

The Bangor Literary Journal

Issue two: 30th April 2018. Featuring award winning photographer Gerry Coe; poet Colin Dardis; new writing from Women Aloud NI; plus, poetry, flash fiction, art and photography from our contributors.



Tram, Lisbon by Gerry Coe

Edited by:

Amy Louise Wyatt
& Paul Daniel Rafferty

Editors' Welcome

Hello Readers.

Welcome to issue two of The Bangor Literary Journal.

The response to our first issue was overwhelming.

We thought it could not be topped.

We were wrong.

Instead, we discovered that we had received almost 300 submissions to our second issue- which were of an extremely high standard. The selection process was even more difficult second time around, but so very rewarding.

Therefore, we are delighted to bring you another jam-packed issue of exceptional writing, art and photography.

Included in this issue is a special feature showcasing selected members of Women Aloud NI; an interview with award winning photographer Gerry Coe; and we catch up with poet Colin Dardis as he launches his new collection. This is in addition to a wide range of hand-picked poetry, flash fiction and art by contributors.

We really hope that you enjoy what you find within our pages. Because of our contributors, readers and supporters- this journal is becoming everything that we hoped it would be!

Kind Regards

Amy and Paul



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Opportunities

Deadline Extended

Until 30th June 2018

The Bangor Poetry Competition

Theme- LOVE

The Bangor Poetry Competition is different than most other poetry competitions. If you are shortlisted then you will be asked to hand-write your poem, sign it, illustrate it/ embellish it and frame it. Your original piece will then be displayed as part of The Aspects Literary Festival (August- dates to be confirmed) at The Blackberry Path Art Studios, Bangor, Northern Ireland and the poems shall be voted on by the public over a period of three weeks.

Your work also must be for sale. We usually sell around one third to half of our shortlisted pieces. You do not sell the rights to your poem, but instead your piece of poetry becomes almost a piece of art, to be enjoyed not just on the page, but on the wall!

We have several events throughout the exhibition, including the initial launch event and opportunities for those shortlisted to read their work. Alongside the poetry we also display artwork.

This year's prizes are:

First Place: £100 cash; a writing book and pen; a framed certificate; the opportunity to read at Aspects Literature Festival and your poem shall hang for one year at The Blackberry Path Art Studios. Plus, a special feature about you in the upcoming issue of The Bangor Literary Journal.

Second Place: £50 cash; a writing book and pen; a framed certificate.

Third Place: £30 cash; a writing book and pen; a framed certificate.

Fourth place: £10 cash and a certificate.

Fifth place: £10 cash and a certificate.

There are shall also be 8 Highly Commended Poet certificates issued. All shortlisted exhibitors shall receive a certificate and the opportunity to be presented with it at our awards ceremony.

All details can be found on our website:

<https://thebangorliteraryjournal.com/the-bangor-poetry-competition/>

Feature:

Gerry Coe

Photography



www.iphone-art.co.uk (iPhone Art)

www.gerrycoe.co.uk (Portraits)

We chatted with multiple-award winning photographer Gerry Coe from Bangor Co. Down in Northern Ireland about his journey as a photographer.

Gerry, can you explain to us how you first got into photography.

I first got into photography at the tender age of 13 through entering a competition on Blue Peter, the subject was to photograph your pet, well at that time I did not have a pet, but we had a camera with about seven or eight frames left on the film, so I photographed my neighbour's pet. The photos were rubbish, but that got me interested in taking photographs, so after upgrading the camera and then joining some local camera clubs in Belfast, I got well and truly hooked.

Tell us about how your career as a photographer has developed.

I left school just before my 16th Birthday and went to work for a photographer on the Antrim Road at Carlisle Circus. His name was Lionel Salem and he and his wife ran the Jaymar Studio. He was a brilliantly inventive person and he would just have loved all this mobile photography. After almost three years, I moved to Robert Anderson Photography which became Anderson/McMeekin Photography and is now called Blacksheep- who now don't do any photography at all. I learnt a lot while working there in the Commercial/Industrial field, but once again I moved on after 3 years and started working on my own as a freelance, covering all types of work for different photographers. I worked with the NI Tourist board for about 8 months but I was eventually asked to join with Leslie Stuart Photography to run a new department doing commercial/industrial work along with the artist Rowel Friers. It was very difficult getting past Leslie Stuart's reputation for top-end portraiture and we decided in the end to close the commercial side. I then became self- employed and have been working as a photographer ever since.

As well as continuing doing photography, I ran a small business making decorative copper etchings and picture framing. It was very difficult during the "Troubles" in Belfast to keep the copper etching business going, so I moved totally into the picture framing side, along with a new partner Victor Kennedy.



Birch Trees

This business thrived and I was still doing my photography. The two front rooms of our new premises on the Lisburn Road were turned into an Art Gallery run by Victor and Solly Lipsitz, when they decided to close the gallery I took over the rooms for my new Portrait studio "Lasting Image". The framing and Photography businesses were split into separate companies and the framing was taken over by Victor's son Charlie who still runs the business "Frame & Picture Centre" I retired from my studio about 4 years ago, but I still do the occasional sitting for some of my previous clients.

What do you love most about photography?

Having been a photographer since the age of 13, I could never see me doing anything else. I have always been attracted to the arts, so photography suited me, as I say "I can't paint, I can't draw, I can't sing, I can't dance, so I became a photographer". To me photography is not just a job- it is a passion. I enjoy all aspects of photography and I have covered almost all of them. After being someone who hand printed all my own work in darkrooms, I quickly embraced the digital age. It is much nicer sitting at my computer in the light, rather than a chemical-smelling darkroom. I still print all my own work at home on my A2 printer and I don't get sore legs standing all day in the darkroom.



Rainy Day in Belfast

Nowadays I love using my iPhone to produce photographs and now by using apps I can "Paint and Draw" although there are no apps that will help me to "Dance and Sing"! What I love most is seeing so many wonderful photographs that are produced these days by some very talented people whether it is on a mobile device, a digital camera or even back to using film and glass plates.

I am also the President of our local camera club "Bangor & North Down" and it is great to see so many wonderful images by the members and to see new people blossom with help and encouragement from the more advanced members.

What awards and prizes have you won and which one are you most proud of?

I have been lucky to have achieved numerous awards and distinctions throughout my career both for my portraiture and my digital/mobile photography. I am a Fellow of each of the four main photographic bodies, The British Institute of Professional

Photographers (BIPP), The Royal Photographic Society, (RPS) The Society of Wedding and Portrait Photographers (SWPP) and The Master Photographers Association (MPA) Fellowship is the highest honour that can be bestowed on a photographer by his peers.

Each year the BIPP award an extra honour to the most outstanding Fellowship panel, The Peter Grugeon Award and I am the only person ever to have won it twice. Recently, I was also made an Honorary Fellow of the BIPP which only 20 people have ever been awarded in the 120 year history of the BIPP. My second Fellowship from the BIPP was for a panel of images taken with my iPhone, this is the first time anyone from any organisation worldwide has received such an honour.



Contemplation

Lately I was the UK Nations Winner, with the top scoring image in The World Photographic Cup. I have had many of my images accepted into the RUA annual exhibition and many of my images are held in private collections.

I have been asked about which award I am most proud of. Well all of them really, but probably the Honorary Fellowship from the BIPP, as this recognizes not only photographic ability but also the influence one has had on other people over many years and the dedication to photography.

What current or upcoming events are you involved with? What else have you been up to in the field of art and photography?

I do not have any proposed exhibitions at this time although there is a display of some of my work at the Boulevard (formerly Outlet Centre) in Banbridge. I am currently working on some new images that I hope will eventually make an exhibition. In September I will be running a 10 week course on Mobile Photography at Stranmillis college. Lately, I have been playing around with acrylic paints producing abstract works, however, this is really a work in progress at the moment.

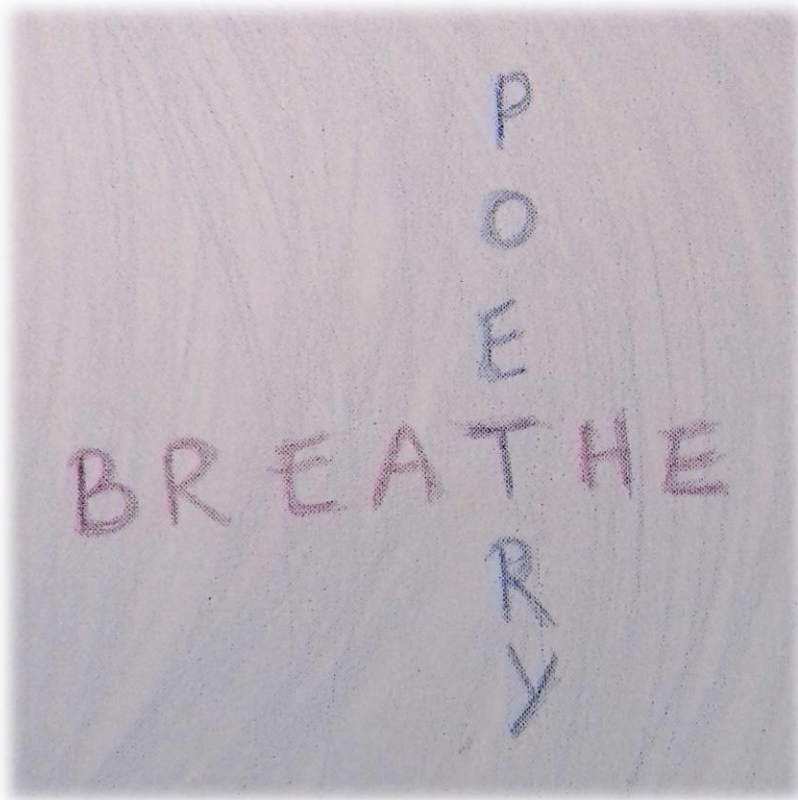


Abstract Acrylic

Poetry

Marina Herbst

Marina Herbst is a German-Irish writer. Educated in the States, she is now based in Dublin. Her work looks at life and people; nature and humankind. Poems come from all angles. She believes all is fair in love and poetry.



voyeur

we found each other mesmerized
as I opened the curtains
half dressed
looking like accomplices of a common prank
an instant
gone in the summer
blending in the building
greyness obliterated
by a surprised bird

by Marina Herbst

Annette Skade lives on the Beara Peninsula, West Cork. Her first collection *Thimblorig* was published in 2013 following her receipt of the Cork Literary Review Manuscript prize. She has been published in Ireland, the UK and the U.S. and has won and been placed in various international poetry competitions. She is currently working on a PhD on the poetry of Anne Carson at Dublin City University.



