



Axon: Creative Explorations, Vol 11, No 1, July 2021

A LITTLE STAR ROOM

Interview with Marc Vincenz

Cassandra Atherton

Marc Vincenz is a poet of consciousness whose poetry is uncanny and cerebral — original post-transcendental explorations of the evolution of language and philosophy. He is publisher of MadHat Press: <https://madhat-press.com> and *New American Writing*, a literary magazine founded in 1986, and a multilinguist and award-winning translator. He has translated from German, Romanian and French and his abiding interest in language, sonics and world culture is evident in his textured creative practice. Vincenz is also a cook who creates fusion dishes from his experience living across the globe. Marc and I met at the international, interactive poetry reading series that he co-hosts on Saturday evenings in the US on Zoom. It's called *Lit Balm* and was conceived as a literary anodyne to the pandemic: <https://litbalm.org> It has become famous for its guests, including American luminaries, Gary Snyder, Lyn Hejinian, Maxine Chernoff and Rae Armantrout, alongside emerging and established international poets.

Marc and I began chatting prior to our interview. Our previous discussions have included some memorable incidents, including the time Marc ate Beluga caviar by the spoonful in Russia; an episode where he ate Scorpion semen in China; and his motorbike days at Duke University. On this occasion we quickly got into darker questions about life and death related to Marc's recent health challenge—he suffered from a rare condition called thyroid storm and almost died.

Cassandra Atherton: Do you think there is any kind of life after death?

Marc Vincenz: When I was younger, I was always searching for some kind of spiritual guide. For me it was never the God of the Catholic Church but that's just because I was indoctrinated at the age of 12 into a Benedictine monastery and I was forced to go to Latin Mass three times a week. Everyone used to hide little comic books in the songbook because the Sunday service lasted about three hours. And, so having that experience — the golden statues peering down at us, the priests who talked non-stop sin and redemption, the sombre nuns who shuffled in penitent silence to and from their chapel — I veered away from the Catholic faith through my thinking and reading.

I read a lot when I was young and, when I was 16, I was reading Herman Hesse, the Bhagavad Gita, Buddhist scriptures — that kind of thing — to see if there was another road, another route that might be better for me. Of course, everyone needs some form of spiritual inspiration on some level. And I've experienced everything from seances to profound Buddhist prayer in a temple in Thailand—that was very moving, much more moving to me than, say, a mass at the Catholic Church. So, I leaned

toward the Buddhist's ideology for a long time, but I was never a practicing Buddhist.

There's this pragmatic side of me, which is very scientific and says, well there's nothing, you know. And we, the writers, are very lucky that we still might touch someone who's alive when we're no longer. So that's kind of a special thing — carrying thought into the future. And even more so with poetry and philosophy which, for me, are crucial elements of any society. Honestly, I hope that is a place where all of us good spirits coalesce in some kind of beautiful star space or something like that. But I have my doubts.

CA: Since your illness, you don't seem afraid to die. Is that the case?

MV: I don't know. Having come so close to death and thankfully being able to think about the experience has been important. The thing that's really sad is when people lose their natural thinking capability, when their mind turns off so that they can't be aware of their situation. Sometimes it happens to people even just temporarily while they are ill, they just can't think straight. But I pretty much always could think straight no matter what happened during this whole process. So, I could see it at least sort of objectively.

I've always been very resistant to doctors and even going to the doctor. There must be some childhood trauma that happened to me that I've blocked out of my subconsciousness. But, yeah, I've always hated going to be prodded and have sticks put in me and things like that — just leave me the hell alone, you know. So, I think I reached the stage when I was critically ill, where I was like, okay, just do whatever you want with me. It's fine. Go ahead. Stick a needle in me if you need to, cut me open, just go ahead and do it, let's get this bloody thing over. But that was a big change. Interestingly, since I have somewhat recovered, I feel less and less the need to have any contact with doctors.

