

The Bangor Literary Journal

Issue 7 - February 2019



Featuring poet Kevin Higgins, writer and journalist Malachi O'Doherty, artist Siuban Regan. Plus, exceptional poetry, flash fiction, reviews, art and photography from our contributors.

Editors' Welcome

Welcome to issue 7 of The Bangor Literary Journal. We are delighted to bring you yet again another wonderful journal full of exceptional poetry, flash fiction, art, photography and reviews.

In this issue you will find interviews with our featured poet Kevin Higgins; our featured writer Malachi O'Doherty and our featured artist Siuban Regan.

2019 will see us take on a quarterly format; allowing for longer submission periods. Thank you to everyone who supported us in our first year of The Bangor Literary Journal- we could not have done this without you.

Now all you have to do is relax and enjoy!

Amy and Paul

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Anne Walsh Donnelly lives in Castlebar, Co. Mayo. Her work has been published in various literary magazines such as Hennessey New Writing in The Irish Times (July 2018), Crannog, Boyne Berries and The Blue Nib. Her poems have been highly commended in the OTE New Writer of the Year Award (2017&2018). She won The Blue Nib Spring 2018 poetry chapbook competition. Her debut chapbook "The Woman With An Owl Tattoo" will be published in May 2019 by Fly On The Wall Poetry Press.



Sweet Valhalla

Every night, I sip warm cocoa,
ask Matthew, Mark, Luke and John
to bless the bed I lie on.

Every night I dream
of iron axes,
wooden shields,
clash of steel blades.

Thundery showers of arrows
blood slicks on my cheeks,
bodies cluttering a battlefield.

I dream of lying strapped
on a slab of oak
in a tent full of the scent
of burning pitch and skin.

Dying wails of men,
clink of enemy tankards
as a chief raises his hatchet.
“Take me to Valhalla.”

He bears down, cracks my skull,
raises the hatchet again
splits my chest bone,
thrusts the weapon into my limp hand.
“Save your tribe now.”

Every night I dream,
I grip that hatchet,
hack at his trunk,
grab his intestines
and fling them at his men.

Every morning I wake
swallow the lumpy porridge
the care assistant
shoves into my mouth.

by Anne Walsh Donnelly

I loved you from the day

your heart stuttered to a stop
as you sat in the Cusack stand
and your tribesmen lifted Liam's cup.

I loved you from the day
I inserted a sliothar into your stiff
left hand, a Hurley in your right.

I loved you from the day
your cold lips
tasted like stale tobacco.

I loved you from the day
your ashes lay in a goal mouth,
your breath mixed with the September breeze.

I loved you from the day
I sat in your seat watching
another All-Ireland Final,

Shefflin scored the winning goal,
crowds roared and a ghost's hand
clapped me on the back.

by Anne Walsh Donnelly



Grief

At the moment, I'm exploring different tangents on the idea of absence and presence, through still life and the poetry of objects, and the sometimes overwhelming metaphors in nature - which is where this image sits. I work with 35mm film and digital photography, finding a beauty in both.

Ruth McKee is a writer, reviewer, singer-songwriter and photographer. Nominated for Hennessy New Irish Writer 2018 you can read her work in The Irish Times, The Lonely Crowd, The Honest Ulsterman, The Incubator and elsewhere. Recent photography appears in The HCE Review and Pidgeonholes.

Kerry Buchanan

Flash Fiction

Kerry Buchanan is a retired vet, stable hand, carer and dreamer who wrote her first novel in 2014. Since then, she has had short stories published both online and in print and has occasionally been lucky enough to win prizes – and the competitions weren't even fixed. She writes science fiction, fantasy, and crime.

Short stories published online ([Kraxon Magazine](#)), in print magazines (e.g. Ireland's Big Issue), and printed anthologies (see Amazon Author Page, above). I have been successful in several competitions, including 2nd place in Skypen (Blackstaff Press's competition for new writers, now defunct), and runner-up in Haynet/Lavender and White's equestrian-themed short story competition, as well as winner of the 2015 Special Submissions Window for Kraxon Magazine with [The Survivor](#) and third place in Kraxon Magazine's short story of the year competition in 2014 with [Soul Ship](#). Recent publications include Matchgirls in the Bangor Literary Journal, and I have a short story, Space Rocks, accepted for an upcoming anthology, diStaFF, published by a co-operative of female SFF writers. I will also be reading my short piece, Only a Clockwork Heart, in January at Armagh Flash Fiction.



Dementia Tremens

"What am I doing tomorrow?" Dad asks for the seventh time in the three minutes I've been with him. "Is it the day centre?" He likes the day centre. Feels safe there.

"No," I say again, counting out his tablets. "You have a free day tomorrow. You can do whatever you like."

I would bite back the last sentence, if I could. He *liked* to drive himself places, to work outside in the garden, to hold hands with Mum. Instead he'll be sitting in his chair all day, reading the Daily Mail and watching the BBC 24-hour news, same as nearly every other day.

His watery eyes smile at me as if he reads my mind, then they drift to his diary. "Am I doing anything tomorrow?"

With a puzzled frown, he slides backwards into his memories. Not from today or yesterday but from nearly seventy years ago, when he was pinned down in a river ambush in the Malayan jungle, watching his best friend's blood swirl downstream. It is more real to him than me, his daughter, standing in his kitchen with the little cup of pills that keep him alive.

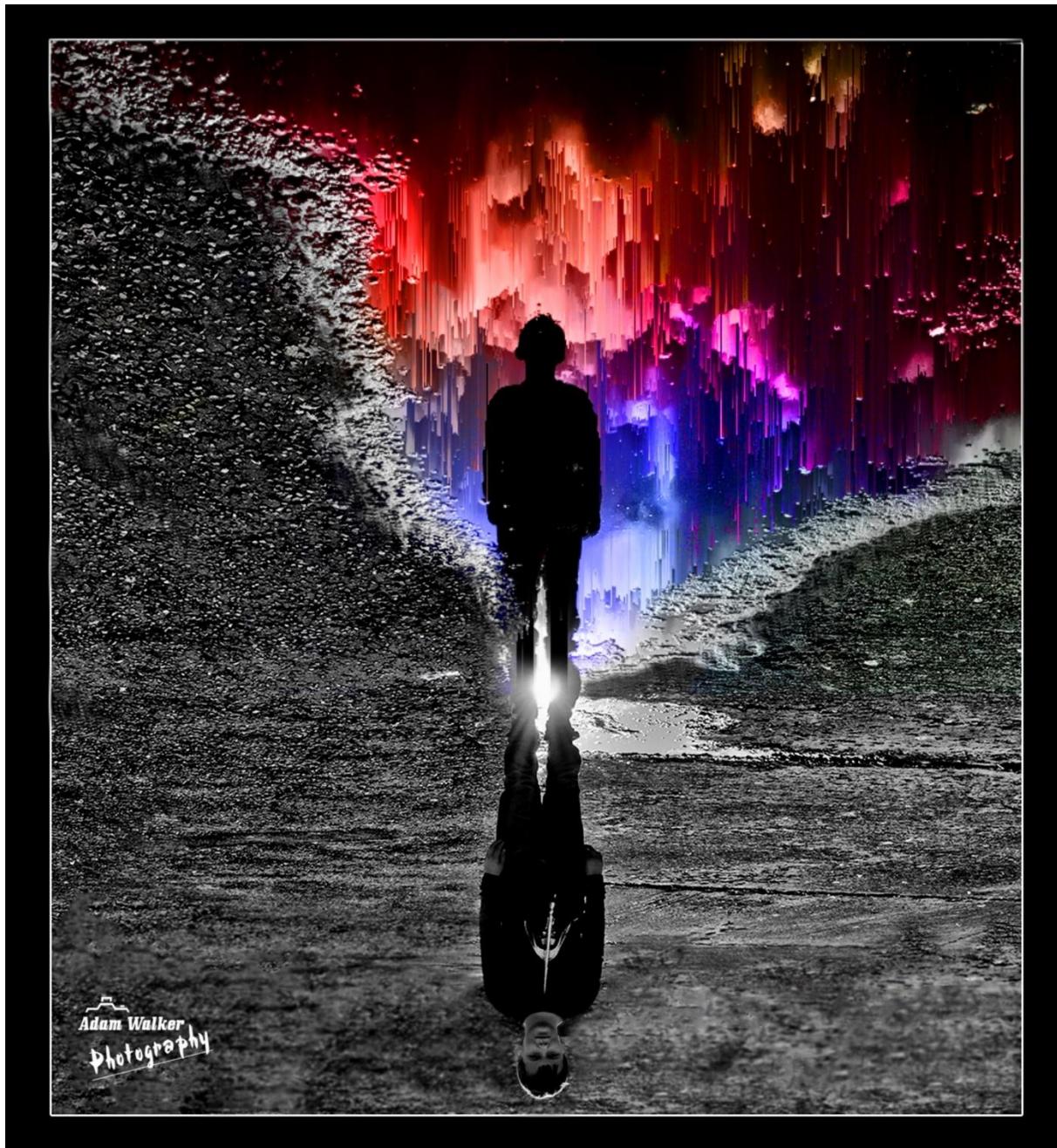
Keep him tied to the nightmares.

by Kerry Buchanan



The Sheep on a Bridge

The sheep on the bridge was taken on a recent drive up the north coast and was just a very lucky capture.



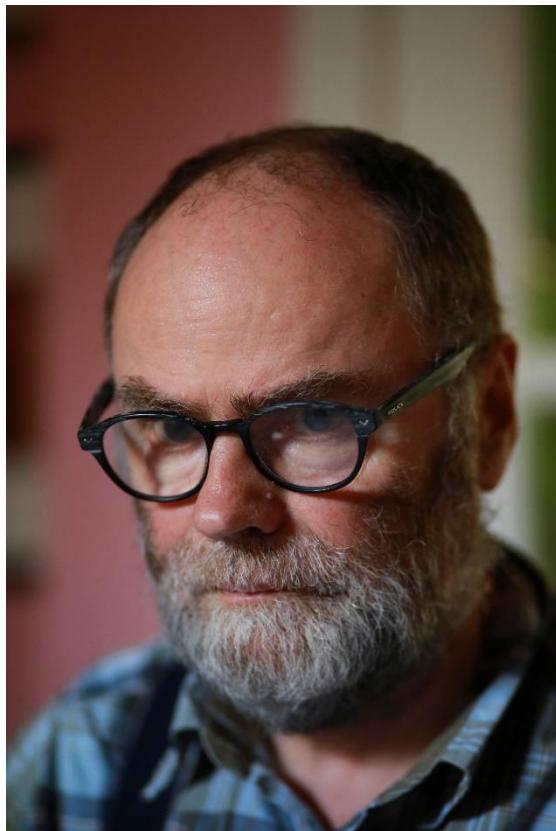
The Sky is Falling

The sky is falling was a pic of my son Luka that I played around with using a few phone apps.

Adam Walker is a (very) Amateur photographer from Bangor who loves to spend time on the PC playing with his photo's. His work is probably less photography and more Photoshop art. You can see more of his stuff and contact him on AdamWalkerPhotography on Facebook or @adam_walker_photography on Instagram.

Featured Writer

Malachi O'Doherty



Photograph by Paul McErlane

Malachi O'Doherty is a writer and journalist living in Belfast. He is the author of seven published books with more to come. His most recent was a biography of Gerry Adams. The one before that was a celebration of cycling: *On My Own Two Wheels*. Malachi writes memoir, political and cultural analysis and, he says, experiments in poetry and photography. Some of his illustrated poems are available on his YouTube channel.

He is married to the poet Maureen Boyle.

Malachi, thank you for taking the time to chat with us. Firstly, can you tell the readers a little bit about how you got into writing?

I was writing as a child and I always believed that writing was my vocation. I wrote poetry in a little notebook when I was in primary school. I made the mistake of showing the notebook to a teacher and he marked the poems as if they were homework for him, whereas I had thought of them as something specially my own.

