking Glass by Edel Molloy: This poem is based on my experience working with unaccompanied minors in Malta and how our diverse circumstances shape our struggles. An attempt to explore the social pressures and inequities in the world and how this is reflected in our societies.

Gone wid de Windrush by Joy Getliffe: "Gone Wid the Windrush" is written from the perspective of a Windrush child from the Caribbean, capturing the emotional and cultural displacement of immigration through authentic Caribbean dialect. The poem reflects the genuine cadence and texture of the language, honouring an underrepresented voice and evoking the enduring legacy of the Windrush generation's experience of displacement and belonging.