Driven from Home

You look driven from home - she'd scold,
rubbed the dirt from my face when I bowled in.

A joke. Not meant to presage the time
I'd be prised from hearth, become

split bone through skin, the awkward angle
in my own house, wake up a stranger,

cramming bedclothes and bits in the back
of a hatchback, glancing quick

over shoulder with nowhere to go
and no ear for my story, no

salve for the wound, but the merest sliver
of light through the hinges.

I could sing you of home: the pathways
and sheeptracks, stars in swathes,

purple sunsets drenching the pier,
shifts in distance, headlands through weather,

the shallowest place to ford the river.
The sea fizzing through my fingers,

or in slinky skeins around my wrists,
its sluggish roll against rock. Ground mists,

gossamer on grass: a low sun on wires,
each bearing a seed pearl of spider.

Friends drive the peninsula, tell me its riches
as if I never knew them. My heart crouches

and waits. But too far from everything, I say,
sketch ripples in air to wipe it away.

by Annette Skade

Annie Q. Syed is a reader and writer who teaches full time to inspire students to read and write. She has called many places “home” and currently resides in New Mexico, United States. Her stories, *Collection of Auguries*, were published in 2013. More recently, one of her stories was published in *Ellipses Zine* and two long-listed stories will be part of the Reflex Fiction Anthology. You can find her at <http://www.anniesyed.com> or at @so_you_know



First Language

In what language do you think?
People often want to know.
Memories don't come in words, I want to reply.
What words give, they also take, I say.
When I have found the right word,
I know I had to excavate it from my body. Parts
I didn't even know I had.
The hip flexors are where it's at, I want to say.
I catch the shiny ones.
Pull them like a zipper.
Some sputter and push back.
Others tighten.
I want to wear them like a necklace.
Some I just want to lay on the kitchen table like a puzzle,
so I can translate my father's stories for which there are no words in English.
In what language do I think?
It's easy to describe a green mountain.
Even one that's blue.
It's a whole another matter to explain
how a green mountain turns blue.
Just the other day, in a thirty-yard conversation, the other individual said a word,
one word,
that changed me forever.
I knew I was changing that very instant, in fact.
I wish I remembered the word.
Words are not my first language.

by Annie Q. Syed

Gráinne holds an MA in Creative Writing from UCD. Shortlisted for the Gregory O'Donoghue International Poetry Prize, Maeve Binchy UCD Travel Award and Robert Monteith Poetry Prize, 2017, her work has been published in a number of publications. Winner of the Greywood Arts Residency 2017, she has just completed her debut novel.



Nation

Left wheeling the pram
beneath the dim glow of McDonald's arches,
toddler chews a nugget,
she chooses a bedspread from the Argos catalogue-
single, mauve, polyester,
to get when she signs on
for the bedsit the Council have her in

Joins the queue at Hatch 4
behind a Roma girl who wears a black headscarf
the kind her Nanny wore
over her rollers of a Saturday night,
along comes a teenager with a bubble belly
smelling of smoke and Rancheros,
Bubble's Daddy stands beside her
shouting down the phone
that today's stuff better be nicer
than the shit he's scagged on all night

Toddler looks at him then returns to the nugget
looks in the direction of a man at the counter
who's roaring that
'he can't spell, has no fixed abode,
and all ye settled folk are the same...
discrimination, discrimination'
toddler points and cries
'*Nation, nation*'

It's her turn,
lady at Hatch 4 makes her sign a form
and tuts when she signs on the wrong line
'Are you deaf? I said sign there...',
form's pushed back under the glass,
she signs again- tears of indignation well,
toddler looks up and whispers
'*nation, nation*'

by Gráinne Daly

Marilyn Timms, a writer and artist living in Gloucestershire, is a great believer in beginner's luck. The first poetry competition she entered won her a holiday for two in the Caribbean. Since then, she has performed her short stories and poems at Cheltenham Literature Festival and Cheltenham Poetry Festival. She has had poems published in nine anthologies and online. Her collection, *'Poppy Juice'*, will be launched at the 2018 Cheltenham Poetry Festival. Two of her comedies have reached the stage, the third lies mouldering alongside her novel.



Meeting Keira

Dad had been in that park for hours before the police found him. Blood and glass everywhere. Next morning, pictures of him and Keira Gurney-Jarlsohn were plastered all across the papers. You only had to look at her to see she was trouble. All long, blonde hair and a smile as wide as an aircraft hangar.

It was three days before Dad was allowed home. Didn't recognise him. '*Lights on, no-one at home*,' know what I mean? He's still gets nightmares, even now. That Kiera's really messed with his brain.

Dad sounded like a zombie, giving evidence, I couldn't bear to listen. Mum was mad I hadn't waited for the verdict. I told her, it didn't take rocket-science to work out that it was a foregone conclusion.

Poor old Dad can't help the way he is: he's had a terrible time since Keira. You don't expect things like that to happen, do you? When the police found Dad, he was sobbing like a baby.

Yeah, okay ... so he was doing sixty-two in a forty limit. ... Wrong, I know, but, honestly! — What kind of mum lets her six-year-old kid walk home from school on her own?

by Marilyn Timms

I am a queer writer currently based in Leicester in the UK. I write short stories and flash fiction. My influences include Daphne Du Maurier and Joyce Carol Oates. My pamphlet, *Without Makeup and Other Stories* was published in 2012 by Crystal Clear Creators. I have published stories in a range of small-press publications and online. I also have stories coming out in anthologies from Unthank Books and Valley Press this year. I have a PhD from the University of Leicester, work part-time in the voluntary sector and live with my house-rabbit Agatha.



The Redemption Window

In the utility room of my mother's house there is a stained glass window. It's a strange place for such a beautiful piece of glass but my mother is unsentimental for pretty things. The window was there when she moved in: the utility room came afterwards, built for practicality not prettiness.

When I was small it was where I washed my football kit, where I soaked and scrubbed my muddy boots. I turned red, purple, blue in that room, stained by the light that poured through the panes.

There were plastic tubs in the utility room, filled with liquid and lined up against the walls. I didn't like to look inside: I knew what I would find. Except I couldn't help but glimpse the submerged soft things that would bob, rise, break the surface.

My mother taught biology. Bulls eyes, frog torsos, the delicate lungs of tiny mammals: these were the subject of her lessons. These were the things she encouraged children to cut and categorise, the parts of once-living flesh she asked them to slash and label.

I never believed in God. But in the utility room, beneath the light of the stained glass window, I would pray for the pieces of these poor dead creatures. I would pray for redemption, I would pray for my mother to care.

by Dr Hannah Stevens



TITLE: View through yourself

MEDIUM: DSLR camera, Canon 500D

ABOUT THE PHOTO: Nature is the only truth. Trees will tell you everything you need to know, that`s why the most of my works; photography and prose are connected with her. This is one of the rare works where I am included. I wanted to show that nature is a part of us all.



TITLE: Enter the deep

MEDIUM: DSLR camera, Canon 500D

ABOUT THE PHOTO: Today people lost touch with their inner self. Every one of us are wondering where and when we stopped being ourself and how to again feel like the original "Me". The answer is: in the nature.

Tamara Jancic

The photographs you see here are not for being understood but for being felt. Through time, things are changing, but some are not. I am Tamara Jančić and I am from Croatia. Currently I live in Dublin. Within my photo-stories, I enter deeper into everyday things and analyse more. But some I feel. These worlds are already captured in my mind, and I find them in a single touch or a smell...or a memory on which this moment just reminded me of. Some of them I grab and write or freeze in a frame but some of them are waiting hidden. Anyhow, welcome to my world.

Anita Goveas is British-Asian, based in London, and fuelled by strong coffee and paneer jalfrezi. She lurks in libraries and her local independent bookshop, Bookseller Crow. She was first published in the 2016 London Short Story Prize anthology, most recently in Pocket Change, Haverthorn, Moonchild Magazine, Riggwelter Press, Anti-Heroine Chic, former cactus mag and Litro. She tweets erratically @coffeeandpaneer



Turmeric and Saffron

Cooking with Nana is an obstacle-course. Mustard seeds pop like tiny drum-beats, her cracked wooden spoon clatters, she hums something alien with an insistent downbeat. She's directing me with jerks of her spoon- find the turmeric, that's saffron, where's the *fresh* garlic?

Turmeric smells of earth, tastes like sun-warmed dirt-pies. Saffron smells of dying flowers, tastes of oily-eggy-expensiveness. The daal bleaches itself, turmeric brings the colour back, a sunrise caught in aluminium. Steam from lifting the lid floods my face with heat, my hair with tiny creases. The spice-mix to finish is dry-frying in my mother's heavy pan, the one I've never used. There's a moment, a single moment, when the curry leaves, the fennel seeds release sweetness, they turn from woody to aromatic and need to be tipped into the daal immediately. Nana senses this moment with her eyes shut, from across the room. I miss it from next to the cooker, awkwardly twisted around the pan-handle.

