

# THE BANGOR LITERARY JOURNAL

Featuring the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Bangor Poetry Competition; artist & muralist Jossiepops: a review of Angela Graham's 'Star' by Caroline Clark; & art, poetry, photography & flash fiction by our contributors.



## ISSUE 20

## ASPECTS EDITION



## **Editors' Welcome**

...And we are back!

You are in for a treat with this very special Aspects Festival edition of The Bangor Literary Journal.

We are delighted to announce that Kendra Reynolds won the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Bangor Poetry Competition with her powerful and apt poem of strength 'a reclaiming'. Not only was this poem meticulously crafted, but it perfectly exemplified this year's theme: 'In the grand scheme of things'.

This year's Runner Up went to Ben Keatinge for his poem 'Candles'. Jean Tuomey's 'Walks with a Gardener' was Highly Commended; and Stephanie Conn's poem 'Blue House' was Commended in this year's competition.

We want to offer huge congratulations to each of the shortlisted poets this year, the standard was nothing short of exceptional. You can read their poems here which were voted on by the public. We hope you enjoy them as much as we did.

With over 800 public votes cast, we would like to thank everybody who took the time to read the ten poems and select your top three.

In addition, we are over the moon to feature the infamous, unstoppable Jossiepop, an artist and muralist who has made it his mission to inspire change in Bangor's city centre through street art.

And last, but definitely not least, delve into an array of poetry, flash fiction, art and photography from issue 20's contributors; including a review of Angela Graham's 'Star' by Caroline Clark.

Details of the next submission period (Christmas issue 21) and The 40 WORDS Competition 2025 will be announced soon on our website, so make sure to subscribe if you haven't already.

All the best—

Paul and Amy

*Photo credit: Colin Dardis: Poet, editor, facilitator and multi-media artist*



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# Feature

## 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Bangor Poetry Competition



*Winner Kendra Reynolds at Aspects Literary Festival.*

## **10 poems published here**

### **Winner:**

Kendra Reynolds	a reclaiming
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### **Runner Up:**

Ben Keatinge	Candles
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### **Highly Commended:**

Jean Tuomey	Walks with a Gardener
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### **Commended:**

Stephanie Conn	Blue House
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### **Shortlisted poets:**

Glen Wilson	Sea glass
Niamh Busby	Ammonites
Iain Campbell	Skinny dipping
Lynda Tavakoli	Pouffe
Noel King	Village of Athea, 1963
Shelley Tracey	Full Circle

### **Longlisted poets:**

Di Slaney	Grief
Gifford Savage	It's all about tomatoes
Rhona Stephens	Granny Kept a Sweetie Jar
Sean Larney	Life's Venn Diagram
Colin Dardis	Stubborn Mathematics
Lucy Crispin	cross-section
Siobhan Ward	A Story of Your Life
Meg McCleery	All Hallows' Eve

## **Winner**

## **Kendra Reynolds**

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Kendra Reynolds has a PhD in literature from Ulster University and is now pursuing her love of creative writing alongside her academic work. She is a former Fulbright Scholar, having taught creative writing and social justice literature at both the University of Tulsa and Tulsa Community College in Oklahoma.



## **a reclaiming**

a reclaiming of A, aptly named for the Greek  
– *Alpha* – male servant from the start.

A: beginning of the alphabet,  
of life in Africa, birthplace of humanity,  
where man came down from the trees  
started walking as Adam in the garden.  
Female servant pulled from his rib,  
but not side by side they say  
(though literally pulled from his side),  
she lies as the horizontal line to his triangle,  
the capital A they both complete,  
for woman is the lesser part  
deemed vital for the whole.

*A is for apple* I learnt in school  
the alphabet our building blocks for life.  
Eve earned her knowledge too,  
plucked her apple from the tree  
and maleness was threatened:  
a learned woman is a dangerous thing,  
best to keep her from the As, Bs, and Cs.  
So they used it to punish her:  
the blood-red letter staining a dress  
– *Adulteress* – stamper of the powerful,  
for A denotes a lack, as in asymmetry,  
out of balance.

yet, *a*, when not capitalized, boasts soft feminine curves,  
*a* is female, giving birth to all persons, places and things,  
introducing all nouns to the world:  
a woman, a child, a daughter, a son,  
Mother Nature birthing a rainbow, a flower, a star.  
*a* protects our individuality  
defining each of us as one from the masses,  
shattering stereotypes that keep us powerless,  
lumping us together in a faceless mist.  
*a* in algebra means *a known quantity*;  
it will not compromise, *a* knows itself and supports us all.  
we will reclaim it, for *a* tells us that we, as women,  
are allowed to speak aloud.