In my teens I wrote funny pseudo memoir comic pieces and showed some to Chris Moore when he was editor of a youth paper called Thursday. He gave me a weekly column but I wasn't able to sustain it for more than a few months.

Then I took a training course in journalism and got my first job on the Sunday News in 1971. Later I started a journal and wrote for years about experiences and ideas. I think that probably did more for my development than anything else.

You are a multi-disciplinary writer; known widely for your journalism, memoir; and also, script-writing and poetry. Tell us a little bit about these. Do you have a favourite genre to work in?

I like writing memoir stories. I enjoy performing these also and have done many times on radio and quite often now as a regular at Tenx9, a storytelling forum that meets monthly in the Black Box.

But I also like writing other people's stories through journalism. The difficult tension in my writing is between telling stories and extrapolating ideas. I think the join between the narratives and the analysis is a bit clunky in some of my books but that I am getting better at that. The editor of my next book has remarked on how well I do that. That's the best thing he could have said.

Do you feel that crossing generic boundaries is easy to do, or do you have to put different hats on, depending on what you are undertaking?

It is all play. Some work that I do is more playful, less serious than others. And play is learning.

I managed to keep up commentary writing alongside reportage, and that was long considered improper in the BBC. I would never have got away with it as a member of staff.

Currently, the playful side for me is writing and recording sonnets as soundtracks to photo slide shows. I am acquiring skills which hopefully will later go into expressing more serious thoughts.

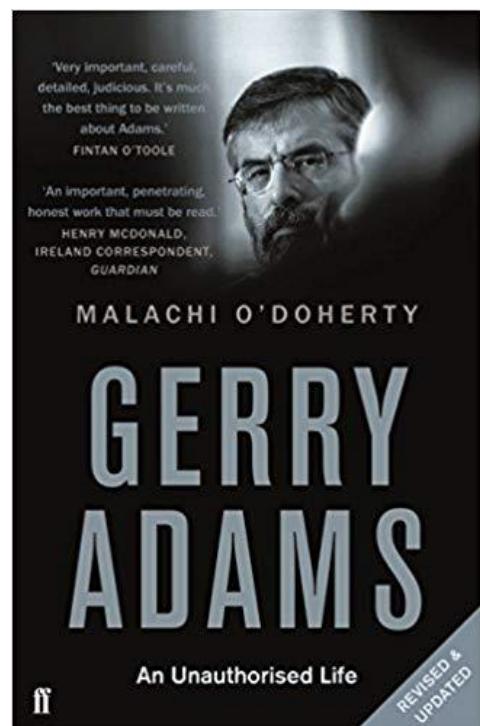
Looking back over your successful career, what is/are the biggest highlight/s?

A big highlight - in terms of pats on the head - was being made writer in residence at Queen's. Another was getting the Major Award from the Arts Council. But the real highlights are just getting books published or commissioned.

Recently you released your book 'Gerry Adams: An Unauthorised Life'. Tell us a little about this.

Gerry Adams is an enigma, a man with an enormous ego who loves being in the public domain yet has dark secrets. I am intrigued by that tension and how he manages it. I suspect he just blanks out the past and disowns all responsibility for carnage.

I also feel that we have some similarities in background, the same generation, the same type of schooling, the same inclination to write. I think he has compromised his writing talent for propaganda purposes and that he might have been a great writer or journalist if he had not done that. I expect he thinks he took the right course.



Finally, Malachi, what have you got in the pipe line? Have you any plans or upcoming events that you would like to tell the readers about?

My next book comes out in the summer with Atlantic. It looks at the changes in Northern Ireland over the fifty years since the start of the Troubles, recognising that there has been a social and cultural revolution.

And my Major Award is to fund research for a book on Margaret Noble, a Northern Irish woman who, like me, lived under the tutelage of a Hindu Guru and became one of the founders of the Indian nationalist movement. I will be revisiting my own Indian experience. I lived there for four years in my 20s as a disciple of a guru before I managed to shake him off.

Blogs:

[Writer's Log](#)

[The Street](#)

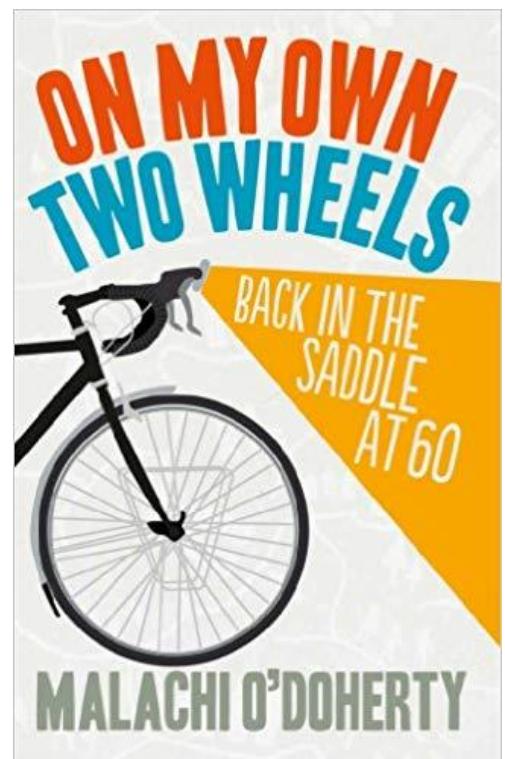
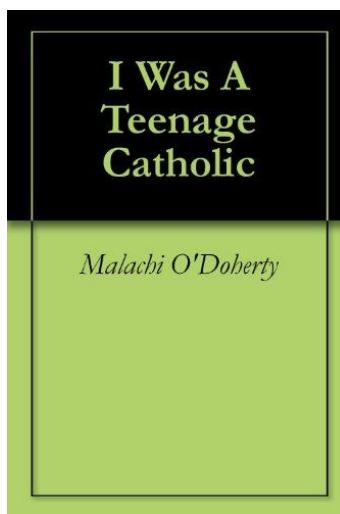
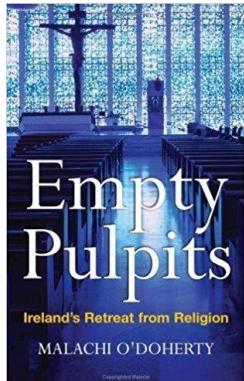
[Malachi With An Eye](#) (photography site)

[mal.pics](#)

[On My Own Two Wheels](#)

[Pictures of Writers](#)

[Books:](#) available on Amazon.



Saving the Day

It was a Saturday afternoon in term time. I had little duties around *The Legion of Mary*, that might bring me back to the school on a weekend.

Sometimes my Legion duty was to make posters for the classroom wall, exhorting my fellow pupils to give up something for Lent or to pray for the conversion of Russia.

There were other people at the school that day. They were organising a Gaelic football match and they were in a quandary. Some of the players had not turned up.

They had played the first half but now, with injuries or send offs, or whatever it is that reduces the size of a team - how would I know? - they were so many men short that they would have to scrap the game if they couldn't at least find one more.

So Brother Quinlan asked me for a favour. Would I go to a house in Ramoan Gardens and tell Paul somebody or other to hurry down to the school so that they could make up the minimum requirement for a team for an important game.

Paul's wee sister answered the door and said: He's not in. He's working with my daddy. Was it just my imagination that saw her glancing behind herself to check with someone in the living room that she had got the story right.

It looked as if the game was going to be cancelled, and it was starting to rain.

The boys who had already played a half were probably losing interest anyway. How could they not? I would.

The afternoon was dragging on.

There were civilians there, men from outside the school, men who didn't know me, who in their ignorance were capable of seeing me in a light in which no one else ever had.

One of them had a suggestion. Why don't we just put a jersey on this wee lad and send him out?

He doesn't play at that level, said Brother Quinlan, basic decency restraining him from stating the facts more plainly in front of me.

Well, it's either that or we all go home.

Brother Quinlan mulled over this. Would the school be more disgraced by fielding me than by losing the match by default, not having produced a full team?

He may also have been constrained by christian compassion, considering the humiliation I would suffer and the physical danger.

Come here, child, he said. Let me go through this with you. It's just about making up numbers. He held my upper arm in a tight clasp and I don't know if this was meant to be supportive and a comfort or if he was checking if there was any muscle there at all.

He took me, not to the dressing rooms, but to the Principal's office and he gave me a smelly team jersey to put on over my shirt. 'You'll be cold', he said. I kept on my own trousers - short legged at that age, 14 - and my own shoes, for there were no boots to fit me. Then one of the civilians spoke kindly to me. He crouched down to my level and said, 'you're saving the day.'

Brother Quinlan had briefed him on my negligible skill level.

The man said, Just don't touch the ball.

Leave it to the others.

If it comes near you, run away from it.

So the teams filed out, me with my school, onto an all weather pitch, thought then to be the very height of sports technology. It was a kind of porous tarmac covered in fine grit.

None of this had seemed real until I was there among the other boys, all of them frisky and shouty.

We were more exposed to the wind and the rain.

Was this really necessary? I was thinking I could have stood in the bicycle sheds and contributed as much from there. But no, I had to be on the pitch.

Nor did I realise the power I had. I had only to walk off the pitch and the whole match would stop. That kind of thinking was beyond me.

The other boys, eager for the clash, eyed me with perplexity and disdain.

You'd have thought they would have been a bit more grateful.

I assumed they had been let in on the plan, that they knew that my presence was purely - a technical matter. But what if they hadn't?

And then the whistle blew and they were at it, running and bumping into each other, thumping that leather ball - it did look awful heavy - roaring and spitting.

Working out notions they'd picked up from the fathers about how it is to be a man.

Seamy!

Here Seamy.

Seamy!

Fuck you, Seamy.

And I stood there, getting wetter and colder.

Occasionally the ball bounced towards me and the lads of the two teams came thundering after it, tugging at each other, ramming shoulders, shouting, and I did what I was asked to do for the good of the team and the school; I got out of the way.

I dreaded them all bearing down on me,
bundling on top of me, puffing, spluttering and farting,
their rough dirty knees and elbows,
the weight of them

There was one scary moment when I had mistimed and somebody was shouting, Mark that man! Nobody's marking that man!

I had caused some alarm by trotting about a little to warm up.

They were almost on top of me; their groins, their faces close to me, bad breath and sweat.

I just fled to the side of the pitch, as far away from the ball as I could get. And that thundering clutter of bodies reeking of a foul cocktail of every pubescent stench.

But a boy did come over to mark me, a stocky fella with curly blond hair. Wild nippy, I said, glad of someone to talk too.

But he was lepping about the place, ready to bounce on me any time I moved. But I didn't even try to match him in attention or urgency. I was a poor dance partner. He soon worked out that I was moving away from the action, not towards it, where he wanted to be, so he ran off and left me alone again.

For these boys , this was pleasure. I could comprehend none of it.

I don't remember who won. I don't even remember for sure which team I was playing for. But I had at least allowed the match to proceed and Brother Quinlan and the civilians were grateful, though not grateful enough to send me home with a half crown in my pocket.

While the other lads went back to the changing rooms for rowdy banter and whatever they did in the showers I was taken to the principal's office where a two bar electric fire warmed the room in readiness for me.

There one of the civilians helped me off with the smelly wet jersey and I scrubbed my head and my legs dry with a dank towel.

I told my mum that I had just played for the school, that I had saved the day.

Yes, dear, she said. You've missed Dr Who. Your dinner's in the oven.

by Malachi O'Doherty

Gary Liggett

Poetry

Gary Liggett is an English film-maker, writer and poet. He was born near the banks of the River Mersey, from where he once sailed across the Irish Sea in a boat built with his father. His work is held in permanent collections, including the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Wordsworth Trust, England. He lives sustainably on a Cumbrian smallholding with his wife and family.