The pan soaks in the sink, wisps emerging from cremated seasonings, more curry leaves are in a smaller, lighter pan. Nana hands me her spoon, teaches me the words to her song. I stumble over Hindi while we laugh from our bellies.

by Anita Goveas

Julio Montalvo Valentin is the author of two chapbooks, *Don't Give up the Ship and Ship Lost*. He is an editor and founder of CWP Collective Press, which also runs a Podcast called *The Process*. He is a Blogger for Plurality Press, the guest editor for Erie Community College literary journal *Mutata Re*, as well as the one of the editors of Buffalo State's literary Art Magazine called *Portrait*. After completing two poetry tours, he has read from coast to coast and is one of the recipients of the 2017's Buffalo State's UGSR fellowship award. Welcome this reluctant heart.

Translations

Donde vas-	where are you going
La ciela-	the sky
Frutas-	fruits
Que estas haciendo muchacho-	What are you doing young man
Flotante-	floating
Tontos-	fool or foolish
Hijo-	son
Carajo land-	a place far away, where you don't want to go to but have to

Diaspora of the Banana Cloud

Donde vas child?

To la ciela where all latinos
cling to rafts like hope, believing
in frutas of promise, sinking
under the burdens of today?

Que estas

haciendo muchacho?

Flotante above rippled waters
as you surf on yellow backs, further
than other tontos, propelling you away?

Por favor

Hijo,

keep dreaming while you can
from the island scent to carajo land,
for even clouds peel and stray.

by Julio Montalvo Valentin

Sally Russell left a career in IT to spend more time on writing and music. She writes poetry and short stories that examine social relationships and family. She reads at poetry events in London and Hampshire and is a member of the North Hampshire Stanza.



Ripe Corn

He leaned against the Eastern white pine.
Sun-bleached straw hat,
shaded eyes gazed down
under dark lashes.
Bum-fluff beard, short and soft.
A Swiss knife,
to whittle a stray stick.

Casual-like.

'What's your favourite colour?'

Pennsylvanian sun burned through my golden hair,
seared my fair plump arms like griddled bacon.

'Yellow,' I said.
Like the sun.
Like ripe corn in the field that Daddy sowed.
Like my Sunday dress, with its satin bow.

He stroked my hair,
laughed.
An adolescent gargling yodel
split the air like a ripping fabric.

He unfolded his hand.
Gave me a pine heart
whittled with love.

by Sally Russell



Empty shell, Castle Espie Wetland Centre, Spring 2017

During a trip to Castle Espie Gaynor Kane and her Niece and Nephew came across this broken shell at the base of a large tree. They all noticed the yolk stains and were saddened.

Feature:

Colin Dardis

Poetry



Colin Dardis is a poet, editor and arts coordinator from Northern Ireland. His work has been published widely throughout Ireland, the UK and the US. Having had a childhood speech impediment, attending speech therapy classes throughout primary school, Colin's initial interest in language and words grew out of this formative experience. His personal history of depression and mental illness is also an ongoing influence on his work.

A previous ACES recipient from Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Colin was recently shortlisted for the *Seamus Heaney Award for New Writing*, and the *Over The Edge New Writer of the Year Award*. Known for his devotion to supporting and developing the Northern Irish poetry scene, and one of Eyewear Publishing's Best New British and Irish Poets 2016, *the x of y* is his debut full-length collection, from Eyewear.

Colin, thank you for taking the time to talk to us about your poetry. You are currently launching your new collection *the x of y* with Eyewear Publishing. Can you tell us a little about it?

I suppose a lot of people's first full-length collections, like a lot of bands' first albums perhaps, are like a greatest-hits in a way. You choose the poems you think work the best, look for some parity between them to identify common themes, and together, form a cohesive body of work. There's an awareness that a debut collection really serves as your calling card, and for a lot of readers, it will be the first real introduction to your work. So, there's pressure to offer a book that reflects well on your abilities and interests.

For me, a key theme in my poetry is the idea of 'hope'. Some of the poems come from a point of depression and social anxiety, which I've experienced for quite a while now. And although I feel it is important to openly address and explore these areas, I want a central message of hope as well: that life can get better, that people can improve their situations and outlook. The hope might be hidden at times, it might be a thin veil, a whisper, an undercurrent that is hard to find, but it is still present.

Of course, there are other pieces that fall outside of this definition, that are simply about ideas and concepts that I found intriguing, like about the mechanics of peeling fruit, or making scrambled eggs, or speculating on Grant Wood's famous painting, *American Gothic*. These are included simply because I think they are good poems, and I want to share them. I don't really care about being well-known or having a legacy (I'm in the wrong game if those are my concerns!). But I do want people to react to the poems themselves, and hopefully, there's plenty on offer in *the x of y* to achieve that.

What writers or events have been your main poetic influences?

My earliest influences were Yeats and Blake, as discovered and taught in high school. Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* struck many chords with me as a teenager, during that uneasy transition from child to adult. The appeal of movement, of different states and perspectives emanating from the one place, was fascinating, and have stuck with me. For Yeats, it was his early work, his lyricism and romanticism, how words can be applied to create a sense of beauty. That's the big challenge in poetry: how do you convey the sense of something? Yeats does this amazingly.

I also enjoy Paul Durcan: his easiest, conversational, by-the-by manner means that he is dismissed in some circles, but I find this approach so different from my own, that I'm attracted to its ease and its grace.

Event-wise, my wife, Geraldine O'Kane, and myself run a monthly open mic night in Belfast, and we are fortunate to regularly experience great readers coming in all the time, sharing their work and their insight. It's exposed us to many brilliant, grassroots poets who I admire and enjoy. I like the fact that these poets have gone through a multitude of experiences and influences, which gives them distinction and range. They haven't just all been taught by the same professor, read all the same reading lists, and therefore all sound the bloody same. I hear these poets, I share my own work with them, and I love the community of it all.

What have been the major challenges and achievements along your poetic journey?

Coming from a background of depression, the biggest challenge is always one's own mental state. That can attack your sense of self-worth and ambition, which bleeds into how comfortable you are sharing your work, and your ability to create anything you deem valuable. I believe that it is okay to create bad poetry, as every bad poem brings you closer to a good poem. Not every idea or draft needs to sparkle. Some (many, perhaps!) can just be little exercises for the mind, a workout for the pen. It is leads to nothing, that's okay, another poem will come along soon enough.

As for achievements, I'm happy that Geraldine and I have helped give a platform to other poets through the work we do, whether that's through open mics, slams, online and print publishing, or just giving feedback and encouragement. It's a lot easier to advocate for someone else than it is for yourself, but there are so many exceptionally talented poets out there in Northern Ireland right now. I love seeing people grow and achieve, at any age or stage of life. We see poets show great advances in their writing styles and in finding their own voice, and if we have assisted in that in any small way, that yes, that for me is an achievement.

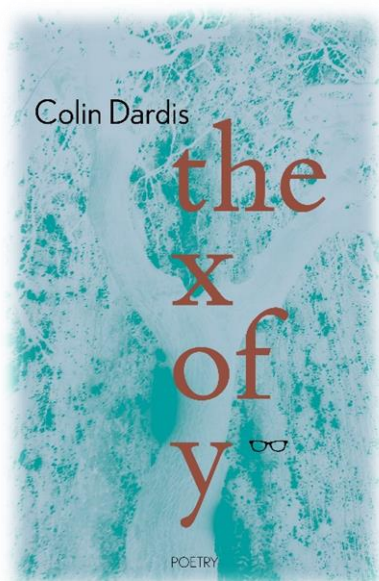


Apart from your new collection, what other projects or events are you currently involved in, or will part of in 2018?

Well, Geraldine and I just compiled our second Poetry Day Ireland Mix Tape, featuring 14 poems from a wide variety of writers. That was a lot of fun to put together, and although I am primarily a 'page poet', I want people to celebrate the act of *listening* to poetry as well for Poetry Day Ireland. We've also just taken part in Maria McManus's *LabelLit* project, which sees poets in Ireland, the UK and beyond leaving poems in public places for strangers to discover, read, enjoy and take home.

I'll be setting up some dates to tour and promote *the x of y*: I've just confirmed this week a joint reading at the Belfast Book Festival with Mel McMahon, who has released his collection inspired by the life of Wilfred Owen, So I'm really looking forward to reading alongside Mel, plus I'll be reading with American poet Leah Umansky in July when she visits Belfast. Geraldine and I will also be taking a children's workshop on haiku at Seamus Heaney Homeplace in August. And I've also just confirmed the line-up for the next issue of FourXFour, our quarterly online poetry journal, which we'll announce online soon.

I've also started to try and review more poetry books. Lots of poets have mentioned that they find it really hard to get reviews placed anywhere, so I've been trying to help fill that void and rewrite more new contemporary Irish poetry; there's a little pile at home waiting to be read and digested! There are other projects and ambitions planned with Poetry NI, but I don't really like talking about plans too much, I'll rather just go out and do! But if you keep an eye on social media, you'll see a few announcements later on in the year...



the x of y is now available to purchase
from store.eyewearpublishing.com

Find out more about Colin and Poetry NI:

www.colindardispoet.co.uk
www.poetryni.com

Faithless

Fifteen degrees is enough
for you to open every window
and welcome in the sun,

although perhaps not enough
to exit your houseboat
and walk on bronze-filled water.

In the changeable céilí
of a Northern spring,
your duvet is a life-jacket.

by Colin Dardis

from Train Scenes: Watercolour Scene

Only the birds are out this morning.
Dogs remain crouched at their front doors,
fishermen choose the blanket over the reel.

The waves' flurry washes away
a scurry of sandpipers
as a train cuts through the mist.

It's a watercolour with grey wash
even the goats can't escape, the cows
anchored to their fields, stoic as rock.

Workmen abroad at Bellarina,
their hi-vis overalls two drops of sun
against this Autumn sky.