CA: Didn't that get you into trouble in the first place? Not wanting to go to the doctor when you were ill?

MV: It did. And I had never been hospitalised before that. Nothing. Zero. I think when I was maybe five years old or something, I had my tonsils out. But that's it. I never had to seek medical attention. I was so stubborn about not going to the doctor, I once fell down this cast steel stairwell in an old Swiss hut. So, I fell down the whole bloody thing and when I hit the bottom, my shin felt like hell and my foot swelled up but I could still kind of walk. I just put on these big hiking boots and walked around like I had a clubfoot for a while and then after about three or four weeks, it healed and I felt fine. And I later discovered I actually had a fractured bone but somehow it managed to heal itself. And there's this huge gouge if you touch my leg in that spot on the bone there. I was that stubborn about not going to the doctor. But I guess you are really asking when I was lying on the hospital bed, did I sort of see the end of the tunnel? Yes, and it looked pretty damn good.

CA: Didn't you wonder about what would happen to the essence of you, like what happens to that little part of you that thinks and dreams and writes? I think with our egos, it's very hard to believe that we don't go anywhere else; that some little part of us doesn't survive. I guess the only thing I could compare it to is, possibly, what it might be like before birth — maybe going back into that kind of nothingness. But I just find it so hard wrestling with these ideas. You seem to be more at peace with

it.

MV: I am. I think becoming nothingness is probably pretty damn good, actually. And, you know, if it's not nothingness, then it's somethingness and any of the above is okay. In the beginning there was nothing, right? And then suddenly there was something. So how did that something come to be if there was nothing before? So, it can't just be nothing. It might have smelled, looked and sounded like nothing, but maybe it wasn't nothing.

CA: I'm going to hold onto that. I remember a doctor saying to me once, just because science can't prove there is anything after death, that doesn't mean there isn't. Science and medicine can't do a lot of things when people are sick, they don't have all the answers. Medicine is still pretty draconian. I like the idea that there's never nothing.

MV: In the novel that I just finished writing, people go on a vacation at the age of 34 because at 35, they are terminated because of population control. So, as it turns out, in this society, many people have normal lives, do their work until the age of 34, when they get married, go on a honeymoon and then die together. So, this particular couple goes on a honeymoon in the City of Lemons and, through wily ways, one of them manages to make a connection to the right person to kind of make a bribe to get into the cryo unit.

CA: I love the idea of cryogenics.

MV: So there is the idea of immortality which is, of course, a very literary thing and has been for aeons — since antiquity. This search for eternal life is what the couple is thinking about at this stage, just before they are supposed to die or be extinguished. This is the theory of this society — you've had your time, you have 35 years to make the bloody most. It might have turned into a *Soylent Green* kind of thing — that Charlton Heston movie — but no, it doesn't!

CA: But I think it's also interesting, isn't it, because one of the things we don't know is when we're going to die.

MV: Coming back to the idea of consciousness, I think if there is some kind of somethingness when we are dust and our consciousness travels, or astrally travels, and merges with other astral travellers, for example, if that is the case, I'm all for it. And I love the idea of being able to philosophise, talk poetry, hopefully drink great wine and have great food in heaven or wherever it is. Of course, the Vikings convinced themselves that it was okay to go into battle and die because they were going to go to Valhalla where there was basically unlimited mead and naked women and your heart's desire, right? So many, many societies try to fulfill that need, whether it's through the Roman Catholic Church or through the pagan rites of the Vikings.

CA: I wanted to talk about your childhood because you had a fascinating childhood — but I wanted to talk about it via sound because I think that your poetry turns on sound in lots of really clever ways. And I think sound is something we form early in our lives. There's also something quite incantatory about your poetry. So can you say a little bit about your childhood and those first listenings, and what you think they did for your poetry?