The Lambing Shed

Her body pushes
twisted hooves, tenderly

into the night. Lamplight
shedding warmth on a sac;

or a lamb's head? Who
knows what springs

from nativity, or why
owls began calling across

mist-rolling meadows
at this hour? Sometimes

the future bounds clumsily
over the past. Imprecisely.

So this is the place, far from
the Ferryman of Hades,

where old souls are reborn
onto this simple bed of straw.

Waxing Moon in Aries, 2017

by Gary Liggett

Órla Fay is the editor of Boyne Berries. Recently her poetry has appeared in Honest Ulsterman, The Ogham Stone, Quarryman, Three Drops from a Cauldron, Red Lines, Hennessy New Irish Writing in the Irish Times, Cyphers and is forthcoming in Poetry Ireland Review. She has been shortlisted for the Over the Edge New Writer of the Year 2018 Competition and Highly Commended in The Jonathan Swift Creative Writing Awards 2018 for poetry. In 2017 she had poems shortlisted in The Red Lines Book Festival Poetry Competition and The Dermot Healy International Poetry Award. <http://orlafay.blogspot.ie>



The Bench

Dalgan Park, January 2019

I tried to write about the bench before –
late last spring when the daffodils were in full sway
bobbing their gold heads in Wordsworthian unison
as I trod rhythmically on the path
alongside the river, The Gabhra and Skane conjoined,
hurtling under the cement bridge and the steel footbridge
to meet The Boyne. I had tried to write a story
about the pew but discovered I hadn't much to say.
It is a resting point on the estate, beneath Hazel trees
that drip leafy branches and kernels of lore in early autumn,
a point to watch bronze sheaves of hay being baled
from, in July. Friesian cows amble by when the pasture is green
and drink from the always full trough of piped water.
I see people stopping there as on a cinema screen;
families with toddlers and buggies, couples who seal
the spot with a kiss, and old-age folk gasping for breath,
their knees buckling, their hands clasping a walking stick.
I sit on the bench in silence now, the river is gushing below
the reeds and in the greater distance cars are whizzing
on the motorway, the N3 from Cavan to Dublin.
Retracing the water there is a weir, whereon a heron
surveys its reflection and any passer-by warily
from the far side of the bank, a bulging vine reaches over.
The sanctuary is to wildlife and a cathedral to all
who come to walk in the woods, to seek solace in ablution,
to know the secret harmony of nature in their hearts,
to pacify the mind fractured by chaos.

by Órla Fay

Sheila Scott is a hybrid writer-scientist who most enjoys turning idle thoughts into short narratives and illustrative doodles. She is a University of Glasgow MLitt graduate and has been published in Causeway, Cabinet of Heed, FlashBack Fiction, Poetic Republic, Qmunicate and shortlisted for Arachne Press Solstice Shorts. She also helps lead New Writing Showcase Glasgow and has an intermittently hyperactive Twitter account under @MAHenry20.



Decorum Est

The medal sits on a velvet plinth in the museum display cabinet. It faces upward as people pass by. Occasionally they cast a glance its way but keep moving, moving.

It lies still. The shine of the gold disc has tarnished, its emblazoned patriotism dulled with truth and experience. The ribbon, intended to decorate a heart beating hard with the rhythm of war, hangs over silence. The edges of the precious braid are worn and damaged and the colours drained. Fatigue has thinned and finally broken the pin between ribbon and medal.

A card reads 'Posthumously awarded'.

by Sheila Scott

Glenn Robinson graduated from Queen's University, Belfast with a BA in Scholastic Philosophy and an MA in Theory, Culture and Identity. Glenn has individual poems and short stories published in regional and thematic collections. In 2016, his story *The Onion Ceremony* was included by Scottish Book Trust in their *Secrets and Confessions* anthology. He is a regular contributor to *Bleeding Ink*, a pamphlet produced by Edinburgh New Writers. Edinburgh has been Glenn's home since 2011. He lives with his wife Mhari and daughter Sally.



Linger

A name of a stranger lingers, in a smokeless pub, up on the High Street.

Half pissed, I walk along the coastal path from Bangor to Strickland's Glen, remembering what I've read.

Below the tarmac, history's exploits are hidden from view in a cave. Waves crash against broken rocks, still sitting, mostly unmoved and unchanged after hundreds of years.

There is no longer any smuggling.

Jenny Watt's voice is unheard and no longer remembered. Echo has given up her ghost. Now with a pub named after her and framed words articulating her life for the punters, I wonder what will become of me.

What does legacy mean? A list of activity, friends, families and associates, do not tell my story. They are mere blocks and pebbles, rubbing up against each other, only giving a sense of things.

If I dissolve in the rain, no one will know me in one hundred years. I've been drinking, three nights a week for a decade, There has been erosion from the inside.

So I decide to leave, to start afresh.

I reach a shingle beach and pick up a rock. I carry it hundreds of miles away.

by Glenn Robinson

Angela Graham is a writer and documentary-maker, currently working on a novel set in Northern Ireland. Her poetry appeared in The Bangor Literary Journal, The Open Ear, Infinite Rust, The Honest Ulsterman, The North, Poetry Wales, The Works.



The Saint Sets Out

Was it at night he launched the boat?
The surf was sound,
Thudding, thrashing, arriving, arriving
And he mad to be gone.
Was he a stern commander of his men:
Jerking a slack rope taut,
Skewing a too-straight line;
Or was he the silent type:
Hunched at the prow,
Stinting his energy from tasks
That could as well be done by any,
Knowing himself to be
The only crucial compass for them all?
Whichever, the sea was wide
And the boat small.
The lamp at the masthead swaggered crazily,
A spangle, hoist to light a vaulted dome.
The sea, un-seeable, was chaos, roaring,
Nothing stable but a few stars:
Blasé observers
Of all this casting-off and letting go.

In bone-tight cold and swingeing spray
Those on the wind-skinned strand
Watched a departure into black –
No wake, no skyline –
But when the voices shredded
As the sea swung in behind them
Then (since in darkness any light is Light)
The eyes who sought made out an ensign:
The boat itself become a buoyant star.

by Angela Graham

When the Saint Wavered

At the last moment
He took a small stone with him to the boat,
Roughly round, a solid talisman.
Dry beach, it said among the waves,
Powder; desert; firm, un-tilting mass; stanchion; plumb-drop ...
An un-staunch'd litany:
Praise of the parched or steady
At every touch.

When, after many days, he knew (they knew, all knew)
That they were at a loss,
He weighed in his palm
His last-of-land.
He felt their anxious, trusting eyes
And let his pumice Jonah go
Over the side.

That night in drifting sleep he heard
A hunter among leaves:
In the pursuit of love, beloved,
You have to risk the throw.
Loser takes all.
With nothing left to hold, be held.

He woke among veils of drizzle, grey as dust,
And the sound of birds:
Their first landfall.

by Angela Graham

Featured Poet

Kevin Higgins



Kevin Higgins's *Song of Songs 2.0: New & Selected Poems* was published in 2017 by Salmon. The *Stinging Fly* magazine has described Kevin as "likely the most read living poet in Ireland. His poems have been quoted in *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Times* (UK), *The Independent*, *The Daily Mirror*, *Hot Press* magazine, on *Tonight With Vincent Browne* and read aloud by film director Ken Loach at a political meeting in London. Kevin's eighth poetry collection, *Sex and Death at Merlin Park Hospital*, will be published by Salmon Poetry in June.

Kevin, we are delighted to chat with you. What made you delve into writing, and in particular, poetry?

When I started writing, in late 1995 and 1996, I wrote everything: a couple of short plays, a novel (or what I thought was a novel), even a couple of screen-plays. But I have a short attention span and I think, in a way, poetry can be said to suit such a temperament. I did learn a huge amount from trying the other forms, in particular how to incorporate wit and humour into my writing. Before I tried the other forms, the first few poems I wrote were somewhat overwhelmed by their own gloom. They were the sort of poetry that might have emerged if Rick the peoples' poet from The Young Ones had tried his hand at re-writing the lyrics of Joy Division.

You are most prominently known for your satirical poetry. What draws you to write in this particular style?

I come from a family many of whom had/have a savage turn of phrase. My paternal grandfather, my dad, my mom all had a knack for a quick put down and, particularly in the case of my mother, a keen sense of the absurd; though she might not have known what it exactly meant, she had it. I have inherited that and just happen to be the first member of my family, that I'm aware of, to write poetry. None of my family were literary people. All my ancestors were small farmers in County Galway and I think I have inherited some of the fabulous belligerence that goes with that particular mindset. They were people with fantastic hates; they didn't "get over things". I'm like that to. And it provides me with much of my material. It may take me a decade for me to find a way of taking down one of my enemies in a poem, but generally speaking they get (metaphorically) 'done in' eventually. Apart from that, I find much about the world we live in ridiculous and hypocritical. I still remember the day, when I was about six years old, when our substitute teacher at Sacred Heart School in Coventry explained to the class the meaning of the word 'hypocrite'. It was a fateful day!

The Stinging Fly described you as 'likely the most widely read poet living in Ireland'. Why do you think your work has the ability to connect with so many people?

I think to a certain extent it's a case of right time, right place. I started writing poetry in the mid-to-late nineties in an effort to get away from politics having been an active member of the Militant Tendency from the age of 15 until I was 27. Obviously, my attempt to escape politics has been nowhere near as successful as I hoped. But back in 1996 things were very different. Now, everything seems dramatically political and, for the past few years, something most experts didn't expect seems to happen every other day. The fact that I am able to respond with topical poems on public issues, and have had more than a decade to hone my style, makes this a good time for me as a poet. Also, there is the huge factor of the internet. I have a number of (mostly non-literary) on-line publications in Ireland, the UK, and the US to which I regularly send topical poems. These poems are read by at least hundreds and often thousands of people outside of the usual narrow poetry-world circle. To be honest, I would not see the point in sending a satire on the absurdities of identity politics, or

Leo Varadkar, or President Donald Duck, or the soon-to-be late Theresa May to a traditional print literary magazine in which it would be read by, at most, a couple of hundred people, if even that. The other big advantage I have is the slightly skewed view my political background gives me of recent events. Most Irish poets seem to me to be vague liberals of the Archbishop of Canterbury/Michelle Obama/Michael D. Higgins variety. I am not a liberal but still my own (pretty idiosyncratic) kind of Marxist and think the political establishment deserve pretty much every kick they've had over the past few years. I don't feel sorry for them. This world view marks me out from the 'why-doesn't-anyone-ever-think-of-the-children brigade', which I think is a huge advantage in the current context in which so many literati are running around pretending to be political, because they think it's the thing to do.

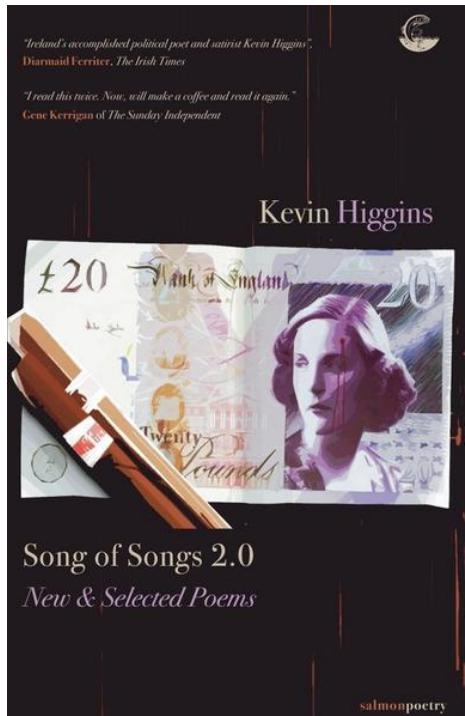


You run the highly successful 'Over the Edge' events in Galway. Can you tell the readers a little bit about these?