Underneath it all, a row of crows,
a tractor persisting,
a farm shed collapsing.

(originally published in the Origami Poetry Project)

by Colin Dardis

Brink

The kitchen is a death-trap
set to spring at my touch.

All the knives pointed inwards
waiting to tenderise my forearms.

The garbage disposal
with its appetite for fingers.

The hob asking for the flat
of a skillet or a palm.

For the squeamish, the toaster
flirts minor burns and foreplay.

Even the iron under the sink
can be weaponised at will.

Bleach bottles and detergents
formed into a cocktail.

The blender offering
a whirlpool of lacerations.

I could trap myself in the freezer
and lie there till next Christmas.

I turn the light off
and retreat into the living room.

by Colin Dardis

**A Sense of Space**

I spend a huge amount of time working in darkened theatres and spaces with no natural light. As a result, I spend a huge amount of time outdoors whenever I possibly can; daylight is extremely important to me and I'm fascinated by cloud formations and reflections when I'm travelling up to Derry (with Donegal in the background), with sunsets and cloud patterns when I'm home at the farm - or driving across a dark moonlit mountain on my way home from teaching.

**Adder Photograph**

The plank rests on its side. In front is a garden bed used, each Spring, for broad beans. Behind is a stone wall. In early March my adder friends appear. This year one decided to pose for me along a furrow in the middle of the plank. I thank it.

Seth Crook lives on The Isle of Mull and can see Ireland from where he lives (on a clear day). His poems have appeared in such places as The SHOp, The Moth. Most recently in the Rialto, Magma, Envoi. One of his photos appeared in the first edition of The Bangor Literary Journal. One of his poems specifically about the adders in the photo is in the current edition of Causeway, The Journal of Irish and Scottish Writing.

Originally from County Armagh, Elaine Donnelly lives on the North Coast and writes poetry, short stories and flash fiction. Elaine has a PhD in English Literature from the University of Ulster. She has been writing for a number of years and her work has been published in journals and anthologies including local publications such as The Incubator and North West Words, as well as in the collections of the Portrush Writing Group, of which she is a member.



Stanley's Bluebells

We gave you no name, no label, not aunt nor uncle, nor family friends,
yet you were always part of our lives.
Our fathers worked together once, I think
and so the pattern of friendship was set,
you came to our house, we to yours.
You were always planning somewhere to go and often we did too.
In Belgium you unpacked the old tent
and your daughters washed their hair in buckets
and in the Isle of Man, we walked country roads,
wishing the little people 'good morning'.

You came to our wedding days, and gave gifts to our babies,
and on your way to the races
changed good clothes for old clothes
protection from the motorbike smoke,
bringing gifts of books for our children
and bulbs for the garden showing us how to transplant and split them
and your own egg and onion sandwiches in a Family Circle tin
not wanting to put us out.

So now when Stanley's bluebells push through the soil each May
they signal Spring
and bring with their low hanging flowers
a moment of reflection.

by Elaine Donnelly

Poetry

Patricia Devlin-Hill

Patricia Devlin-Hill was born in Belfast and was first published in The Young Irish Writers column (Irish Times) in the 1970s. The poetry faded then with physics taking its place. Today, Patricia writes in her free time, and is published in Poetry NI's FourxFour, Community Arts Partnership/Literature and Verbal Arts anthologies and Lagan Online Publications. Patricia's poem 'Tea' was short listed for the Seamus Heaney Award for New Writing 2016. Patricia is one of Lagan Online's 12NOW (New Original Writers) and often performs at Poetry NI's Open Mic Evenings in the Crescent Arts Centre, has been a finalist in the All Ireland and Belfast Festival Poetry Slams, and has read at Red Pill, CAP/LAVA and Waterstones's hosted events.



Match

Some decades discoloured to the mind,
the lit stove in the garden,
struggling with pancake batter
and old china on a
splintered wooden table,
my mum sings still, in the snatched
failing light of a spent match.

by Patricia Devlin-Hill

Maureen Anne Browne is a member of Ards Writers and attends poetry workshops at the Seamus Heaney centre for poetry at Queens University Belfast. She has read her poetry at The Festival of the Peninsula, Swaledale Festival, and summer season at La Mon Hotel. She has had her work displayed in public places in Havant, won various prizes in competitions, been published in magazines – Pulsar, Orbis, Writing Magazine, Honest Ulsterman, and various anthologies, most recently NUCLEAR IMPACT: Broken Atoms in Our Hands by Shabda Press. She is currently working towards her first collection.



Museum

A man of wealth, status, dining
at the Captain's table
on a ship that outclassed the Olympic.

Revelling in its gravitas, celebrating
its credentials, Made in Belfast,
the future iron-clad;

crossing the Atlantic,
with shipping magnates, writers,
fashion designers, on the crest of greatness

as if in Heaven's favour -
the sea at ease, the stars radiant;
before the dawn had taken hold

he was shuddering spluttering
in ice-ridden waters buffeted by corpses
children's shoes wine bottles; unconscious;

falling falling like the Bohemian porcelain
au gratin dishes plates platters crystal glasses
Chinese bowls Japanese vases

through deeper and deeper dark
past the prying eyes of orca and shark
the glint of luminescent fish

to end up prone in the silt
with unbroken crockery, cables, davits,
baskets of laundry, silver soup ladles.

The body raided: skin, muscles, ligaments,
stripped by lumpsuckers, rattails, monkfish,
eyes gouged by shrimp and crustacean.

Down to a spine: seen, but unidentified;
the piles of porcelain never lost
their telling sign – White Star Line.

by Maureen Anne Browne

Poetry

E.V. McLoughlin

E.V. McLoughlin's poems were published in Making Memories (CAP 2015), Connections (CAP 2016), Between light and half light (Shalom/Crescent writers 2015) anthologies as well as in Panning for Poems, Rat's Ass Review magazines. Her poems were longlisted for Seamus Heaney Award for New Writing 2016 and shortlisted for the Fresher Writing Prize 2017. E.V. loves coffee, books, and city lights and lives in Co. Down, Northern Ireland with her husband and son.



The switchboard

When I first learned about internet,
I imagined a room full of switches:
When I click "Connect" someone
will see a flashing light, flick the switch and connect.
I learned later that it does not work like that,
but

Who flicked the switch
the day I looked out of the nursery window
and woke up to my own being?

the day 'my house' became
my 'parents' house'?

the day I stopped being
the hero of stories?

the day that turned a 'growing up'
to 'growing old'?

Who will flick the switch
and turn off the light?

by E.V. McLoughlin

Andrew Soye is currently studying part-time for an MA at Queen's University. His poems have been published in several magazines including Abridged, Honest Ulsterman and Magma. One of his poems won the 2014 Kent & Sussex Poetry Competition and another was shortlisted for the 2016 Bord Gáis Irish Book Awards Poem of the Year. Photo by Ger Holland.



Preserving

sunlight, these words; raspberries,
loganberries, strawberries, picked from gardens,
blackberries filched from hedges, still stain our hands
and lips, fill mouths of earthenware bowls to overflowing,

cascading into heavy saucepans with cups
of sugar, *Tate & Lyle* bags shaken-out over them
as incantation against corruption, boiled and simmered,
stirred, burbling like the blackbirds that took the better half,

then strained through muslin hung
from brush shafts spanning kitchen table to
kitchen chair, the blood of summer dripping, shed
for sponge cakes, scones, thick crusty-white-loaf sandwiches.

the hand that writes these labels is a different one, but you
knew long summers when swallows flew above soft fruit
snug in rows or hid beneath the leaves of hedgerows
– I too have tasted them, and name them now.

by Andrew Soye

Ewan Smith was brought up on a small farm in rural Scotland in the days before electricity complicated life and he is still coming to terms with the concept of inside toilets. He worked as a primary school teacher and recently retired to the seaside in North Wales. He is a member of the Colwyn Bay Writers' Circle.



T

The Trouble With Women

Right Up Front I Want To Say That This Is A
Clichéd Generalisation Based On A Momentary Incident
(Accompanied By A Muttered "Oh For Fuck's Sake")
Which Doesn't Reflect At All On My Relationship With My Wife
Whom I Love To Distraction And Who Actually Has Sensationally Gorgeous...
Well, That's Not Really Relevant.

The trouble with women is tissues.
They generate so many of the fecking things,
crumpled and stained with God knows what,
impossible to contain,
scattered everywhere in inconceivably vast numbers like spores from a fungus.
They would hang around in the air if we lived in a different universe with fewer
gravity.
Can you imagine? There they are, everywhere you go, just floating about.
Millions of the things, billions; little platforms of tox just...just there,
bumping against you, in your face, wherever you look.
You push them aside for fear of breathing them in
but it's hopeless because others simply replace them
and in the end you give up, exhausted by the sheer scale of the task
and realise with desperation that you have no choice but to learn to live with them.
Men aren't like that.
Men, with a concern for the environment at the forefront of their minds
along with the urgent need to reduce waste,
use their sleeves or arms or the backs of their hands when they need to wipe their
noses
or they simply sniff. Is that so hard?
And if you miss just one – you search through every pocket
(that's another problem with women,
their clothes have pockets everywhere;
completely pointless, most of them)
but miss just one of the things,
and the entire load of washing is completely fecked.

#JustSaying

by Ewan Smith

P.W. Bridgman writes from Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. He has earned graduate and postgraduate degrees in psychology and a degree in law as well. His poems and short fiction have been published in *The Antigonish Review*, *Grain*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *Ars Medica*, *The Glasgow Review of Books*, *The Moth Magazine*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Litro Magazine* (UK), *Litro Magazine* (NY), *Praxis*, *Pif Magazine*, *Ascent Aspirations*, *The New Orphic Review*, *Easy Street*, *London Grip*, *A New Ulster*, *Section 8 Magazine*, *Mulberry Fork Review*, *Aerodrome* and other literary periodicals and e-zines. Bridgman's writing has also appeared in anthologies published in Canada, Ireland, England and Scotland, and his first book—a selection of short stories entitled *Standing at an Angle to My Age*—was published in 2013. You may learn more about P.W. Bridgman by visiting his website at <www.pwbridgman.ca>.