MV: Yeah, let me go way back to shortly after I was born. My parents lived in a place called Stanley Market in Hong Kong, which today has been somewhat touristified. But back then it was a serious Cantonese market with everything from turtles and snakes to fish and vegetables and also trinkets and Chinese medicines and all these kinds of things. And it was this fairly organised and wide, sprawling thing that attracted a lot of people because they had all of the freshest stuff. And, so, my parents' house was two blocks away from there and it was very safe. Even when I was a toddler they'd let me go and hang out with the Chinese kids in the market. And I think I learned Cantonese before I learned English. I mean, in a fluency of some sort. I would run around the market with the kids as I was growing up and, then, when one day my parents couldn't find me they went searching for me in the market. They found me in some back apartment of one of the market stalls with a bunch of kids playing cards or something like that, just talking like a local kid. And my father had his friend with him who was a Hong Kong Cantonese guy. And he said, you better watch what your son is saying, he's using some pretty nasty words. So, I think that impregnated the sonics of my poetry. Definitely. Cantonese is a very, very sing-song language. I don't know if you know what it sounds like. You've gone to the markets in Hong Kong haven't you?

CA: Yes, and it's a really unique sound. It's kind of overwhelming, but it's quite beautiful at the same time.

MV: That was the beginning. And, then, my father was doing business with people from all around the world. I lived in Hong Kong twice. So, the second time, I was probably eight or nine and we lived in another part of Hong Kong — but because of my father's business, we had a clientele. His clients were coming over for dinner to our house maybe two or three times a week. At least once a week, we kids could join them and go out to a restaurant with a business party. And that had a lot to do with how much I appreciate food, as well. We had everyone from Russians to Brazilians to Thai people to South Africans — every single week there were people of different nationalities in the house. And my father was pretty good at speaking languages. My father spoke English with a continental British accent, so you couldn't tell what country he came from. He spoke as professionally as an Englishman, but there was just a slight lilt there and the occasional mistake, maybe, but nothing significant. He spoke German and French and passable Italian and he grew up in the Romansh language, which is the smallest language in Switzerland, but the fourth official language. And, so, Romansh was always in our house. I've done a little research on this and not much is very clear about its origins. But the theory is it's kind of old Celtic meets Latin with a touch of Etruscan thrown in, or something like that.

CA: Doesn't that make it hard to speak?

MV: In Romansh, 'to speak' is 'tschantschar'. What other romance languages or Germanic languages can you think of that uses that word or something similar to it? In French you've got 'parler' — and 'to parley' in English is also connected to it. In Spanish you have 'hablar' and in Italian it's 'parlare', la la la la la la la, you can see that there's something, some relevance there. So, 'tschantschar' has no connection, really. I suppose I'd say my initial influence was Cantonese, then Romansh and English, because my mother was born-and-bred English — from Essex. That side of the family is also interesting. We could talk about that another time and then all those different influences of

Portuguese, Spanish, Slavic languages in the house all the time — and other forms of Asian languages as well. And, you know, my father spoke some of them. So, sometimes we'd have a dinner table with everyone speaking German, or everyone speaking Italian. His Spanish wasn't very good, mine was better than his. Or mine is better than his was. So many languages in my life!

CA: You're a brilliant translator, so you have an innate kind of curiosity and gift for language. And I think that the passion for words and syntax and the playfulness seem to have a place in your poetry — your poetry seems to be about language in lots of ways. Has the translation of all this poetry informed your own poetry?

MV: It has significantly, and I am as surprised as anyone might be as to how much it has. I started translating on a lark. It wasn't really something I was thinking about. It started when I lived in Iceland and I was looking for interesting books. You can order books from Amazon, but it takes forever for them to arrive. But I love to browse and find something unexpected. That's one of the things that's missing from this whole Internet thing.

CA: Yeah, yeah, those chance encounters on a bookshelf, I miss those, too.