They were the brainchild of my wife Susan Millar DuMars. She thought that there was a terrible lack of proper platforms for writers in the middle stage, who had begun to publish or attend workshops (or writers' groups) but had yet to publish a book. It has been a huge success. Sixteen years of well attended readings. In 2013 Salmon published the anthology Over The Edge – The First Ten Years which included work by 47 writers who had published a first book since being a Featured Reader at one of our Over The Edge: Open Readings in Galway City Library. This idea of Susan's has probably done more for more emerging Irish writers than any other initiative this century. No doubt when she dies they will name a small cul-de-sac after her.

Why do you think it is important that poets should read their work aloud?

Because to me poetry is both a written and a spoken art. Hearing a poet read her or his work aloud bring the words to life – for better or for worse – in a new way. The poem read aloud or performed doesn't supersede the poem on the page; it complements it. It's also a way of giving a poem a test-drive. I love poetry readings of all sorts. But I have no time for those who try to hide the fact that they're too lazy, or egocentric, to do things like attend workshops - to try and make their poems as good as they could be - by writhing around a stage in a pair of second-hand PVC pants or pretending to be working class when they're not.



Kevin, you have published four collections of poetry. What have the biggest challenges and the biggest highlights of this successful poetic career?

The biggest challenge, always, is to just keep going. And it's a challenge which never goes away. I become quite neurotic if I haven't written a poem in a couple of weeks; thankfully, of late, I've been writing a lot. Another challenge is to make a sustainable life for yourself with poetry at the centre of it. Myself and Susan have faced that challenge by totally immersing ourselves in the business of teaching all kinds of workshops. We do it in our own very freelance way. A big challenge of late has been to come to terms with the fact that the poetry establishment will never embrace me fully, at least not until after I'm safely dead. Because I'm not one of them, and they know it now. In a way I

take this as a compliment. In terms of highlights, I think the film director Ken Loach reading a section of one of my poems at a meeting in London this time last year would be up there. But also having poems quoted in The Daily Mirror and the Daily Telegraph. I was particularly chuffed to have one of my poems attacked by former David Cameron advisor Lord Danny Finkelstein in his column in The Times.

Before we leave you, can you tell us about what plans you have for 2019?

I am currently putting together my next poetry collection 'Sex and Death at Merlin Park Hospital' which will be published by Salmon in June.

To buy Kevin's books:

<https://www.salmonpoetry.com/bookshop-search.php>

Kevin's Blog: <http://mentioningthewar.blogspot.com>

Kevin's Twitter @KevinHpoet1967

Diary of an Absurdist

This is not the usual route I'd take
to the place I never go.

I spend the holidays I don't have
listening to the albums
John Lennon would've made,
if he hadn't been shot.

My head's full of ways
back down mountains
I never intend to climb.

Anytime you want to talk
call me on the telephone
I just had disconnected.

I was once made violently ill
by a cheese-steak
I plan to one day eat.

I'm a big fan of the books
Paulo Coehlo didn't live to write.

Come see me Christmas morning
for some eggnog and sauerkraut.
I'll definitely be out.

by Kevin Higgins

His Biography

after Iggy McGovern

From the brick he used to play with
in his first ever back garden
to the iPhone 8 on which one can pre-book
one's own funeral, and when necessary
the funerals of others.

From the black and white stray mom
he used to slide secret slices of ham
out the back window
to the giant orange Tom
who has his choice of rooms
and brie, pate, or raspberry jam.

From the black nurse
in whose massive arms
he didn't want to leave his sister
the day she rolled off the high bed
and didn't quite crack her turkey egg skull;
to eight years later finding himself
silently cheering as a Klansman
had his pale pink throat
exquisitely sliced down a timely back alley
during episode seven of Roots.

From the ten year old tossed out
in the corridor for presenting blank
homework copybooks
eleven weeks on the trot
to the developing bald patch
his American students insist
on calling "Professor".

From his granite neck
no politically motivated drill
or axe could grind a chip off
to the neck-brace he now wears
even during sex.

by Kevin Higgins

The Caint* World Festival of Literary Intercourse

This year's highlight: the alleged papist,
who denies everything (and more besides)
in conflagration with the retired pederast,
who was never exactly convicted of anything,
on the rickety main stage,
where so many of the greatest drawers down
of state aid in the history of literature
have of late been paraded. In the chair,
for what's hoped will be a wide ranging
and, at times, violent discussion
Professor Malcolm McArthur
of the University of Tullamore –
International Studies Department.
Each attendee is advised to bring
his or her own lump hammer.

To help keep your eyes ajar during
our more catastrophically dull events
we advise festival attendees not lucky enough to find
a sympathetic brothel to sob the afternoon away in,
to start taking odds, which emerging poet of which gender
will spend the night bouncing
up and down on the withered novelist
from Coupon, Pennsylvania.

Later, you can retire to our festival club;
watch a guy who seems to think you know who he is,
have a whiskey induced fit of roaring
about train strikes and how we need to get back
to James Joyce (the books, not the railway station
named after him). Or ask a woman you thought
might be Lionel Shriver the time
and realise when she looks at you as if
you'd just dipped your penis or,
if you're a woman, the nearest available penis
in her Long Island Iced Tea;
that she is in fact Literary Correspondent
of The Dawkey Episcopalian,
and didn't get where she isn't today
by telling the likes of you the time.

by Kevin Higgins

*“Caint” is Gaelic for talk. In days of yore school teachers would often shout at the children in their charge “Na bí ag caint” (Don’t be talking) and then beat them savagely with bamboo sticks about the hands if they disobeyed.

Iain Campbell

Poetry

Iain hated poetry at school but has since changed his mind. His poems are inspired by his love of the landscape and the sea, often intertwined with a tale of someone he has met, or a journey he has undertaken. 2018 has been a big year, marking his first steps into the world of published poetry, with work selected for the Bangor Literary Journal, the Blue Nib and Lagan Online. He is a regular entrant to the Bangor Poetry Competition, (runner up, 2014 and commended, 2018) and is a regular reader at the Open House Festival, Aspects Festival and Poetry NI's Friday nights.



Dunlewey's lament

When you walked, you walked
beneath the shadows of Errigal,
beside the stream that winds
serpent like, along the poison glen.
And when you danced,
all the girls of Moneybeg danced with you.

And that time the sexton rang the bell,
all Dunlewey knew it was your wedding day.
White cloudlet's drifted on the rushing sky,
the bog cotton nodded 'I do',
while mayflower drifted on the breeze,
confetti for a departing bride.

But no more your song
is carried on the mountain's wind;
no more the congregation stands in line,
no more the bell rings out in joy;
only the blackthorn drapes white veils
across its tumbled hedgerows.

For now the old church stands abandoned,
it's tower, a shaft of hollowed hope,
a shroud of grey and silver chaliced stone.
And yet it's spiritual fingers still stretch out
past those scudding clouds of doubt,
towards a sinner's hope.

by Iain Campbell

Painting on the strand

The narrowing day slid westward
in shallow arc across the bay,
where morning tide had pushed
winter's broken crust
in furrowed frown higher up the shore.

Years back they beached a trawler here,
and now it cannot float
but hunkers down within its mirror pool,
where rust red fractured edges
slip their rivets to pay the ocean's fee.

Today the ebb tide shrinks a canvas
tight across a driftwood frame,
it's easel, granite grey;
its silver wash dark streaked
where piebald cantered free.

While at the fag end of the strand,
across powder sand and salt dry kelp,
past a tango of tiptoe steps,
through the flotsam and the discard,
lies a twisted ragtime dress

and inside-out umbrella;
tattered black upon the ivory,
each a scrapbook memory
and every piece a remnant
of Vettriano's last summer waltz.

by Iain Campbell

Penny Blackburn

Poetry

Penny Blackburn lives in the North East of England and is a teacher by profession. As well as writing poetry she enjoys performing it 'off-page' as part of local open mic and spoken word events. She also writes short fiction and was the winner of the 2017 Story Tyne competition as well as being runner up in the Readers' Digest 100-word-story competition 2018.



Sailing

That box was our boat.
We sailed it to distant places
we had barely heard of,
could not have pointed out on any globe or map;
argued about the destination,
for to children
even imaginary journeys matter.

We roved the seas as pirates,
as kings or traders; not understanding
the link between a man's life
and a pineapple.

We took turns as captain, took
equal shares of any jetsam booty,
which we hoarded, buried,
refound, cast back.

Sometimes one of us would be Jesus,
with an abbreviated apostle band.
We claimed the abandoned scraps of nets,
lowered them over the wooden sides
to swirl, unfilled,
in barren waters.
Until we were told to be fishers of men –
sent off to spread the gospel
to mams and sisters over supper.

But on the day when the women waited,
hush-struck, static on the cobble pier,
we waited with them; until the word came.
Then we followed a different box
through the lych gate, under the yew arch
to waveless ground.

So we left off our box boat voyages,
sensing that the tide of play was turning.
Seeing the faces of our fathers,
stone blocked as they stooped,
scooped a handful of soil before they sailed;
an earthy talisman
to bring themselves back, salt-scarred,
to our fragile harbour.

by Penny Blackburn



Boots

Each year my daughters boots get bigger, while mine get more battered. We stand together by the cloud filled Lower Lough and reflect on life.



Snowy Footprints

Trish is a poet and photographer. She is currently working on her first poetry collection. Follow her at '[Bennett's Babblings](#)'

Antoni Ooto is a poet and flash fiction writer. His works have been published in *Red Eft Review*, *Ink Sweat & Tears*, *Young Ravens Literary Review*, *Front Porch Review*, *Amethyst Review*, *An Upstate of Mind and Palettes & Quills*. Antoni lives and works in upstate New York with his wife, writer/storyteller Judy DeCroce.



Burgundy Tree

I was always bent
on living a crooked life.

How old am I now?
How many storms have broken me?

Still,
searching out an opening,
twisting toward light.

I will not be dismissed by nature,
even now, half-gone...
two new shoots.

by Antoni Ooto

Dee was born in Londonderry and graduated from Leeds Trinity University with a degree in English and Media. She lived in Berkshire for 20 years, working as a Project Manager for a consumer-goods research agency. She returned to Northern Ireland in 2006 and works for a bereavement charity. She has had three flash fiction stories published by Reflex Fiction in 2017/18 and was longlisted for the 2018 Fish Flash Fiction Prize. The experience of growing up in a time of conflict, together with recent insights into bereavement and loss inspire her writing.



Sanctuary

She walks faster, following a group of tourists. They enter the West Door, their leader engaging the ticket clerk in conversation. She left the restaurant without her hand bag and slips between the red roped barrier. The vault resembles a giant animal carcass. She tilts her chin. Pink stone sprays from anchor points above cluster columns, formed from bamboo-like pillars. She bites her lip and glances at her wristwatch. It's hard to believe so little time has passed since she fled the kitchen.

Below the ranks of silver organ pipes, a choir is practising. Bookending the choir two mahogany lecterns are wreathed with poppies. The scarlet petals cascade and spill across the floor. A requiem fills the space. She doesn't think the words are in English, their edges blurred by the echo.

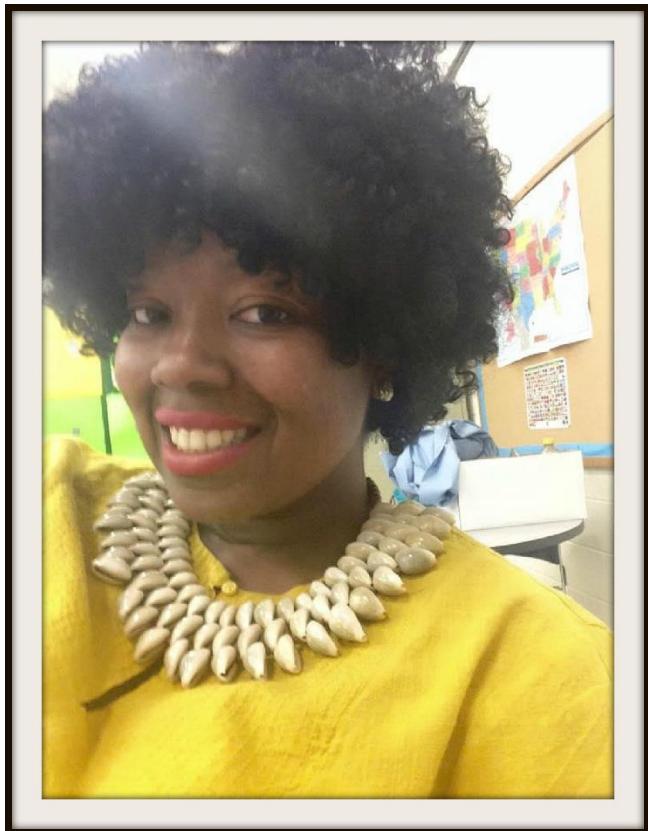
The harmony stirs tears. She tugs the cuffs of a black cardigan over her white shirt-sleeves, hiding the specks that would condemn her. She tries to forget the sensation of pushing steel through skin, skidding on bone. Tries to forget the sound he made and the expression on his face as she drove the handle home. Chef. Bleeding out over pristine floor tiles.