***By Kendra Reynolds***



## **Runner Up**

## **Ben Keatinge**

Ben Keatinge won the Patrick Kavanagh Poetry Award 2022 for his manuscript, 'The Wireless Station'. His poems have been published in *The Irish Times*, *Cyphers*, *Irish Pages* and in anthologies, most recently, *Romance Options* (Dedalus Press). He was selected for the Poetry Ireland Introductions 2024. Dublin is his home city.





## **Candles**

*Church of San António da Torre Velha,  
Ponte de Lima, Portugal  
24<sup>th</sup> April 2024*

The deities of silence  
hear me as I jingle  
coins and slip them  
in the slot for candles

and every bulb lights up,  
the first few at the front,  
others following in lines,  
more marchers joining

to parade across the city,  
offer red carnations,  
the Day of Liberty  
is coming, is tomorrow.

***By Ben Keatinge***

## **Highly Commended**

## **Jean Tuomey**

Jean Tuomey lives in Co Mayo. She is published in national and international journals. Her chapbook, *Magical Thinking*, was highly commended in *Fools for Poetry* 2021. She won the Jonathan Swift Creative Writing Award for poetry in 2021 and the St Francis Hospice poetry prize 2022. Her debut collection *Swept Back ( Lapwing )* was launched in Dec 2022. She received the Cathaoirleach Award for Contribution to the Arts in Mayo 2023 . A former teacher, she facilitates writing groups in the West of Ireland.



## **Walks with a Gardener**

When a bee buzzed into the kitchen,  
like a welcome visitor making a call,  
we were thrilled. And later, as I closed  
my bedroom window, I found another,  
a gift hidden in the folds of the curtains.

On our pre-lunch walks, we guess the weeds,  
delight at dandelions, praise unkempt  
flower beds, shake our heads at neat  
front gardens, peer over walls into foxgloves  
humming with black bees, worry that soon  
the neighbourhood will groan with mowers.

This afternoon, it rains heavily,  
dangerous weather for bees.  
We stay indoors too, tidy our hive,  
watch yellow rattle sway.

***By Jean Tuomey***

## Commended

## Stephanie Conn

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Stephanie Conn is poet and creative writing facilitator. She is the author of the *Copeland's Daughter* (Smith/ Doorstep), *The Woman on the Other Side, Island* and *off-kilter*, all published by Doire Press.



## **Blue House**

I am selling the house. It was always  
the plan. It was meant to be both of us.  
Turns out I'm negotiating the process  
alone. The house you painted blue. On days  
like this I cannot see the funny side.  
I used to joke you weren't to die and leave  
me in this crumbling house that grieves  
in cracks and leaks, damp patches, mould. You died  
and I can't open the loft or the garage  
door, or reach the high ceilings to dust  
the autumn cobwebs. It's hard to trust  
it will sell with last winter's storm damage  
unresolved. Perhaps some couple will fall  
in love like we did. See its potential.

***By Stephanie Conn***

## **Shortlisted**

## **Glen Wilson**

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Glen Wilson is a multi-award winning Poet from Portadown. Amongst others, he won the Seamus Heaney Award for New Writing (2017), the Jonathan Swift Creative Writing Award (2018), the Trim Poetry competition (2019), and Slipstream Open Poetry competition (2021). His collection *An Experience on the Tongue* is available through Doire Press.



## **Sea glass**

Here where I proposed, where we brought  
and bring our children every year,  
the two of them laughing in the distance at a tide going out,  
We hold each other close in this February chill,  
as each wave breaks its own way  
and it must  
break.

And I want to pick up and pocket these memories  
as you search for sea glass amongst the sedimentary  
and metamorphic,  
the glints among the greys.  
The walk back is always laden  
with stories of the walk out.

***By Glen Wilson***



## **Shortlisted**

## **Niamh Busby**

Niamh Busby is a writer from Bangor. She has previously been published in orangepeel, The Apiary, Gypsophila and Seedlings Studio. She won first place in Sonder Magazine's Morning Coffee Competition 2022. Her work has been exhibited at ArtFest 2024, Vault Artists Studio Gallery and 2 Royal Avenue.