The Things He Grasped with Both Hands
(A Lamentation in Thirty-Six Bars)

1. The breast.
2. The "bah-bah." (The bottle.)
3. The rattle with the smiling clown's face.
4. The vertical slats of the crib when it got dark.
5. The picture books they gave him.
6. The cinnamon bread she baked him.
7. The Meccano set he bought him.
8. His ears when they argued.
9. The handlebars.
10. The black pony's mane.
11. The library shelves.
12. The door of the taxi when she left them.
13. The telephone when she called him.
14. His ears when she didn't.
15. The chance to study at an American university.
16. The Christmas cards she sent him from Rome and Vienna.
17. The sleeves of the graduation suit that didn't quite fit.
18. The job at the merchant bank that didn't quite suit.
19. His head when the call came she'd died in Zurich.
20. The telephone when he dropped it.
21. The notice of termination he picked up at reception.
22. His girlfriend's ears when she wouldn't listen, again.
23. The hem of her dress when he begged her forgiveness, again.
24. His ears when she wouldn't give it, again.
25. The telephone she used to call the police.
26. The vertical bars of his cell when it got dark.
27. The sleeves of the prison garb that were a little too long.
28. The door of the taxi when he was released.
29. The job at McDonald's that he just couldn't stand.
30. The Nag's Head doorway when he couldn't stand up.
31. The helping hand of the cop with the round, smiling face.
32. The Bible.
33. The bottle.
34. The Bible.
35. The Bottle.
36. The Bb-b...ottle.

by P.W. Bridgman

Emma is a graduate of Queen's University Belfast, where she received an MA in Creative Writing. She is an aspiring librarian with an interest in writing short fiction, drawing on a range of influences including history, mythology, and nature. She currently lives in Bangor.



Home Security

There was the woman who had the signs. There were the six quartered circles on her garden wall. There was us. They'd come with the house, we were told. She made a show of them: dabbed paint into the reedy lines; hung flowers out to dry around them; wrote a verse in chalk beneath them.

We walked past her house on the way to school. We saw her. We saw the circles. We decided to pull them out. It didn't take long. One hour in the dark, the three of us working the stone out of the wall. Dirtier and more brittle work than we thought. Heavier too. We dropped the stone, of course, and it split.

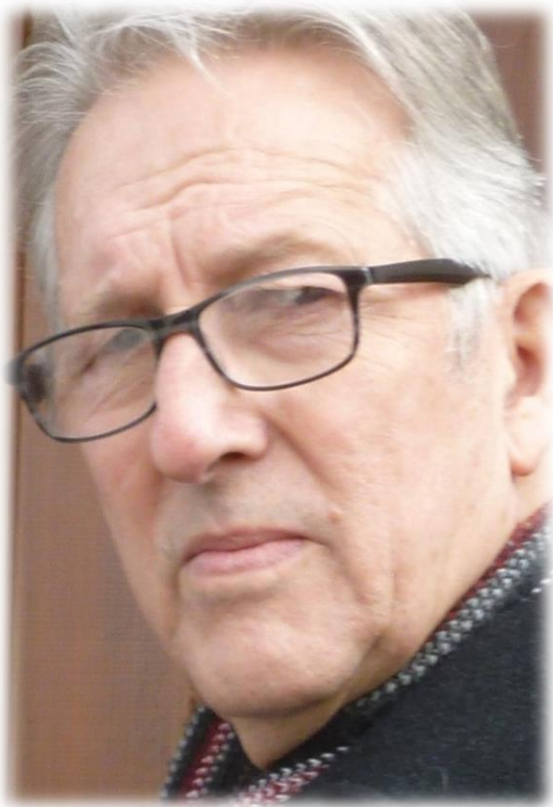
We tell ourselves still that we didn't mean it. Who knows what we meant. The garden wall had an ugly gap in it for as long as she lived there. A damp, grasping cold came from it. We walked on the other side of the street. We saw her: pale, tired, sad. No more signs, no more show. Circling, always. When she finally left, the hole was plugged up with an ugly square of concrete: the wall was ruined.

by Emma Devlin

Nigel Jarrett is a winner of the Rhys Davies prize for short fiction and, in 2016, the inaugural Templar Shorts award. He's a former daily-newspaperman and a contributor to the Wales Arts Review, Jazz Journal and Acumen poetry magazine, among others. He is also a poet and novelist. His first collection of stories, *Funderland*, was warmly reviewed in the Independent, the Guardian, and the Times, and long-listed for the Edge Hill prize. Parthian also published his first poetry collection, *Miners At The Quarry Pool*. His latest collection, *Who Killed Emil Kreisler?*, was published in 2016. He, this year sees the publication of his short fiction pamphlet, *A Gloucester Trilogy*. He lives in Monmouthshire.

Nigel's inspiration for the poem:

'We now live in an apartment at the former Penyfal Mental Hospital in Abergavenny, South Wales, converted into flats ten years ago. Each day on our way out, we pass a small grass area with trees, where 3,000 hospital patients were buried anonymously between 1850 and 1975.'



The Lunatic Act

(At the old Pen-y-fal Asylum cemetery, Abergavenny)

They buried them in pits, singly or in pairs (the lovers Megan Lewis
and Cuthbert Rees), or in batches when the sweating sickness ran.
Records were kept: Victoria Hughes, 'exposing her person, scolding onlookers,
paralysed, demented, parotid glands swollen, screams, sinks, dies at noon'.

But first Budding's rotormower, a jangle of parts swung through the weeds
to shave the first ten-by-twenty plot, a cartoon bubble with that wheel-in.
One quarter acre, they'd worked out, sixty-eight plots, twelve on each level,
four levels, forty per pit, the variable of sinkage, but room for at least three thou.

Precision! They craved it in that house of rude departures from the norm. Even
those gargoyles, defending the worsted, held their line as sculpted ironies.
Whoever entered, dribbling Houdini or deluded mimic (one said, 'I'm Fulljames,
the architect - stable the horses'), left stragglers, pieces of an endgame.

They'd done the arithmetic, established the categories of Abandoned and Leased,
so expected the mud-caked bier, come to collect the corpse, their sad epitome of peace.
But not Alice Hodges, her pupils dilating alternately, who'd left a reap hook
hanging from her husband's neck (all said the fool had 'ever made her mad'); or

the Isle of Thanet's Generalissimo – next to her in pit four, row three, level two -
who'd studied too much and eaten mangolds in an acre of snow, but could play Baroque,
his piano a Weser light mahogany; while, outside, the Gothic, the Classical,
the Jacobethan, and the Doric sang antidotes to the place's unbidden human rococo.

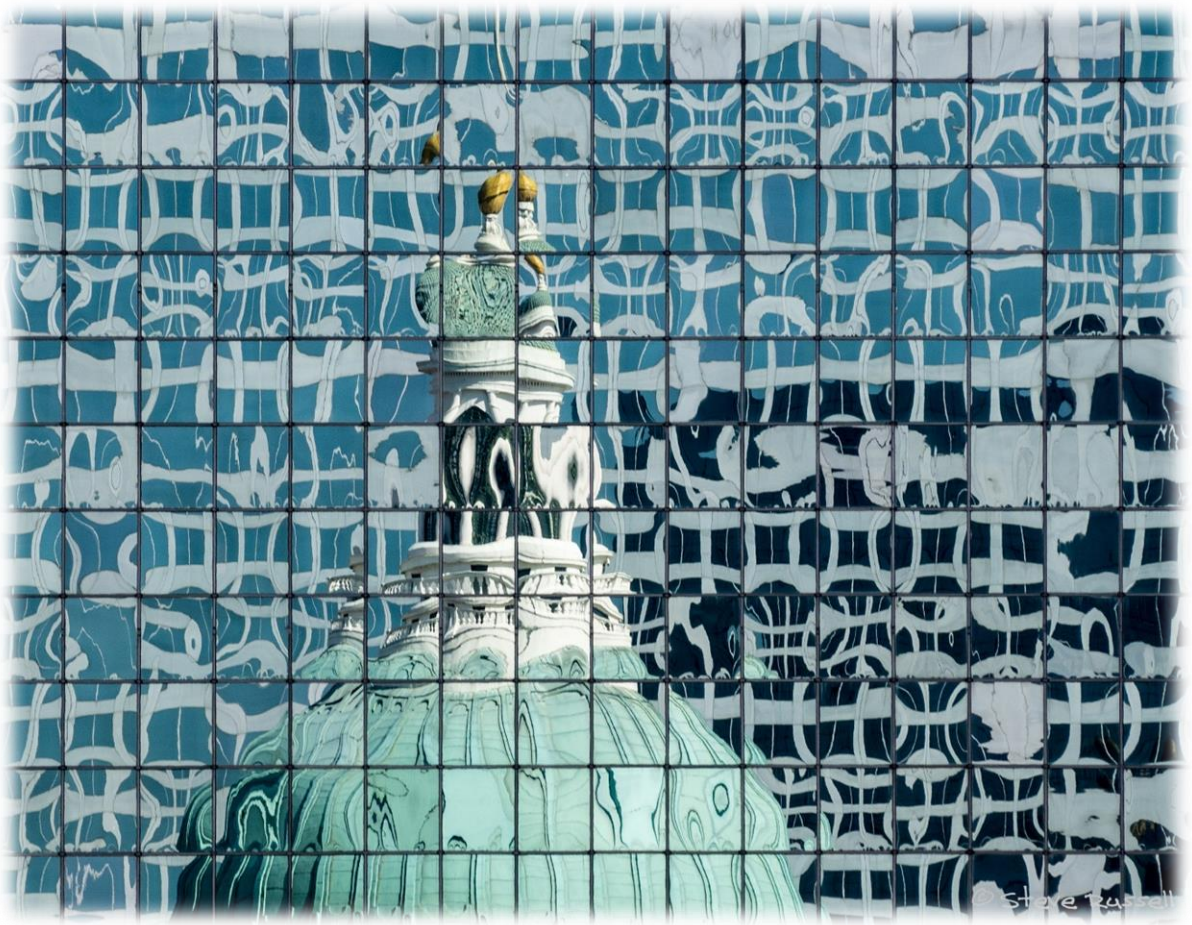
It went like this: first, the chapel service, an am-dram rehearsal, motley cast illustrating
religion's decline, much slouching in the pews. a Tourette's FUCK! at the Lord's Prayer.
Then a slither to paradise (just one hole dug to the storeyed incumbents), the 'Super'
cupping a bivalve watch; the priest aflutter and smiling at the word 'committal'.

by Nigel Jarrett



ReflectedDome#1

Taken near Albert Dock, Liverpool, UK. This is an image of the Port of Liverpool Building, reflected in a nearby office block, creating an intriguing abstract image.