MV: So, I think I went to the University of Reykjavik library and I was looking at poetry; looking to find something that I've never seen before and then I just walked by the German poetry section. I pulled this book off the shelf and it was a Swiss poet I'd never heard about. I didn't know many Swiss poets, even though I'm half Swiss. I flipped through it. I read the German and thought, this is pretty good. Let me take this out. So, I took it home. I read the whole thing and enjoyed it. And I thought, 'actually, I probably could translate this into English'. And I started just for fun, translating. And then I finished the whole book fairly quickly and was pretty happy with it. And I was trying to find who held the rights of this book — it was by the Swiss poet Erica Burkart, and I've translated three of her books.

So, I stumbled across the Swiss Arts Council and I emailed and asked would they know who held the American rights? They answered pretty immediately. They said, it was her husband, as she's deceased. He's also a writer and they gave me his email and telephone number. So, I called him up and spoke to him in German. And I told him that I'd translated his wife's book into English and asked, could I meet with him and discuss the rights? He said he was absolutely delighted. I learnt from meeting him that he actually spoke English quite well. He said that his wife, Erica, had spent many years in Ireland, but her English wasn't as good as his. I later discovered in their house — which is kind of a small, converted castle in one of the Swiss cantons — an unbelievable library and whole floors of books dedicated to different languages. So, they had a French poetry library, an English poetry library and a huge German one, of course. It was just insane for me when I got there, all of these amazing poets and this giant sort of tower library in the castle just along the walls. I just walked up the stairwell and looked at all the books. It was fascinating. I could have spent hours and hours and hours. He was always a great host and always had some Armagnac available. He baked unbelievable almond cake, which he always served when I came over with a with a lovely espresso and a little Armagnac on this almond cake. And then we'd walk through the castle and discuss the book I was working on and so on. I worked very hard with him on Erika's first books. We did a lot of back and forth where he'd say to me, 'maybe this word is not quite right. It should be more like this.' So it was kind of an intense thing.

That was my first experience with translation. I decided because the Swiss Arts Council was so supportive of translations, and at the time I was kind of desperate for cash, I'd better just stick my head into translation and get a few grants. And I started looking around at other Swiss poets because, obviously, the Swiss Arts Council only supports Swiss poets, seeing if there was something really interesting out there. Eventually I stumbled across Werner Lutz, who's also passed away. But I knew him when he was still alive and I spent a lovely weekend with him and his girlfriend in this mountain hut overlooking this giant lake in Switzerland. There were wildflowers everywhere, there were cows and Werner and his wife organised every single meal. They had gourmet food throughout the whole thing and we were discussing one of his translations with a glass of wine — it was an amazing experience. And that came out from Spuyten Duyvil and it's called *Kissing Nests*.

Prior to the Swiss translation experience, I would say I was inclined toward too much verbiage. After having translated, I've become much more minimalist and more considered — predominately because all these Swiss poets inform me a lot in their concision, in their minimalisms. For example, Erika, Werner and Klaus Merz were the three big poets I translated in Switzerland. I've translated a couple more, but those are the three big ones. Klaus is still alive and the grand duke of Swiss poetry at the moment. But he's getting on now. He's probably in his 80s. I'm actually doing a *New and Selected* with White Pine Press for next year of his work. He is the most minimalist of those three. But all of them are very much about compressing moments or compressing images. And so that has definitely informed my poetry.

CA: Well, I loved the poetry in *Behind the Wall at the Sugar Works*. The spacing is just crazily beautiful and it reminds me a bit of Mallarmé's *A Roll of the Dice* in its conception of the white space and how kind of rebellious it is. It's minimalist but in an expansive way, like you've got these tiny things, but they open out into something so much bigger.

MV: In that book, I imagined what it might be like to be a female factory worker. I imagined it in China, because I've seen it — a single parent, or something like that, who had to deal with working in a factory and still trying to make a life somehow.

CA: So maybe this is a good point to talk about your process — because everyone's going to want to hear about that. How do poems form for you? When you talk about it, it always seems kind of shaman-like somehow.

MV: I don't think I can give everything away because part of it is some kind of magic.