## **Ammonites**

Her father used to take her to  
the museum beside the gardens,  
where she loved to run her fingers  
along the ridges and curves of  
huge and winding ammonites.

A year after he passed,  
she found one on a beach,  
fingers tracing, thinking  
that life is like its surface,  
a curling, widening thing,  
that just ends.

***By Niamh Busby***

## **Shortlisted**

## **Iain Campbell**

Iain's poems have been published widely on-line and in print, including The Blue Nib, Dreich Poetry, The Honest Ulsterman, Lagan Online, and the Bangor Literary Journal. He is a 2020 SIAP recipient from the Arts Council NI. His first collection, 'Tide Lines' was published by Hybriddreich.



## **Skinny dipping**

Mid-summer nights paint  
cinder streaked sunsets  
under ash scraped skies,  
and whisper spellbound laughter  
across saffron-dappled tides.

It is always easy to sneak  
out in the fading twilight;  
leave the window open wide  
to prevent that tell-tale creak;  
wait until they're all asleep;

leave quietly, slow over the sill,  
slide down the warm,  
shallow, sloping slates;  
plunge down into the welling dark  
beyond the locked backyard gate.

Walk in the shadowed edge  
beneath the silhouette breeze;  
cut across the dew damp lawn  
to avoid a crunch of shingle  
on the crescent path; listen ...

far off footsteps echo lightly  
on her broken street lamp lane;  
barely a five minute stroll past  
gabled moonlit window panes,  
watching, waiting ...

to the timber jetty, black barnacle  
crusted silent still and a promise  
honest cross your heart to meet  
by the old stone boathouse  
on the slipway at midnight  
her sun bleached curls  
beach freckled face  
dare devil smile  
seal grey eyes  
a taste of salt  
upon her lips

except we  
didn't

***By Iain Campbell***

## **Shortlisted**

## **Lynda Tavakoli**

Lynda Tavakoli lives in County Down where over the years, she has facilitated both adult creative writing classes and the Seamus Heaney Award for schools. She is a professional member of The Irish Writers Centre and has been nominated for Best of the Net Awards and the Pushcart Prize (2024). Lynda is presently working on her second collection.



## **Pouffe**

After she died and we were clearing her things,  
I kept the better looking, shop-bought one.  
A pouffe with the pizzazz of ooh la la,  
and home for weary feet to fantasise  
a can-can on The Avenue des Champs-Élysées.  
I gave the other one away.

She had made that one herself.  
Six National Dried Milk tins  
saved from the war, covered  
and re-covered after the burden  
of my father's bog-trodden,  
hard-soled, Fermanagh feet.

And that final restoration  
created from a benefactor's cast-offs:  
a coat, as hirsute as any camel,  
with buttons big as biscuits  
that we bought together from  
some charity sale in Fivemiletown.

Sometimes it's just too late,  
our hearts forever squeezed  
by the sharpness of memories  
of what we gave away in haste.  
Those small, important things, laid bare  
with the aeonian cruelty of hindsight.

***By Lynda Tavakoli***

Shelley Tracey's first collection was *Elements of Distance* (2017). Poems have also been published in *Bloody Amazing*, *The Haibun Journal*, *Drifting Sands Journal*, *Artemis Poetry*, *Abridged*, *The Bangor Literary Journal*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *Skylight 47*, *The North*, *North West Words*, *The Bray Literary Journal* and on *Ink*, *Sweat and Tears*.





## **Full Circle**

In our unseeded garden,  
no swing on the sycamore, shape-making in the sky,  
no cradle swaying in the house.

A sundial wedged between blank flowerbeds  
inclines from its axis,  
each shadow cast upon its face  
more off-centre, imprecise.

We spend time lavishly in waiting rooms,  
watch clocks slicing into quarters on repeat.

We share some cheesecake in a café,  
read of hatchings, incubations.

In three weeks, chicks kept under heat  
will crack their shells with tiny beaks,  
clamouring for their mothers and release.

Within five weeks, the eagle's young are born  
to her fierce nurturing, safe beneath  
umbrella wings on scorching days.

For nine to ten weeks, an emperor penguin  
faces down the wind, his egg between his feet,  
sheltered in his feathered brood pouch.