ReflectedDome#2

Taken in St. Louis, Missouri, USA. This is an image of the Old Courthouse, reflected in a nearby office block, creating an intriguing abstract image.

Biography

Steve Russell lives in Hampshire. He has exhibited his photographs in several venues and regularly teaches photography to individuals and groups. You can see more of his work and other information on his website at www.steverussellphotography.co.uk

Kelly Creighton grew up in Bangor and now lives in Newtownards. She is a novelist, short story writer and poet. Her books include *Bank Holiday Hurricane*, (Doire Press, 2017), *The Bones of It* (Liberties Press, 2015) and *Three Primes* (Lapwing, 2013). She founded and edits The Incubator literary journal and is a recipient of the 2018 Arts Council of Northern Ireland ACES scheme.



star replacement parts

a hand span from the rock-pool
where other children held nets in summer

bought from the village newsagent
we hung our coats over padded chairs

in a room emptying of pattern
the piano played something absorbent

and we sat on with our eyes
on the couple at the table behind whose eyes

were bowls rising on a tilting axis
fruit sat on our sweets in tiny buoyant berries

laughing at what was lacking next door
our leaving neighbour left for the gents

to pick a conversation starter from the roll
like a bandage strip to hold the wounded

we huddled the strangeness of star-fruit
chilled moist and level on our palms

on our spoons their slices weighed nicely
to soar through a night where stars had hidden

our left neighbour rummaging in her bag missed
the bizarre new brooch that landed on her lapel

by Kelly Creighton

Edward O'Dwyer, from Limerick, Ireland, has had poetry published in journals throughout the world, including *The Forward Book of Poetry* (2015), *Poetry Ireland Review*, *The Manchester Review*, and *The Houston Literary Review*. He has published two full collections with Salmon Poetry, *The Rain on Cruise's Street* (2014) and *Bad News, Good News, Bad News* (2017). His work has been nominated frequently for Pushcart, Forward and Best of the Web prizes. Most recently he has written a collection of 'dark comedy' micro fictions on the theme of infidelity, examples of which have been published by *Danse Macabre*, *Dodging the Rain*, *Headstuff* and *The Cabinet of Heed*.

Photograph taken by Niall Hartnett at the recent Eigse Michael Hartnett Festival.



Sinner, She Whispered

We were the only ones on the beach, because that's how it can be with west of Ireland beaches in malevolent January cold. Oddly, there were two deck chairs side by side in the sand, facing the ocean, seemingly abandoned. She had the ludicrous notion that God and Satan had left them there – that they had met here earlier for a chat, some catching up.

"Why here?" I asked.

"Why not here?" she answered. The level of the water was moving up her body. She was moving out with her back to the rolling waves, and I was following. Her breasts had vanished. I began to miss them as soon as they did. She had worn the bathing suit I like them the best in, the pink one.

I always enjoy her absurd notions, and I like that she brings God into the conversation so much. It's funny how atheists seem to do that. This was one of her better theories. Haven't we all imagined those two embroiled in a chess game, or a hand of poker, or even a frame of pool at a sticky pub? Hollywood is constantly at it. She took away the competitive aspect of it, and that's what I liked so much about it, the idea of God and Satan just sitting there in their shorts and sandals, the gulls kicking up the same fuss as they do for everyone else, and the sea air equally in their nostrils and lungs.

"This is far enough," she said, and then I felt her legs wrap around me. She bobbed up and down there like a buoy, in my arms, almost weightless on the tide. I thought again of how I used the expression 'inside her' a few years back and she corrected me, said she was 'outside me'. It pops into my mind quite often. We exchanged the taste of salt from lips to lips as the sun sank farther out and until we both came.

I still believe in God, which she likes about me. She also likes that my mother doesn't approve of her, and is still hoping we'll break up. She likes calling the things we do sins. I like that as well. Sinner, she sometimes whispers to me in the dark, after we've done it.

It's darkening quickly as we leave the water and wrap each other up in beach towels back on the sand.

"We should sit a while," she said, moving towards the idle chairs. It was clear by then that no one is coming back to them. They had been abandoned.

"They left them out for us," she said, sitting down, grinning. "It'd be rude not to."

"So who's chair am I sitting in?" I asked.

"Satan's," she answered.

"Oh you think so?" I asked.

"I know so," she answered, and laughed, but it was a soft, sweet laugh. It was fully dark then. "Sinner," she whispered.

by Edward O'Dwyer

Glen Wilson lives and works in Portadown, Co Armagh. He has been widely published having work in *The Honest Ulsterman*, *Foliate Oak*, *Iota*, *Southword* and *The Incubator Journal* amongst others. In 2014 he won the Poetry Space competition and was shortlisted for the Wasafiri New Writing Prize. He won the Seamus Heaney Award for New Writing 2017.



Vesuvius Speaks

The horses felt it first,
a once placid mare
kicked the doors clean off her stall,
one of the slaves grabbed the leather reins
and was dragged for a half mile
before, scuffed and torn,
he gave up on her
and hobbled back towards the stables.

When the tower of smoke cut itself into the sky
it spewed copious dark words over the city.
It coated everyone with the spit
that forced itself upon us,
well past the point of forbearance.

Ash fell on the forum,
the baths,
the brothels,
every eloquent word
and guttural moan silenced.

We watched from across the bay,
some struggled even at this distance to admit
it was clinging to their cloaks,
nestling between pumiced toes,
making all complicit.

by Glen Wilson



Eisenhower Pier

Clark took this photograph on Eisenhower Pier in Bangor, Co Down. He was inspired to take it because as a child, he and his dad used to go for walks along this pier and it captured a sense of nostalgia, reminding him of those days with his dad.

Women Aloud NI

Feature

Women Aloud NI is a community group for female writers from and/or living in Northern Ireland. It was founded in 2015 by Jane Talbot who wanted to raise the profile of the women's writing scene here. It also aims to provide a platform to promote individual members.

More information can be found on the website: www.womenloudni.com

WOMEN ALOUD NI



Another Room

The women of my family die silent and alone
as though they had not intended leaving us
but simply stepped outside for just a moment;
drifting from the nub of conversation
to become an echoing voice
filtered back to us like sunlight from another room.

We stretch our conversations like this all the time -
moving to feed a pet or fetch something forgotten;
words cast over our shoulders at rough angles
fragments of meaning gathered up to be explained
on our return to the conversation and the cups of tea.

These women step so casually aside without a fuss.
A teapot, still warm, sits on the kitchen table.
The filled cup, waiting to be tasted, grows cold.

by Anne McMaster

Biography

A former lecturer in both English Literature and Performing Arts, Anne now works as a freelance editor, playwright, poet, theatre director and creative facilitator. She's artistic director of *Hydra Theatre Company* and the designer of *PDK* - a year-long creative project focusing the importance of kindness. Her poetry has been published in the UK and the USA. She lives in the rural north west on a much-loved and rather tired old Georgian farm.

Friend

She gave us
 'presents from her children'
every Christmas.
I said
 you don't need to do that
 (they're expensive)
but she continued.

Small parcels
 'from them'
 beautifully wrapped
arrived each year.

Then she died
and her children
 somehow
 became
 her gift
 to us.

by Yvonne Boyle

Biography

Yvonne Boyle has been writing for a number of years and has had a range of poems published in a variety of magazines and anthologies: Literary Miscellany, Ulster Tatler; the title prose poem in 'Cobalt Blue', Dunfanaghy Writers' Circle (2016); the online 'Holocaust Memorial Day Anthology' (2016); the online 'A New Ulster. The Hidden and the Divine: Female Voices in Ireland' (2017); the Community Arts Partnership 2016/7 Poetry in Motion Community Anthology 'Matter' and in their forthcoming anthology 2017/8. She was awarded the 1st Sam Overend Award for Poets and Writers (Spoken Word Competition), Seamus Heaney Poetry House, Bellgahy Bawn (2016). She has had poems exhibited at the Blackberry Path Art Studio, Bangor (2017). She worked as a CAP Artist-Facilitator in their Poetry in Motion Schools Project, September-November 2017. She is a member of WomenAloudNI

Hedge Boy

I heard angry hurt through the hedge,
Busting the peace of a Sunday smoke out my back.
I knew it was a child,
only they could cry so completely on the kerb.

I bumped up the poorly levelled gravel and peered through the poplars.
"Hello!" I called.
He sucked the silence into his throat- it spat back a sob-
Wild eyes searching the talking hedge.

His mouth hung open as disembodied me continued:
"I can't get to you, but, are you ok?".
He nodded, google-eyed and obedient.