By Dee McInnes

Shirley Jones-Luke

Poetry

Shirley Jones-Luke is a poet from Boston, Mass. Ms. Luke has an MFA from Emerson College. Shirley was a participant at the 2018 summer workshops for Breadloaf, Tin House, The Watering Hole and VONA.



Want

A hunger, but there is only dust.
Our brown fingers make figure eights
on the pantry's shelves.

by Shirley Jones-Luke

Vinny, from Galway, is widely published in poetry journals and anthologies both abroad and at home. Some journals and online sites that have featured his work include Crannog, Ofi Press Magazine, Boyne Berries, Windows 25th edition and Cinnamon Press anthology. He has been placed or shortlisted in numerous competitions during his short time writing. He is working towards a first collection.



Pages from a Garden

Sitting in a sunny south facing back garden
I have sought to capture pristine moments
buried, say, in the purple vivacity of geraniums
hidden deep in the geometry of bird wing
or in the spectrum splash of light on a gable wall.

Only in the liminal space are such moments born.
Nestled in the textile of words not yet spoken, forged
in the silence of afterthought, floated on troughs of waves
and gathered in a haze of rapid eye movement
in synch now with the pages fluttering on my lap.

In this white space I am standing on a littered Moscow footpath
honeyed odour of the sticky poplar seeds, the dark red flash
of flag flying over turrets and a type of sadness
that emanates from stained glass windows, moulded into marble
and gilt mosaics, and yet in these streets no one cries.

On another page sunlight tussles with venetian blinds.
On the floor of a Galway bedsit I am naked and in the clotted air
a stench of want, for all good spots are taken now
the needle rammed between toes, drip-and-splash on a fetid
kitchen floor and in the locked bathroom a dog howls.

So, it continues with each turn, an Arabian dressmaker with
a passion for evening gowns, the successful Parisian poet
moonlighting along an Amsterdam canal. Men with horses and land.
Landless women with strength and dignity. A grieving countess.
The ones that were forgotten, the bodies never found.

But what will we fill our pages with?
How we found the threads of existence at the end of our garden
in a newly planted apple tree, where we pinned all our hope - the leaves like future
post-its to ourselves, instructing us to listen to the movement of roots, sounds of shuffled
soil, and to joyously wait in the space between our two lives and the one to come.

by Vinny Steed



Silent Songs

The second dead bird that I noticed when out for a morning walk, which had succumbed to the freezing temperatures and the inspiration for a series of winter poems.

Lorraine Carey's an Irish poet and artist from Co.Donegal, with work widely published in Poetry Ireland Review, Abridged, The Blue Nib, Prole, Atrium, Smithereens, Constellate, Poet-head, Live Encounters, The Bangor Literary Journal and Picaroon among others.

A runner up in both Trocaire / Poetry Ireland and The Blue Nib Chapbook Competition 2017, she's a 2019 Pushcart Prize nominee. Her poetry has been broadcast on local and national radio and her art has featured in journals including Skylight 47, North West Words and Three Drops From A Cauldron. Her debut collection is **From Doll House Windows**. (Revival Press)

Featured Artist

Siuban Regan



I was born and raised in Castlewellen, I now live and work as an artist in Bangor. The one thread that kept me connected to my true self was the use of pencil and paint, using it within my various work settings, working with children and their families. Over the years attending art courses that continued to enhance and hone my skills.

That thread has now become my working life and this different direction and experience of humanity in all its shapes and forms, influence my work. In particular, children, their connection with nature, their ability to float between realms of fantasy and reality and their roles in folklore and faerie tales.

Thanks for taking the time to chat with us Siuban. Tell us about how you first started creating art.

I have been creating art for as long as I can remember, greatly encouraged by my grandfather, installing the habit of carrying a pocket sketchbook and pencil at all times. Although, I was accepted into art college, my career path took a different direction into working with children and their families, I never stopped making art and used it within my work places. I returned to fulltime art making on my early retirement from therapeutic social-work. At first painting mostly portraiture, then about five years ago I discovered clay and fell totally in love with it.

Your work has many dark elements to it. Do you believe that your career as a social worker has had an impact on your art, or are there other influences?

My larger ceramic sculptures do reflect the traumatic lives of the children that I worked with over the thirty years as a therapeutic social-worker. But I also was raised on lashings of ghost stories, other worldly experiences, some of which were my own, and local folklore- all of which influence my art making.



Siuban's studio and materials

Can you tell the readers a little about the different mediums that you work in and about your processes?

I work across three art mediums, figurative painting, figurative ceramic sculptures and resin steampunk art dolls. I enjoy being able to move between mediums, I feel it keeps my art making fresh.

My process of creating usually begins with rough sketches of ideas in both pencil and paint. They develop into detailed drawings, with accurate measurements for both portraiture and sculpture, before committing to canvas or clay. However, the art-dolls evolve as they are made, which is fun.

What have been your proudest moments as an artist?

I suppose my proudest moments as an artist are when the end pieces of art turn out exactly as I visualised them. Each one of my little babies grow and blossom into works of art. In particular I am very proud of a large figurative sculpture called 'Left Behind' and a child portrait painting titled 'Rauiri: A rare pensive moment'.

Other proud moments have been that Galleries, North and South of Ireland, have accepted my work. However, my most special moment was being part of the RUA Annual exhibition in 2018.



'Rauiri: A rare pensive moment': seen on front cover

Finally, Siuban, what have you planned for the upcoming year?

This year's plans started with a bang, by completing a large portrait that has been entered for the BP portrait award first round of judging. Also, once again I have entered the Form

sculptural exhibition in the Walled Garden, Bangor. So February will either be full of excitement, or deflation, when then results for both come in. I am also planning to enter both the RUA Annual Exhibition and Botanical Gardens, Dublin Outdoor Sculptural Exhibition.

I have a joint exhibition coming up in August in the North Down Museum, titled 'Of Mists and Other Realms'. With two other fantastic artists, Elinor Conn and Fiona Schumacher.

Then in November I am having a solo exhibition entitled 'Slipping Through the Parallel Veils', in the wonderful Chimera Gallery in Mullingar Co. Westmeath.



Siuban's sculptures at Form exhibition, Walled Garden, Bangor

I will also be helping to organise an Art Fair at the beginning of June in the Marine Court Hotel, along with my husband Hugh, under the heading of 'The Hidden Garden Experience'. A new adventure which we hope will grow and fit in with the growing art scene in Bangor.



'Night Adventures'



'Shush, they'll hear us'

Follow Siuban:

<http://wwwsiubanreganartist.com>
Facebook Siuban Regan Artist

Shush, they'll hear us'

Jackie Lynam

Poetry

Jackie Lynam has been published in The Bangor Literary Journal and North West Words. Her poem Tiny Treasures was shortlisted for the Bangor Poetry Competition in 2018 and her poem Saved by A Swell Season was shortlisted for the 2018 Write by the Sea Poetry Competition. She lives and works in Dublin.



Disclosures

A chance encounter at the library desk
Catapulted an ordinary work day
into uncharted territory.

Half-sisters step-aunts married widowed
Mr Maher with your innocent banter,
you unearthed a buried mine.

My sister threw in the grenade
by asking did he mean Grandad
or Dad?
Marriage certificate indelibly stamped
Widower,
that lay hidden for decades in an old biscuit tin.

We conjured up the worst:
Horrific car crash
accidental poisoning
children brought up by strangers.
So in true Irish fashion said nothing

until a few years later our uncle,
spinning yarns while painting our kitchen walls,
Unveiled the skeletons
known to *everyone* in our family,
bar us.

‘I had two mothers and two wives’
grinned my dad,
in the later stages of Alzheimer’s,
when the past is a secret no more.

by Jackie Lynam

Kate Ennals is a prize-winning poet and writer and has published poems and short stories in a range of literary and on-line journals (Crannog, Skylight 47, Honest Ulsterman, The Moth, Anomaly, The International Lakeview Journal, Boyne Berries, North West Words, The Blue Nib, Dodging the Rain, The Ogham Stone, plus). In 2017, she won the Westport Arts Festival Poetry Competition. Her first collection of poetry At The Edge was published in 2015. Her second collection, Threads, was published in April 2018. She has lived in Ireland for 25 years and currently runs poetry and writing workshops in County Cavan. Kate runs At The Edge, Cavan, a literary reading evening, funded by the Cavan Arts Office.



I Am A Bloody Good Cook

With padded bosom, curvaceous hips, raw hands
delightful smile, firm but kind
I parade my kitchen
Flexing pans and rolling pins
my apron flecked with splashes and spills
of exotic ingredients, spices and thrills

I am a cook who stirs and pummels
Crumbs and stuffs, chops and kneads.

I like to

Serve male pigs on a spit, scrotum sacs splurged with cream
Tenderise tough hearts, battering hard
Scramble ovary eggs - whisked with butter and semen
Simmer Asian cocks with garlic and ginger
Mix African pap with salted tongue
Braise sweetmeats in a human skull

And my chef's special? Oh, tender reader
I like to slice, dice, and braise
the fleshy, fatty parts
of you.

by Kate Ennals

Mary Thompson lives in London, where she works as a freelance teacher. Her work has recently featured in journals and competitions including *Flash 500*, *Fish Short Memoir*, *Ink in Thirds*, *Retreat West*, *Reflex Fiction*, *Flashflood*, *Ellipsis Zine*, *the Cabinet of Heed*, *Memoir Mixtapes*, *Atticus Review*, *Spelk*, *Firewords*, *Fictive Dream*, *Funicular Magazine*, *Ghost Parachute*, *Vamp Cat Magazine*, *LISP* and *Cafe Irreal*, and is forthcoming at *Literary Orphans*. She is a first reader for *Craft Literary Journal*.



The Man from Murmansk

Oleg, my only Tinder match in six months, hails from a hamlet outside Murmansk, a mere 2265 miles from me and a chilly minus 20 in winter. To drive there, you pass through six countries and end up within a whisker of Norway.

'True love will appear with the spoondrift,' says Oleg.

In his pictures, my beau is wispy looking, like an evanescent ghost. And in one, he is playing the piano with his long, spindly fingers and staring forlornly at the keys.

'I am without choice,' he says in his messages. 'There is little to do here but make love or play music. And so I play.'

I listen to the stuff Oleg plays – Shostakovich piano concertos and Rachmaninov Rhapsodies, and at night, hunker down under my velvet throw and imagine myself there in Murmansk, surrounded by drifts of snow.

'One day we will meet,' says Oleg.

How I yearn for this to happen, but in the meantime, I spend my nights gazing at the swarthy winter moon and wonder if Oleg is watching it too.

by Mary Thompson

Thomas Zimmerman teaches English, directs the Writing Center, and edits *The Big Windows Review* <https://thebigwindowsreview.wordpress.com> at Washtenaw Community College, in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA. His poems have appeared recently in *Rasputin: A Poetry Thread*, *Pulp Poets Press*, and *Nice Cage*. Tom's website: <https://thomaszimmerman.wordpress.com/>.