CA: I like that.

MV: But I can say this. Basically, I figured out how to put myself into a kind of trance when I write and be in that place that I'm writing. And I found, actually, my best work is the least thought through. It's just the super-spontaneous kind of trance-like thing that happens. And I can tap into it at the moment; I can tap into it whenever I like. It's an amazing thing — even more since my illness. I used to be able to do it earlier, but now what helps me a lot is listening to music when I write. And I kind of stick with the same folk if it's working — or occasionally I'll switch it up and find something totally new that I've never listened to before and see how that works. I always write books, or as a book — I don't write

individual poems and then put them together. I've done that in the past and I do have individual poems, but most of them actually don't end up being in the books themselves. So I guess there'll be a lot of uncollected poems at some stage. I write toward a book and the beginning of the book informs me how the book needs to move further. And more recently, I've been experimenting with different genres as well, moving from lined poetry to prose poetry, to something in between, and sometimes that's even just straight fiction. And I just let it flow the way it needs to. So, for example, there might be a couple of very descriptive poems about a specific place or incident or object that kind of informs the rest of the book. But then, somehow, it always has to have a bit of narrative kick in. So, in all my books, there is a narrative thread that goes through the whole thing, but you have to be looking for it. It's not necessarily obvious, you know.

CA: And do you start with handwritten drafts? How do they make their way finally onto your computer?

MV: Since I've gotten ill, I almost exclusively handwrite; occasionally I'll use the typewriter. I went through a phase of using the typewriter only, to try and constrict myself — not only in terms of space, but also in terms of letters as well. It's a very different process than doing it on the computer, right? But prior to that, I was pretty much mostly writing on the computer, sometimes a little by hand — or notes by hand, and then on the computer. But now for the last, I'd say, nearly two years, first handwriting in black ink, then corrections in green, then mostly to the typewriter. If I'm in a hurry because I need to make a submission somewhere, I might type it straight up on the computer, but I generally like to give myself another sort of editorial process before it hits the computer. And then, inevitably — because it's been through so many stages — by the time it hits the computer it's pretty clean. And of course, I still sometimes change stuff when it's in the computer, but not significant stuff. Also, another thing that I do is record myself reading all the work. And I listen back to it to see if it has the right melody. And sometimes that way I've caught blunders that I wouldn't have caught had I not had the auditory experience as well.

CA: You've got a mellifluous voice so I think you would sound good reading anything!

MV: John Skoyles, the poetry editor of *Ploughshares*, said to me once after a reading, 'you could read a telephone book and it would sound good'.

CA: I think he's right. When did you know you were going to be a poet? When did you write your first poem? Were you in childhood or later that you thought, this is something I want to do in my life?

MV: Okay, interesting. So really three questions, right?

CA: Yeah. Sorry, I'm that kind of person.

MV: I started writing poetry because I was writing lyrics for songs that I was composing. The beginning of the seriousness of the composing was with my old friend, Leon, who now lives in New Rochelle, but went to high school with me in Greenwich, Connecticut. He would come down to my basement at my house with his acoustic guitar and we'd try and compose songs together. He was also a good lyricist. So sometimes, he'd do a line, I'd do a line, that sort of thing. And, then, I was in the high school newspaper as the Arts Editor and I started thinking more about poetry at that stage. I

took a class when I was a Senior in high school with an English teacher, Charles Tyler, on writing poetry — and he made us read pretty much everything from the Greeks to ee cummings and he'd always give us an assignment. We had to write on a poem for every class. And I totally just jumped into it. And then I started reading ee cummings, Yeats; I read Dylan Thomas voraciously, I read everything and I just started writing and writing. In College I had the good fortune of being mentored by Reynolds Price at Duke University in North Carolina. Reynolds was an amazing writer — probably in his lifetime he wrote something like 50 books, ten of which might be poetry, and then maybe another third would be fiction, and then the rest non-fiction. He taught me in my first serious poetry classes — and I remember, in the last poetry class that I took with him, we had to have a finished manuscript by the end of the class. The title of my manuscript was *The Python* and it was influenced by a holiday to Spain when I was probably 13. And I used all these kinds of Mediterranean images. And, since then, I haven't stopped.