Brought back out from himself so abruptly,
he lost his anger and forgotten his pain.
I had stolen it,
Netted it like a butterfly.
Pinned his pity as he sniffled away.

by Clare McWilliams

Biography

Born in Bangor Hospital, Clare, masquerading up in town as the Belfast Beatnik, has performed in venues and festivals all over Northern Ireland. Her performance style ranges from raucous sensuality to visceral vulnerability. She is a poetry and intercultural facilitator and likes to encourage people, no matter their age, to find their own voice. She is an active member of #WomenAloudNI. Her poem *The Day of the Buckets* was shortlisted for the Seamus Heaney Award for New Writing 2017. She is currently working on her new show *You Can Take the Girl out of the Estate*

Plugging Gaps

The boat is said to sink some day.
Wood rot, water damp; pin prick

turns to crack and says *this boat's*
day is done and there's no one

but her on board and she is light
and may well float and may well float.

Still, her bad legs aren't swimmers.
They're not walkers either these

last days. They're sit-uponers,
years of honkers tuned her hamstrings

tight to play in brittle moans. But she is light
and may well float and may well float.

The gaps are getting bigger, longer,
stronger in their vacuum force.

Pin pricks turn to cracks
and there's no wood this big

to plug the gaps. But through
the gaps there's light and she,

in end, no longer needs the boat.
For she can float. For she is light.

by Amy Louise Wyatt

Biography

Amy Louise Wyatt is lecturer, poet and artist from Bangor. She has been published in places such as *The Blue Nib*, *CAP Anthology*, *Lagan Online* and *FourXFour*. She was a finalist in the *2016 National Funeral Services Poetry Competition*; a finalist in the *2017 Aspects Festival Poetry Slam* and shortlisted for *The Seamus Heaney Award for New Writing 2018*.

The Big House

Nestled in drumlins, our house stood at the edge of the country estate
It once belonged to. And though we did not need to bow to lords or ladies
Still, my parents did, when they came calling, plums in their mouths and jars.

I knew no difference; in innocence claimed their demesne was mine.
Its walls were ten feet high, were climbed and walked and jumped from,
Its ten-foot-wide black gates were never closed.

My childhood's playground, I wandered it at will,
Lay snuggled down in dappled bluebell woods,
to gaze at skies through canopies of forty shades of green,

Would startle pheasants, as they rising, startled me,
Avoid eviscerated foxes, heads leering, bright black eyes,
and the gamekeepers who pinned them to the fence,

Play in the huge walled garden where dad would plant for markets,
While I'd pretend to ballet dance on thin brick walls, or tiptoe,
Hand over mouth, to wells where newts that jumped in mouths lived,

Sink deep in mud by lakes the summer turned lime green,
Pull velvet bulrushes, discarding them before I got back home,
Mindful of mother's warnings to stay safe, which pushed me further,

Build hidden dens by river inlets, trees bent over, touching water,
Creep through the crumbling stable blocks, the bell-cot
In the tower now silent. I never heard it ring,

Throw stones with satisfying plops in stinking pools of slurry,
Climb rusting ladders in dank red bricked water towers
To better view my wider world.

And as I grew, I'd venture further, invite myself to croquet games
Or tennis on their glassy grass; knock on the Big House door, and ask to see
The basement's doll's house. No little girls had played with it for years.

And further still, I'd skirt old Gretel's cottage, that witch in black
From head to toe who cursed me with her soundless gestures.
Back then we called her deaf and dumb, and feared her.

And right at the other edge of the woods, as I grew older, bolder,
I found an old abandoned cottage, like London, falling down.
I found new treasure; broken cups, a teapot, book, cigarette butts.

by Caroline Johnstone

Biography

Caroline is originally from Northern Ireland, now living in Ayrshire. She writes mainly on philosophical, political and life experience themes. She has been published in The Galway Review, Positively Scottish, The Scottish Book Trust, Belfast Life, the Burningwood Literary Journal, the New Voices Press, HCE Review, in the Proost and The Snapdragon Journals and the Federation of Writers (Scotland) anthology. She was also shortlisted for Tales in the Forest and was highly commended by People Not Borders. She helps with the social media for Women Aloud NI and is on the Poets Advisory Group for the Scottish Poetry Library.

Afternoon Coffee in Downpatrick

after the work of Edward Hopper

John, I name him *John*, sits alone at a small table.
A dayhawk in a local diner, he holds his paper upright
- a sitter for a portrait – his unmoving frame makes me both
observer and participant. I am in the picture *lone woman*

at the next table. We are facing forward. Side reflections
of one another – he lays his paper down on the table -
reveals a crossword. We both hold biro in our right hands,
make marks on our own pages. Still life. This clue is cryptic.

How can a place without glass be both mirror and window?
We watch each other, gauredly, across the aperture in being
here that passes between our two tables. Alone. Together.
Joints stiff, he gets to his feet, stands quite still, another portrait.

by Olive Broderick

Biography

Olive Broderick's first publication 'Darkhaired' was a winner of the Templar Poetry Pamphlet Award and was shortlisted for a Michael Marks Award. Her full collection 'Night Divers' (Templar Poetry, 2018) was published in 2018. Originally from Youghal in Co. Cork, she came to Belfast for the Queen's University Belfast, Creative Writing Programme, settling, afterwards, in Downpatrick, Co. Down. She has received a Hennessy X.O. Literary Award, Emerging Poetry Category. She acknowledges the support of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, including a Artist Career Enhancement Scheme award (ACES 16/17) for a project which explored the meeting place between poetry and dance/movement. She is currently in receipt of an Arts Council SIAP award

Unhinged

It is the fragile ribbon
which, improbably, holds
everything together;
carved ribs of ivory,
convent lace, finest silk;
the very mechanism
of unfold, fold, unfold.
Without it the ribs unhinge.

Find themselves in rusty
biscuit tins, mixed in
with postcards telling
of trains to be met,
brooches with no pins.
The carver's dreams
of vine and fern clogged
with dust and grease.

Childish fingers poke
into the leaves, worrying
Holes between rose
and hearts' ease.
The busy enterprise
of the fan; ivory hunter,
Chinese carver, Belgian nun
is long bankrupt.

With care and the exact
breadth and weave of ribbon
you can rethread the fan.
It will work almost like new
but what would you do with it;
your dancing days far behind you.

by Linda McKenna

Biography

Linda McKenna lives in Downpatrick. Originally from County Dublin she has lived in County Down for over 20 years. She started writing poetry about two years ago. She has had poems published in A New Ulster, Skylight 47, Panning for Poems, Lagan Online , The Blue Nib, Four x Four, Dodging the Rain, Poetry in Motion Anthology. Linda was the winner of The Seamus Heaney Award for New Writing 2018.

Oceans End

There is a moment that cannot be held or measured.

You will know this moment.

It has a sound, a feeling, a time of its own.

It is a back to front moment, like the silver light that grips an ocean just before a storm.

Or those mirrors at the arcade; ghoulish, twisted, deformed.

A mirror of your insides.

Or the sound of a frantic oar in water.

Or a slap sweeping through air before it lands.

Or a memory that echoes like a game of snap, returning in waves.

Like swimming in an ocean of rainbows and white noise.

You will know this moment.

The moment when chaos is about to burst. A place where there are no rules or tidy suits.

A place of crackling light and petrol darkness.

Where tides rip through childhood sandcastles leaving broken pinks and powder blue shells.

*You **will** know this moment.*

The moment when the soul leaves and the oceans end.

by Eibhlinn McAleer

Biography

Eibhlinn McAleer is a writer from East Belfast. She has been previously published in the online magazine 'The Incubator' and 'The Jellyfish Review'.

Dark Circus Emerges from Pandora's Box

"Someone I loved once gave me a box full of darkness. It took me years to understand that this too, was a gift."

— Mary Oliver

I. The Clown

Jagged little clown, bowls me over.
Stampeding through my dreams.
Not remorseful, no matter what. Sharp and spiky
little chin, piercing through the fabric of my heart.
Swaddling, strips of toxic. Toxic toxicity, choking mind,
shattered nerves and nearly crash the car.
Crash. Die. Crash. Survive. What's worse?
Will it ever be over, brashness tearing through my skin.
Tearing deep beneath the skin, bites at the flesh; so then, bone.
Bone alone. And boneless. Shushed with acid undertones
No complaint, o worthless one. Of course they haven't silenced you.
Shush. Shush, now. You are mad, is all, mad and you must shush.
Everyone knows, be quiet. Silenced and disturbed,
living lifeless death, memories mauling, pushed down by a clown.

"Peace and justice are two sides of the same coin." Dwight D Eisenhower

II. Rubberman

If I weighed you down with all the words you put in me
until you were compressed, distended, stressed,
you'd bounce right back, o Rubberman, as if I never happened.

And if I cried, yelled, bled, saw red, ran to and fro,
turned round and round, threw it back at you,
you'd stand stock still, o Rubberman, as if I never happened.

I am lost, stoned, tossed and blown, distressed and caught
in nets of knots. It's hot in here, it's hell. So melt?
You'd harden up, O Rubberman, as if I never happened.

If I won; could I be free? No ground left for me,
no peace can ever come through imposed silence.
So I won't win, o Rubberman, as if I never happened.

by Paula Matthews

Biography

Author Paula Matthews has worked extensively in the field of arts and mental health. Trained in three different models of using literature for wellbeing, she is passionate about the subject. Paula improves and safeguards social wellbeing as a social worker and also runs inclusive writing for wellbeing courses. Paula is a WANI member and has recent lived experience of mental health. She is currently developing a poetry collection on the theme of the Pandora and Icarus myths and is developing a piece called Dark Circus reflecting the procession of furies which comes out of Pandora's box, but also the succession of thoughts and experiences which come during depression. This is therapeutic writing- and act of recovery and WANI have been a positive source of support in this recovery process.