Earth Spirits

Time is your mother in a blue dress.

--Charles Wright

That's you, Mom, 1960-something,
blue dress on instead of red (Dad's favorite),
your yellow fingers, smoky kiss.

More beautiful
for all of that, refigured legend.

“If
I hadn't married, had you kids, I would
have been a spirit, free,” you whisper.

When you danced to Elvis, were you free?
You never went to San Francisco. I
went for you. Was I free?

When Dad was banged up
in Saigon, were any of us free?

And when the MS ate into your brain,
the nurses mixed you vodka-cokes.

The rest-home
patio is where you'd take a drag
of cigarette, lips darkening to thunderheads,
and then a hit of oxygen, right back
to burning sunset.

With each breath, earth spirits
clash, commingle, rise, though still conflicted.

by Thomas Zimmerman

Naïve and Sentimental Sonnet #13

Was kicking leaves with Scarlet on our walk tonight, saw shut-tight houses with their TVs on, a sickle moon that mowed the clouds, the ghostly glow of city lights a mile away. We've gotten old. It's hardly news—but realizations, even our recurring ones, come suddenly. So Scarlet's 95 in dog years. I'm denying mine. "Either I'm too sensitive, or else I'm getting soft," sings Dylan on the playlist. Later, "I can change, I swear." The lamplight throws my shadow on the granite kitchen counter, outline of an atom-bomb blast. Beer's intact, thank god. And here's another song.

by Thomas Zimmerman

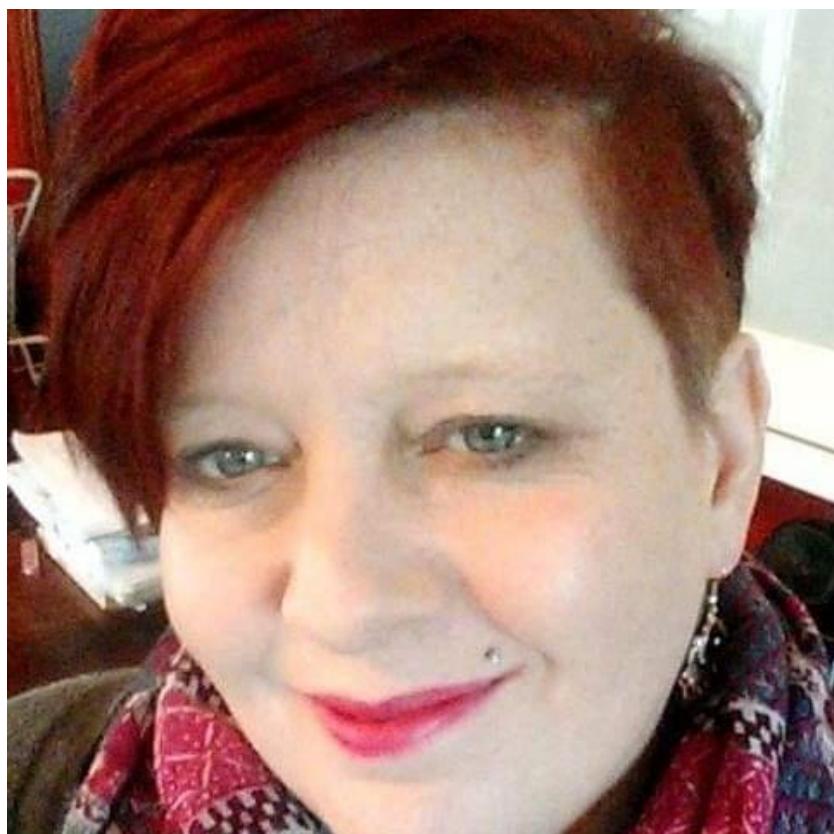


Sunrise over Dairy Lough

Kerry took this stunning photograph one morning, at the bottom of her lane.

Kerry Buchanan is a retired vet, stable hand, carer and dreamer who wrote her first novel in 2014. Since then, she has had short stories published both online and in print and has occasionally been lucky enough to win prizes – and the competitions weren't even fixed. She writes science fiction, fantasy, and crime. She also enjoys taking photographs.

Aisling Keogh is a psychotherapist and a stay at home mother to three young children. Her short stories have been published with The Irish Independent, Crannog Magazine, Wordlegs, Ropes, Bangor Literary Journal and A New Ulster. Her first published short story, "How to Save a Life," was shortlisted for the Hennessy Irish Literary Awards 2011. She finished writing her first novel in 2018, and is currently submitting to agents and publishers. In her free time Aisling likes to sing and play the guitar badly.



Chartreuse

Chartreuse. That's the name of the colour I can see on the back of my eyelids when I close them on one of those rare days when the earth is cracked baked terracotta, and my skin is tinged pink.

Chartreuse is the colour of the dress I wore to Niall's wedding, strapless, flowing, it's hem touching the over the tips of my toes, and a crimson flower in my hair. Hippy dippy free love chick, who gave her love too freely.

Green chartreuse is a french liquour Niall and I drank together before we fucked on my sofa, and after he called, uninvited, with the bottle tucked under his arm and a tear stained face.

Chartreuse, it looks to me like bile. It's the same yellowy-green colour as bile, or puss, just a much nicer way of saying it. And that's what I was thinking about when I dry wretched over the toilet, a white stick resting on the cistern showing two blue lines.

by Aisling Keogh

Keith Sheridan

Poetry

Keith Sheridan is a writer from Dublin in the Republic of Ireland, currently living in Edinburgh. He holds an M.Phil in Creative Writing from Trinity College.

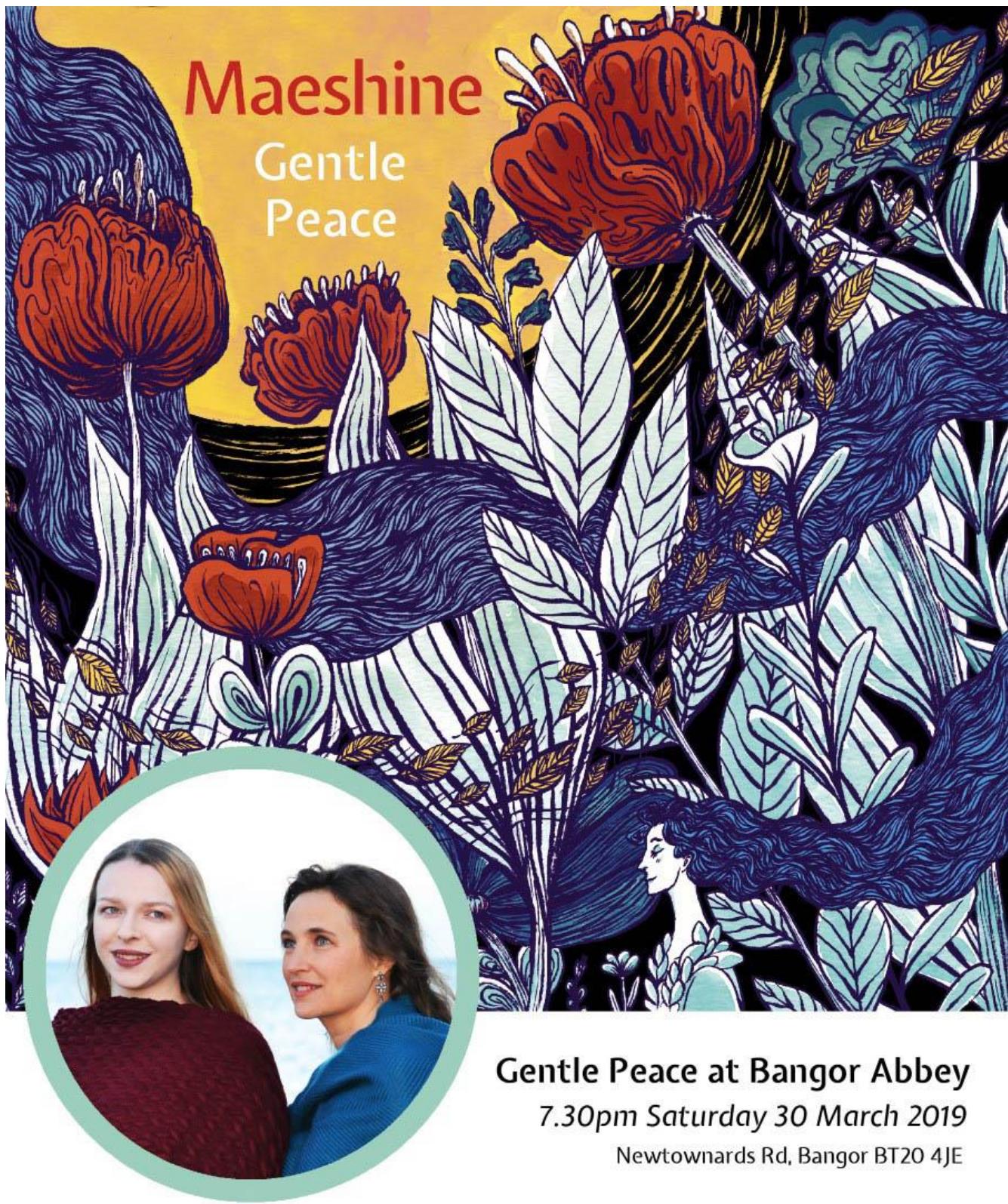


Headaches

It's been seven years
since they shaved your head
“to help with the headaches” and
your sister put away your toys.

Now every weight behind my eyes
could be anything because
there was nothing immortal in you and
you were so much younger than me.

by Keith Sheridan

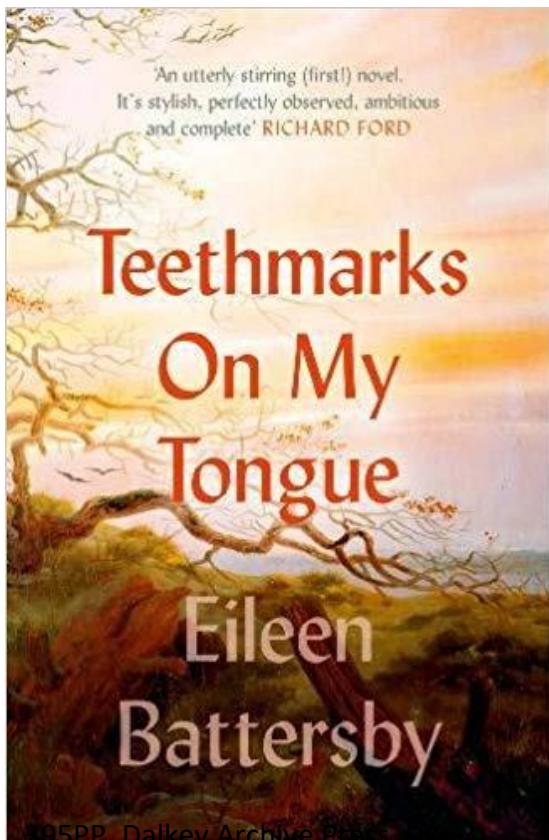


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Review by Jaki McCarrick



TEETHMARKS ON MY TONGUE

by Eileen Battersby

“By the dawn of the 20th century, Europe’s liberties were the liberties denied so many Americans, whether racial, sexual, or gender-specific ... for so many artists, Europe came to stand for all that was bohemian,” states Esi Edugyan in her piece for *The Guardian* about novels in which Americans come to Europe to work out home-grown problems. It is the preoccupation, too, of Eileen Battersby’s debut novel, *Teethmarks on My Tongue*.