CA: Do you still have *The Python*?

MV: I do not. I've moved so many places. There are actually some early chapbooks that I have no idea where they might be. And lots of writing, actually. Lots of stuff that I've written in the past has disappeared over all the moves. There was an entire novel I had written when I lived in the UK for a year and a half in my mid to late 20s, when I worked at this corporation. I was living in this sort of bedsit place, renting a room and I knew I needed to move out. So while I was away one weekend, the owner unlocked the door of my room, went in and stole my laptop. I didn't care about the laptop, but my first novel was on it. It never saw the light of day again. I have a few printed-out bits here and there, but that's it.

CA: That's heartbreaking.

MV: I know, but the way I see it, it's as if it's meant to be. It's okay. I'll write better next time.

CA: And then maybe there's little bits of it in your subsequent writing.

MV: Oh yeah. Sure, sure. I mean, I think the novel that I've just finished writing was informed by all the novels I've previously written. I think I've probably written six or seven novels. One of them was published in Chinese in China, but other than that, none of them have seen the light of day. But I think the book that I've now written, the novel I just finished, *The Age of Occasions* — I think it's totally informed by those earlier novels. So they were all trial runs anyway—you know, to get there.

CA: I wanted to ask you about intertextuality because I love it and you seem to weave together wide-ranging texts. And a couple of books put that up front and centre for the reader — *The Syndicate of Water and Light* is subtitled *Divine Comedy*, and *This Wasted Land* references, in a broad way, TS Eliot. So why do you love intertextuality and why do you use it so often in your poetry?

MV: Well, first of all, everything has been influenced by everything that came before.

CA: Yes, the anxiety of influence.

MV: And *This Wasted Land*, for example, has its own story, as does *The Syndicate of Water and*

Light. Shall I tell you about those?

CA: Yeah, absolutely.

MV: So *This Wasted Land*, I thought to myself, I've been reading the Eliot book several times and this needs to be refreshed; it takes itself way too seriously. Let me see if I can do something that's a little bit more expansive and up to up-to-date. And then I did a lot of reading about the relationship between Eliot and Ezra Pound and thought, wouldn't it be fun if virtually every single word in the poem had a metaphysical reference of some sort? Kind of like the I Ching in reverse. But, then, we can put whatever thoughts we want on the page. Tom Bradley did the majority of the annotations, but many of them were informed by me. I said, you know, look up experts and come up with something. The whole mosaic, that came out of that book, became kind of spontaneous — and the idea was, in a way, mocking Eliot and Pound.

CA: A playfulness?

MV: Yes, kind of like, 'come on, guys, that was the 1920s. We're going to do something, shake it up a bit.' I think they would approve. I think it's important to strip down the text sometimes and try and juggle it because we have these fixed ideas about the literary works that are important to us throughout history for many reasons other than the language itself. And the language is where everything is at. And, in fact, when I was about 12, maybe 13 years old I asked myself, 'What do you want to do with your life, Marc?' I was thinking fireman, astronaut, cowboy, you know, and then I said 'no. The most important thing is to be able to communicate with people as well as you can, to share ideas with people.' And, so, I kind of made the decision about what I was going to do for the rest of my life.

CA: What about *The Syndicate of Water and Light*?

MV: *The Syndicate of Water and Light* was another scenario. I wanted to tackle the idea philosophically and lyrically about the concept of what would it be like for an intelligent alien life-form to come to this planet and describe it for their people and try and see everything with fresh eyes. That's where it came from. You probably recognise there is this little interesting binary section in the middle of the book.

CA: Yeah.