From beginning to end

You stare at me as you play across the table
People whirl around us
Drink spills, a shadow of frustration passes across our faces
Fools watch and are mistaken.

I can't remember how it started,
Wool gloves, a baby on my hip.
Music, whiskey and blood
Founded in an Indian Summer.

Life passes, measured in the lyrics sang out on stages,
Kept time by the beat of a foot on a pedal drum.

by Lara Sunday

Biography

Lara Sunday is an East Belfast based poet whose recent poems explore her experience of studying Irish through the lens of contested identities. More generally her work reflects her interests in nature, food and sex and the places where these topics intersect. Lara runs 'The Poetry Review – Tullycarnet Library', a monthly poetry evening dedicated to the encouragement of poetry reading and the use of local libraries in Northern Ireland. Lara won the Bangor Poetry Competition 2014 by public vote and has been published in FourXFour Poetry Journal, Derry Post, Lagan online and Bushmill's Whiskey and Words 2018. An active member of Women Aloud NI, Purely Poetry and the FSNI showcases, she won a scholarship to the John Hewitt International Summer School in 2015. Lara was one of the readers at Lá Idináisiúnta na mBan held at Mansion House, Dublin on the 8th March celebrating International Women's Day. Concurrently, Lara is a full time Social Anthropology student at Queen's University whose thesis work examines the impact the Irish language has on Protestant Irish language learners

Pushing Nines

The bins haven't been put out for three weeks.
Everyone knows he's home.
That's what you get
with cheap insulation.
More than you bargained for.
Wet rags slapped against stone;
dirty laundry beaten clean, each thick smack
counts out a rhythm:
one, two, three, four,
wife dragged like a dead leg
across the bedroom floor,
and I can't sleep. I push
nines on my phone, press it to my cheek
but I cannot speak. I cannot speak,
and the rubbish is piling high like a pyre
and I wonder if he thinks about tossing her there
like a rag doll, or an odd sock,
or a punctured tyre.
I'm pushing nine, nine, nines
pressing them against my cheek
and if I could just speak,
someone with kind hands could wrap her
in honey-coloured cotton,
and unpick the stitches
where her mouth used to be
so she could say something.

by Seanín Hughes

Biography

Seanín Hughes is an emerging poet from County Tyrone who will shortly commence study of BA Hons English with Ulster University as a mature student. Seanín was first published on Poethead in July 2017 and was selected for the Crescent Arts Centre's Poetry Jukebox, launched in October 2017. She has work published or forthcoming both online and in print, including *Banshee: A Literary Journal*, *The Blue Nib*, *A New Ulster* and NI Community Arts Partnership's *Poetry In Motion* anthology. Seanín was a shortlistee for the Seamus Heaney Award for New Writing, 2018.

My Son Loves to Urinate Outside

This morning he came down late as it is a Sunday,
passed where I was sitting with coffee and a book
and opened the back door. Instantly the room was filled
with the tropical sounds of bird cries and rain, patters
and laden drips which fall and land, disintegrate, satisfied
on the earth. I look from where he stands at the threshold
aiming for the drain, to the window – to the drab drizzle
and low browed sky, to the vase on the sill with the blossom branch
carefully placed but now turning from petal to leaf.
There is nothing in this view which indicates the joy
and fecundity my son has unleashed, but he finishes,
shuts the door, and pads back the way he had come.

by Emma McKervey

Biography

Emma McKervey's debut collection *The Rag Tree Speaks* was published by the Doire Press in Autumn 2017. She has been a member of Women Aloud since its first events for International Women's Day and has taken part in many of their readings. Her writing has been shortlisted for the Irish Poem of the year at the Irish Book Awards, the FSNi National Poetry Competition, and the Seamus Heaney Prize for New Writing. Her work is studied by QUB post grad translation research students in their world wide online community.

Reflections

I thought cameras were never going to catch on. People had perfectly good memories. Why ruin the experience by adding a falsehood to it, with all the posing and waiting?

Now... I'm looking through the old album, annoyed that some of the snaps have faded with age and the faces have become almost unrecognisable.

My brain can't fill in the gaps, and I wish I had of taken better care of it. There's no one around to prompt me, anymore.

I thought cameras would never catch on.

I thought we'd live forever.

by Ellie Rose McKee

Biography

Ellie has been writing poetry and short stories since primary school and been blogging for ten-plus years. She has had a number of individual works published alongside others in anthologies and journals, has self-published some collections of poetry and short stories herself, and is currently seeking representation for her debut novel.

Frank

'So, you've just the one' you say. I don't flinch now
like I used to when your words would slice
and I would make an excuse to get away
to hate you — with your easy three.

A spark lit up my womb once, for enough time
to set us alight over names, what he'd look like
would he have his Father's curls or my sides teeth?
when there'd have to be a lock pulled.

When the spark died, I became so filled with loss
that my ovary (the one that swung to the left)
tried to fill the void by rearing a Frankenstein cyst on itself
'the size of an orange with teeth and hair' the surgeon said
after he'd cut Frank and the rebel leftie — out.

'So, you've just the one' you say. I don't flinch now
like I used to when your words would slice
and I would make an excuse to get away.
I just say 'yes' — like I had a choice.

by Patricia Bennett

Biography

Trish began writing to clear her head of shenanigans. She currently writes poetry, short stories and memoir. Several of her creatures have found homes in magazines and anthologies e.g. A New Ulster, Galway Review, CAP Poetry in Motion, Ireland's Own, The Leitrim Guardian, Number Eleven, Fermanagh Writers Anthologies and Beautiful Dragons Collaborations. She has read her poetry and memoir on BBC Radio Ulster. She is working on her first anthology of poetry.

Trish won the Leitrim Guardian 2018 & 2017 Literary Awards for poetry, was shortlisted for the North West Words/Donegal Creameries 2017 Poetry Award and long listed for the "Over the Edge 'New Writer of the Year Award" in 2013. She is a member of Women Aloud Northern Ireland. Find out more on 'Bennett's Babblings'.

Haikus for Eisenstein

In my nostrils
the smell of freshly cut grass
mingles with soot

rolling unhinged
a bale just stopped an inch
off the motorway

wild children on bikes
windmills stir the low sunshine
field, the brightest green

under wind turbines
black and white herd grazing
upside-down, slow grind

permanent posts
"Prepare to meet thy God"
- falling dominos

by Csilla Toldy

Biography

Csilla Toldy was born in Budapest. Her poems appeared in literary magazines and anthologies, in the UK, Ireland, Canada and Australia.

My caesarean mark never came to be

instead, you slowly erupted through the natural gap.
Your cap furry with down and inked of red,
my words from nowhere etched on you;
my call, being read and answered.
A gate, five barred and metal,
is open to hear your
melody and never
closed out of
light.

by Gaynor Kane

Biography

Gaynor Kane is a graduate of the Open University, with a BA (Hons) Humanities with Literature. She has had poetry published in the Community Arts Partnership's 'Poetry in Motion' anthology Matter and in online journals, such as: Atrium Poetry, The Galway Review and The Blue Nib. In 2016, Gaynor was a finalist in the annual Funeral Services NI poetry competition.

The Lamb

'See yon ewe yonder?' Old Joe pointed his blackthorn stick at a dozen identical sheep. 'Yon ewe was due to lamb, so I called into the barn late one night and sure she'd had her lamb, but it wasn't breathing. Still warm, it was, with phlegm stuck in its lungs. I'd to 'spell it.'

'Spell it?'

'Aye, you know, get it out.'

'Oh, expel it!'

'Aye, isn't that what I said?' He cleared his throat in a hefty cough and spat his earnings into the hedge. 'I lifted the lamb by the hoofs and swung it 'round my head to clear the lungs, but ach sure, I smacked its poor skull off the roof beam.'

Cringing, I imagined the sickening thud of the lamb's head.

'Did it die?'

'I thought so and left it there.' Joe drew a breath. 'Went back the next day – there was that wee lamb, a-hop, skippin' and a-jumpin' round the byre!'

'No way!'

Joe looked pleased and patted his woollen sweater covering his midriff.

'You saved the wool for the sweater?'

He looked at me like I was mad. 'No! Easter Sunday dinner, what better than the lamb that came back from the dead?'

by Byddi Lee

Biography

Byddi Lee grew up in Armagh and moved to Belfast to study at Queen's University. She has since lived in South Africa, Canada, California and Paris before returning to live in her hometown, Armagh. She has published flash fiction, short stories and, in 2014, her novel, *March to November*. She is currently working on a trilogy that starts in Armagh in the near future, where the elderly have suddenly begun to get younger with devastating consequences. Byddi also blogs about life, both at home and abroad called, "We didn't come here for the grass." Author website - www.ByddiLee.com

Christmas

I am in a room filled with glitter and plastic. A lady hands me a hot drink. I spit it out. There is a green plastic tree with lights on. I have never seen this woman who tucks me in a blanket. I sit in an armchair by a fire, which is not real. I long for my wife and darling daughter. This woman hugs me; cries; calls me daddy. "I do not know you", I say as I push her away. I am afraid of the blank faced children who come into the room with screens which pop and whirr. They laugh but not with each other. A boy says, "Grandpa's weird". My cheeks are wet and the woman pushes my hand away and says, "don't be silly daddy". I want to go back to the nursing home. It is lonely. My Martha is not there but my slippers are.

by Wilma Kenny

Biography

Wilma Kenny graduated from Queen's University in 1978 with a degree in English and Psychology. Her poetry and short stories have been published. Wilma has worked as a freelance journalist. In 2014 she was joint runner up in the Trocaire and Poetry Ireland poetry competition and was 2nd in Carers UK creative writing competition (poetry section) 2014. She was published in the recent anthology *Washing Windows* published by Arlen House and in 2016 had a short story published in the *London Journal of Fiction*. More recently in 2018 she has been published in *The Open Ear* and *Answer the Call* (Whiskey and Words).