The novel’s protagonist, teenager Helen Stockton Defoe, is a self-confessed “prig”. Obsessed with horses and astrology, she is also vastly more knowledgeable than her peers on matters to do with art and literature (she loves *To the Lighthouse*, hates *A Clockwork Orange* – “a vicious little yarn”). After her mother is gunned down in the street by Walt Welter (her mother’s younger lover), Helen is left to grieve

and carry on at home with her remote, dour father, a respected veterinarian in the town of Richmond, Virginia. When her father adds cruelty to remoteness by selling off a rebellious but beloved stallion, Galileo, a horse with whom she’s just begun to develop a bond, Helen decides to abscond to Paris. There, she rescues an old street dog, giving him the moniker Hector Berlioz, and, after a terrifying episode with Marc, a man she meets in a Parisian bar, escapes to the Loire Valley to take up employment as a rider-cum-stable hand for horse-owner, Monsieur Gallay. Here, in Gallay’s 2000-acre horse-training complex, just outside Amboise, with Hector in tow, Helen settles in well to the motley staff of trainers, jockeys, cooks and stable hands. Allay’s business is rigorous and tough and entirely suited to the novel’s adrift protagonist, providing her with routine and friendships, particularly in the form of the rebellious Lone Star, and Mathieu, with whom Helen falls in love. Months later, Helen leaves Amboise again for Paris. From Gare Du Nord she travels to Germany – East and West – mainly to observe the works of her favourite artist, Caspar David Friedrich. She falls ill during one of these excursions, which, as the denouement unfolds, culminates in a life-changing event.

The prose in this *bildungsroman* is highly-wrought, clear-eyed, occasionally breathtaking: Helen’s mother’s hand has “the feel of fragile bird-bones”, there is “the shimmy and shift” of

one's own language, and, as the East German guards patrol the border, Helen can "smell their meaty breath" - while "Berlin was alive with its dead". When Lone Star tries to make friends with Helen after an initial combative period, she circles her "as if she was a nurse attending a patient in remission".

While this most literary novel is without "genre", is held together by its precise and detailed style (which is strong and beautiful enough to rescue occasional dips in narrative drive), there is in it a slight nod to the Southern Gothic, or "Southern semi-Gothic" as Helen describes her world in Richmond. For instance, there are frequent references to paintings by the aforementioned Caspar David Friedrich (a German Romantic); there's the shuddersome image of Billy-bob climbing into the dead horse Monticello's grave; the Big (or at least roomy) House trope repeated in Richmond and Amboise; references to the Brothers Grimm, to Helen's dream of her father wearing a Dracula cape, to her "sadistic impulses".

Helen is an oftentimes unsympathetic character, but there are a number of characters to enjoy here: the affable surrogate-father figure, Monsieur Gallay, the sparky Lone Star, the sombre but kind-hearted Mathieu. Set in the 1980s, the period is also evoked well, cassettes play ABBA in cars, Checkpoint Charlie remains a dreary emblem of a divided Europe. The story, particularly the Amboise section, is also highly cinematic; the French landscape and weather is keenly evoked, the various dramas of the stable-yards easy to imagine. The passage about the death of Monticello and how the aforementioned Billy-bob (who cared for him) is shattered after the horse's death, is particularly harrowing. It is to Billy-bob that Helen turns in her mind when she needs to feel grounded, or when the various events that happen to her become unbearable: "I am just like Billy-bob and people like him and me cannot live without our special ones."

There are also a variety of animals mentioned in the text - stags, horses, cats and dogs, which serves to deepen the sense of alienation Helen feels from the people around her, particularly her father. "How sick I was of humans" she opines.

By the end of the novel one wonders if its protagonist has matured, faced up to her untreated grief and issues to do with her troubled family life. Perhaps, a little; though the tendency to work out her emotions through external stimuli – paintings, horses, Mathieu, Hector – rather than locating them clearly within herself, remains.

A sort of metafictional summary of the novel is given by Helen in Part One: "a slow, painful business, this act of remembering – so many images observed and words spoken, overheard, the slightest gesture. It all sticks in your mind and weighs you down, even if it ends up making sense."

This is arts journalist Eileen Battersby's first novel. It's a painstaking work of stark beauty and, as publishers Dalkey Archive Press rightly claim, "a most unusual coming-of-age novel".

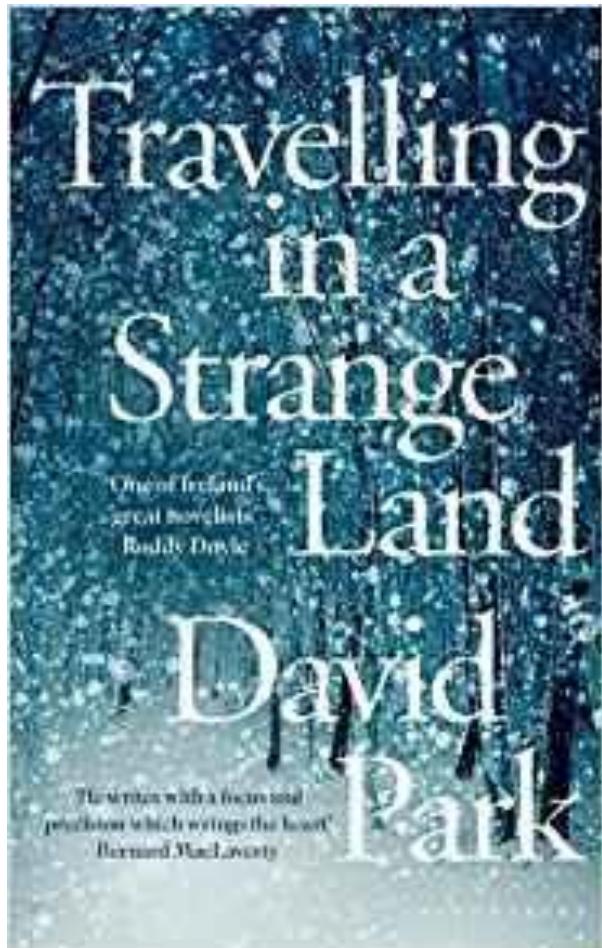
About the Reviewer

Jaki McCarrick is an award-winning writer of plays, poetry and fiction. She won the 2010 Papatango New Writing Prize for her play Leopoldville, and her most recent play, Belfast Girls, developed at the National Theatre London, was shortlisted for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize and the 2014 BBC Tony Doyle Award. Belfast Girls premiered in Chicago in May 2015 and has been staged many times internationally to much critical acclaim.

Her debut story collection The Scattering was shortlisted for the 2014 Edge Hill Prize. Jaki was longlisted for the inaugural Irish Fiction Laureate and is currently editing a second collection of short stories. She writes arts pieces for the Times Literary Supplement (TLS), The Irish Times, The Irish Examiner and other publications.

Read more of Jackie's work here: <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/private/ideas-of-war-riot-and-murder/>

Review by Meg McCleery



Publisher: Bloomsbury Publishing (8 Mar. 2018) ISBN-10: 1408892782
ISBN-13: 978-1408892787

Park's use of pathetic fallacy is effective as the frozen and desolate landscape, the *monochrome world*, mirrors Tom's desolate inner self just as the physical journey mirrors his psychological journey. We are told that *the snow conceals everything* just as Tom's inner life is shrouded in mystery and will unfold as the journey both metaphorical and physical progresses. Park also portrays Tom, a photographer, as having an eye for nuances as he describes himself as a '*dying breed*' "*the last of the "Mohicans"*" as he ponders on how selfies and camera phones have taken over from the working photographer. Park reflects these social changes in the the narrator's personal life.

The journey is also punctuated with characters that Tom meets along the way, The Game of Thrones runner on the ferry, the garage assistant with the flashing reindeer ears, the lone

Travelling in a Strange Land by David Park

I entered the frozen land, although to which country it belongs I cannot say.

Travelling in a Strange Land is David Park's latest novel. The highly acclaimed East Belfast writer has written ten previous books dealing with a range of very different subjects from the deeply troubling political *The Truth Commissioner* (2008) which was televised on BBC Two in 2016, to the more personal narrative in novels such as *The Light in Amsterdam* (2012). *Travelling in a Strange Land* is one of the latter.

The use of first person narrative draws us in as Tom, the narrator, makes his way across the frozen landscapes of Scotland, the English Borders and onwards towards the North East and Sunderland as he travels, three days before Christmas, to bring his ill son Luke home from university. We share in his journey, both physically and metaphorically, as the weather mirrors his inner mood which is one of guilt, sadness, and regret.

elderly woman standing by the road side with her heavy shopping looking a kind soul to give her a lift, to name but a few. Park's peripheral characters are essential to the plot, sharing a moment in time with Tom and revealing more of his kind nature. A loneliness pervades which is only interrupted by a woman's voice on the sat nav and phone calls from his wife and ten-year-old daughter that keep him in contact with home. The CD soundtrack that Tom selects to play along the way: Robert Wyatt, R.E.M, John Martyn, Nick Cave and Van Morrison's *Snow in San Anselmo*, which plays on repeat, all add to the atmosphere and mood in the car.

As Tom's journey progresses, with the use of flashbacks, Park reveals more of why bringing Luke home is so important to Tom and why the spectre of his other son Daniel shares in his journey. Park uses the metaphor of the "*strange land*" and the changing world to emphasise Tom's inner struggles, we are told, *I am travelling in a strange land. The world outside the car is snowbound, utterly changed*, the snow covers everything in an eerie ghostly blanket, a claustrophobic cover which will lift as the snow thaws.

Travelling in a Strange Land is a beautifully written book, it reaches its climax with the narrator waiting for the final *you have reached your destination*, a destination that has involved pain and soul searching and which will finally bring redemption.

Park's prose is never maudlin instead it is taut, poignantly beautiful and surprisingly uplifting. This novel will stay with the reader for a long time.

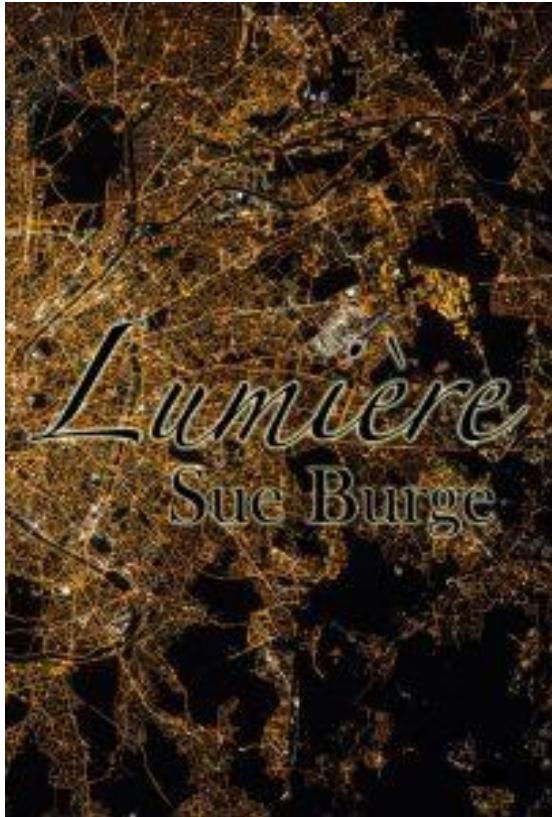
Photographer Sonya Whitefield's collaborative response to the novel can be found here:

<http://www.sonyawhitefield.com/proj/travelling-in-a-strange-land/>

About the Reviewer

Meg McCleery is a former College lecturer in English Literature and Media where she taught and developed literature for Q.U.B. She also ran Creative Writing classes in Belfast Community and Women's Centres and later Book Groups at Crescent Arts. She was awarded Highly Commended Poet in the Fifth Bangor Poetry competition in 2017 and has had poetry published in Poetry Now and Poetry Anthologies. Originally from Belfast, she now lives in North Down.

Review by Gaynor Kane



Lumière by Sue Burge.

Sue Burge is a poet, creative writing and film studies tutor and writing mentor based in North Norfolk. You can find out more about her on her [website](#). *Lumière* is Burge's debut pamphlet and is the product of spending six weeks in Paris, possibly due to a grant from Arts Council England for fieldwork and research. It is a beautiful and well-crafted pamphlet, both in terms of poetry and publication, from beginning to end.