MV: So that was my little attempt to try to communicate that there's something else going on here than just pure poetry. But, yeah, the alien creature recognises, obviously, a lot of the light and the dark we have in and on our planet, but also the unbelievable beauty — recognises both. And that's also the reason why I felt the Dante parallel was important because in a way, this other person, this alien creature, is trying to perceive those things through humanity and, of course, water and light.

CA: What about the *Sibyline*? I wanted to ask you about art and poetry and process. It's so beautiful. Can you talk about the connection between art and poetry, ekphrasis?

MV: I'm hugely informed by art, but I wouldn't say it's my main influence in poetry. I'm more interested

in consciousness through history and, in general, the evolution of the human mind. And, so, obviously key periods like the Renaissance have changed humanity forever. I think that's really my first instinct, that that's where *Sibylline* comes from. It's about trying to understand why this incredible beauty. And of course, it didn't pop out overnight. No, no, no. And that's the way a lot of things seem in human history. For example, when did Christianity become a dominant religion? Christianity probably became a dominant religion by about, what, 500 AD, maybe 600, something like that. And supposedly Jesus died at zero. But, you know, obviously, that's up for speculation. But the best soap operas are all informed by the Bible. In fact, someone took the rest of humanity's steam away by writing that book so bloody early. So, you know, every General Hospital and ER show is basically a retelling of the Bible on some level.

CA: Yeah, it's got almost everything. It's hard to come up with something that doesn't trace back to the Bible — even prose poetry. You know, my love, my big love. You've got *Song of Songs* and you've got poetic prose in the Bible.

MV: Well, another thing that's important is how I feel about writing poetry. It needs to be something that can only be communicated in the medium in which it is presented. It needs to be something that is as vital as you can make it, linguistically complex, yet clear enough to follow and have a great song.

CA: So, let me ask you one last question and it's a fun one. I want to end on an upbeat discussion of poetry and food. Do you ever think of how they connect because they are both loves of yours?

MV: Absolutely. Absolutely. A friend of mine from college, Ted Determan, who runs a marketing company in DC keeps on telling me you should do a poetry cooking show. And he said, you would get the whole poetry and cooking market all tuning into you. But how am I going to do it? Set up a video That's complicated.

CA: And that's a great idea.

MV: It is. Maybe later. But let me tell you, I'm working on my book now called *Coalition*, which I'm probably about three quarters of the way through. My next book planned is actually *More Animal Poems*. That's the title of the book. And then, after that, I'm going to do a book of poetry and food. I think it's also important to have some kind of ecological thought about it. So, I'll definitely get more food in the poetry. There's no doubt!

CA: Well, thank you for your time. You mentioned doing another interview where we talk about your mother's family history. Sadly, she's passed away, hasn't she? I read in one of your books somewhere that she's buried in Massachusetts.

MV: Right in our garden. Under the apple tree.

CA: Oh, that's nice.

MV: Milly [Vincenz's dog, named after Emily Dickinson] sits on her grave all the time, you know.

CA: Oh, she's beautiful. That's so nice.

MV: So, maybe there is something more than the nothingness.

CA: I'm going to hold onto — what did you call it — a little star room, or something, where we will get to meet. That sounds nice.

MV: Exactly.

ABOUT THE INTERVIEWER

Cassandra Atherton

Cassandra Atherton is a widely anthologised and award-winning prose poet and scholar of prose poetry. She was a Harvard Visiting Scholar in English and a Visiting Fellow at Sophia University. She co-authored *Prose Poetry: An Introduction* (Princeton University Press, 2020) and co-edited the *Anthology of Australian Prose Poetry* (Melbourne University Press, 2020). She is associate editor at MadHat Press (USA) and Professor of Writing and Literature at Deakin University.

URL: <https://www.axonjournal.com.au/issue-vol-11-no-1-jul-2021/little-star-room>

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Published by
The Centre for Creative & Cultural Research
University of Canberra
Canberra, Australia
ISSN: 1838-8973