The cover, an image of Paris from the International Space Station, is striking and it immediately places the reader within the place the poems go on to paint a detailed picture of. The rich golden end papers add to the luxurious feel of the pamphlet and represent the decadence of the city involved.

Hedgehog Poetry Press. ISBN 978-1-9996402-6-2 £5.99

There is a surprise gift of a poem 'The Perfect Table' before the acknowledgements and contents page. It's a poem that succinctly introduces the collection to follow, in the line 'its surface is brailled with before: proposals, breakups, philosophy'.

Along the way, throughout the 27 poems, Burge introduces us to the streets of Paris and their people, sights, smells and sounds. With images so perfectly penned that we feel like we are there.

In 'Madame De La Tour' we discover the story of 'a woman so in love / with the Eiffel Tower, she's married it.' In contrast the voice of the poem does not love the tower but instead likes 'how it appears/ from nowhere, playing a game of hide-and-seek, / punching the sky, always a winner.'

I recommend making a mug of hot chocolate and having a bar of *Bournville (*insert your favourite chocolate bar here) at hand before reading 'Audrey Hepburn in Paris'. This poem highlighted Audrey's lifestyle, so busy she can't remember what film she's shooting and the difficulty of maintaining a slim figure whilst loving chocolate. Burge has skilfully included all the senses in this poem. The final lines poignantly remind the reader of Audrey's fragility: 'she hopes all this / will give her enough weight to face / the succabu pull of the camera.'

‘Midnight In Paris’ condenses one moment into a ‘thousand midnights’. Burge make great use of alliteration, assonance and rhythm to enhance the musicality of this poem. It’s a night where the air is filled with music as in the third stanza:

‘Blue notes throb
like windows weeping,
riffs sprawl and weave,
harmonies hang in the air,
predators, ready to strike
your open heart.’

The final poem ‘Paris Blues’ (available in English and French) is written in the point of view of someone who’s life has moved on but they are missing the past. It’s a very moving poem full of loss, as shown in the penultimate stanza: ‘She still recalls the day she learnt / emptiness can way / more than a suitcase of souvenirs.’. The final stanza which introduces the image of the poetic voice dreaming of ‘hovering over the city / like a Valkyrie / with the voice of Piaf.’, very cleverly leaves us wanting more.

Lumière is definitely a collection worth reading and rereading. It can be ordered from Hedgehog Poetry Press. <https://www.hedgehogpress.co.uk/product/sue-burge-lumiere-pre-order/>

About the Reviewer

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’ anthologies Resonance and Matter and in various journals in the UK, Ireland and America. In 2016, Gaynor was a finalist in the annual Funeral Services NI poetry competition. She is working towards a first collection.

Confident Voices

Reviews by Moyra Donaldson

***White Horses* by Jo Burns**

Turas Press ISBN 978-0-9957916-5-7

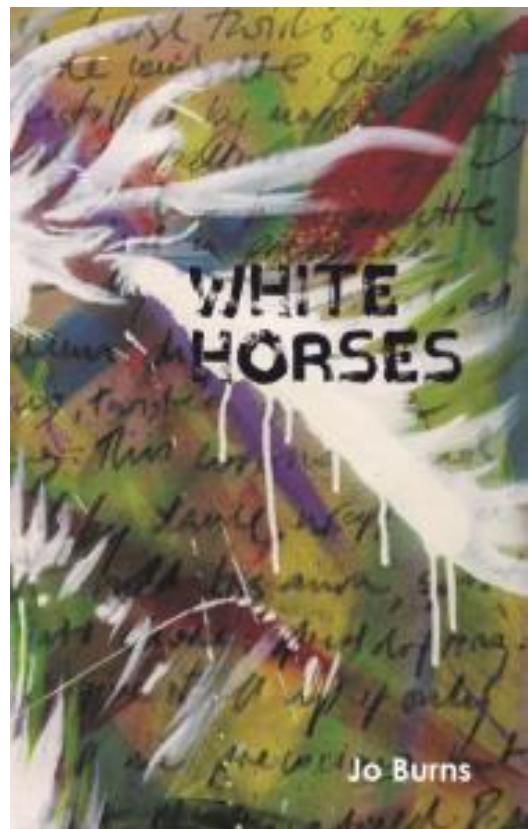
***Each Of Us (Our Chronic Alphabets)* by Natasha Cuddington**

Arlen House ISBN 978-1-85132-203-9

***The Uses Of Silk* by Grainne Tobin**

Arlen House ISBN 978-1-85132-195-7

2018 was an excellent year for poetry in the North, with many poets bringing out new collections and these three volumes are indicative of the diversity and confidence of the work being produced by poets from, or resident in, Northern Ireland.

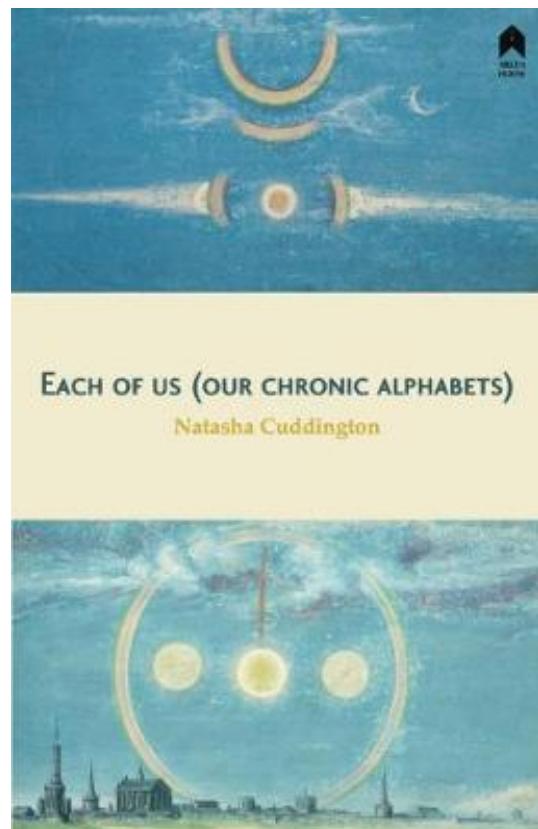


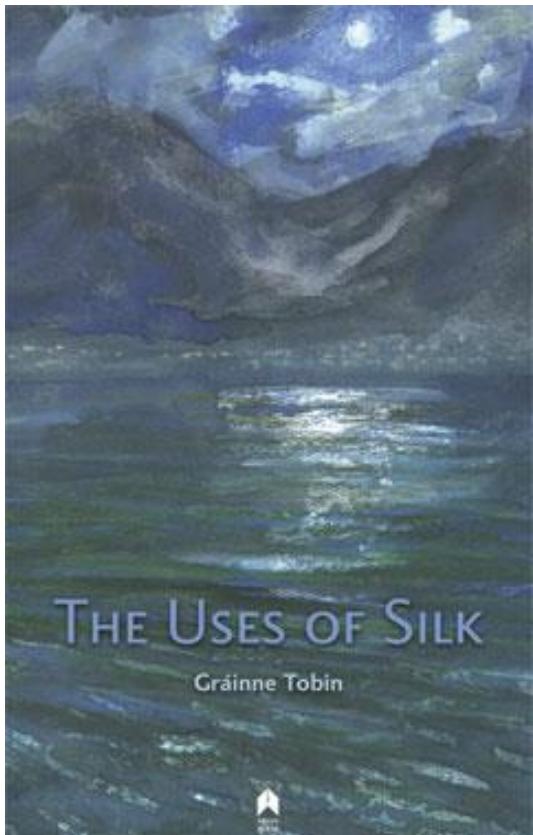
White Horses is the first full collection from prize-winning poet Jo Burns and is an impressive debut, intertwining the personal with the political and social. Born in Co Derry, to a rural Presbyterian family, Burns now lives in Germany with her husband and three children. In the poem *The Mid-Ulster Machinery Museum*, the poet describes the everyday reality of her childhood life in Northern Ireland, where a 'Chinook slicing soundtrack' was the background to walking to the disco and where even children 'knew the meaning of strange words/like "denomination" and "sectarian".' This poem feels like the point from which the rest of the collection radiates out, to other cultures and geographies and with a constant refusal to accept intolerance and dogma. The poet muses on the nature of faith and the importance of nature in her own life. *On Faith* - 'My God, a mother,/ a mountain, cries 'No more martyrs. Punch the stained glass out.'

Poems inspired by the women in Picasso's life take up almost a third of the collection and women's voices weave in and out of the examination of patriarchy - but for me the heart of the book is a celebration of tenderness and love, with poems for beloved family members and reflections on the experience of motherhood with its joys and attendant fears; not only for the poet's own children, but for all children and the sort of world they will inherit, as in *Places Your Children Should Never*. I remember once hearing the poet and writer Damian Gorman talking about how poems should 'risk sentimentality' but yet not fall into it, and these poems walk that line perfectly. They are moving and memorable, but also balanced and accomplished, with an obvious love for language and the meaning of words. In an interview Burns talks about how writing poetry was a way of holding on to her own language whilst living in another country.

A very different voice, though equally confident and assured, is heard in another debut collection, *Each Of Us (Our Chronic Alphabets)* from Natasha Cuddington. Natasha was born in Saskatchewan, Canada and now lives in Belfast. She is an ACES award winner and also received the Ireland Chair of Poetry Bursary. I found this collection quite astonishing in its originality and precision. The closer you read, the more you get from this complex work. The words are precisely laid out on the page with gaps of thought between speech and it as if we are overhearing the poet's mind: repetitions, language as unpredictability, symbols and metaphors that gather themselves into meaning as we immerse ourselves in them. It demands to be experienced as a whole. Paula Meehan traces the lineage of this work back to e.e. cummings and Emily Dickinson and it is exciting to see this heritage manifest itself in these poems. This is not necessarily an easy read, but one which rewards close attention and leaves image and meaning in the mind of the reader.

This is an exciting addition to the diverse range of voices coming out from the North.





The Uses of Silk is the third collection from another award-winning poet, Armagh born Grainne Tobin, now living in Newcastle. Tobin was a founding member of the Word of Mouth Collective that met for twenty five years in the Linen Hall Library. This is a joy of a collection, humane and clever, with a lyricism that is never less than nimble. This poet knows what she is doing and does it with aplomb, a quick wit and a formal dexterity. Humour and seriousness sit side by side, as they do in life. In the wonderfully titled, *Buying Knickers With Auntie Maureen*, the poet describes the aunt's face as speaking volumes, saying 'I am buying knickers/for an abdomen that has housed thirteen babies,/of whom nine lived. I am Hecuba , Brigid, Maeve.'

Neither does this poet hesitate to tackle tough subjects and look at them head on, as in *The Other Myrrha*, and poems that look at the results of violence and terror. Tobin's poetic intent is stated in *A Sunny Day At Chef De Baie* 'Against barbarity,

we fortify/ our settlements, our tide-washed sandcastles.'

There are poems which look back at childhood memories and poems that look forward to grandchildren. She calls down a wonderful literary curse in *A Curse On A Cabinet Minister* and in *Amulet*, looks at the impulse we all have at times when confronted by our fears, to call on old magic. There is a fantastic range in this work, reflecting a poet who is at ease with her voice and in command of both subject and form. Poetry without pretension, but with all the elements of great poetry.

All three of these poets write poems that make you think as well as feel. What more could you want.

About the Reviewer

Moyra Donaldson is a poet, creative writing facilitator, editor. She is an experienced mentor for those working towards a first collection. Her publishers are Lagan Press, Belfast and Liberties Press, Dublin, who published her Selected Poems in 2012, *The Goose Tree* in June 2014. *Blood Horses* was published in 2018 from Caesura Press (www.caesurapress.co.uk) and a new collection, *Carnivorous* is forthcoming from Doire Press Spring 2019.