Months and years pass through us.  
We lean into the future, foreheads touching,  
a swollen gap between us.

***By Shelley Tracey***

## **Shortlisted**

## **Noel King**

Noel King was born and lives in Tralee. His poems, haiku, short stories, reviews and articles have appeared in magazines and journals in 37 countries. His poetry collections are published by Salmon Poetry: *Prophesying the Past*, (2010), *The Stern Wave* (2013) and *Sons* (forthcoming in 2015). He has edited more than fifty books of work by others. Anthology publications include *The Second Genesis: An Anthology of Contemporary World Poetry* (AR.A.W., India, 2014).

He has published just over 70 short stories, from *Ireland's Own* to *The Quest in Montenegro*. He has been shortlisted and highly commended more times than he cares to remember in short story competitions throughout the world.

*Photograph (Poetry Ireland site)*



### **Village of Athea, 1963**

In her son's room  
she found white porcelain inkwells  
he'd stolen from his school.  
Feeling ashamed, she placed them in wooden orange crates;  
put on a headscarf and her late mother's wide-rim glasses  
and placed the boxes in the middle of the night  
outside the school gate with a one word note – SORRY;  
just that, SORRY sellotaped to the top.  
The following Friday, the Sentinel newspaper  
reported the extraordinary find.  
The mother was glad to restore them intact,  
wished she had her son back,  
wondered for a nanosecond  
about pinning the news clipping on the headstone above his grave.

***By Noel King***

## **Hybrid: A Conversation between Poetry & Art**



### **Poetry**

### **Yvonne Boyle**

Yvonne Boyle has had a range of poems and flash fiction published in a variety of magazines, books and anthologies including the online Bangor Literary Journal, the WomenAloudNI lockdown anthology “North Star” and Washing Windows Too , III and IV, Arlen House. She has recently been working collaboratively with her niece Sarah McWilliams, an artist, on joint work. She is a Causeway Coast and

Glens Councillor.



### **Art**

### **Sarah McWilliams**

Sarah McWilliams is a multidiscipline practitioner whose work ranges from assemblage to painting. Her background is in lens-based media and she completed her degree at Ulster University in 2003. Photography is the bedrock of her practice as her work often begins with documentation, either from direct observational studies or archiving personal collections. Sarah's creative outcomes have varied visually over the years, but themes

such as exploring the relationship between person, place and object as well as dealing with the debris of modern life, pervade. She has 20 years’ experience of teaching art in secondary schools and is currently exhibiting work at the Island Arts Centre Lisburn as part of the Gallery 545 group exhibition. Previous exhibitions include ‘The Spaces Between’ at the Down Arts Centre in Downpatrick and ‘Spring Fling’ at R-Space Gallery, Lisburn.

The painting ‘Stone’, is inspired by a large granite boulder in a dry stone wall near our home. Most likely it is an erratic, deposited after the glaciers melted, as it stands out against the local stone. I was told it once belonged in a stone circle. It has become a landmark for me, a point of reflection on the daily dog walk. Habits combined with stories quickly become tinged with ritual significance. I don’t know if the story of the stone circle is true. In a way it doesn’t matter. We write new mythologies about the land around us.



## Stone

Co Down

Yvonne Boyle

'This glows in moonlight' my niece says.  
 We stand at the lichen covered granite rock  
 with veins of quartz, the wall on either side  
 silurian greywarke. 'Part of a stone circle,  
 the farmer told me. I have searched old maps.'  
 We walk to other stones under this year's brambles  
 in the field above her house and sloping garden.  
 She is clearing stones to make steps. She came  
 here when her father died and said a prayer.  
 Sometimes we can only stand and speak to stone,  
 grief words in the air.

## **Poetry**

## **Roisín Browne**

Roisín Browne's work has appeared in The Galway Review, Flare, Live Encounters, The Stony Thursday Book, Ragaire Literary Magazine, Poem Alone, Black Nore Review and Mnemotope. She was commended in the Gregory O'Donoghue International Poetry Prize 2018, shortlisted in the 2019 Bangor Poetry Competition and highly commended in the Seán Dunne Inaugural Poetry Award 2024.



## **Imbolg**

*for Sofia Rose*

Ahead of due date  
you turn, shift current  
make your mother winch and smile,  
her hand holds each belly-pang burst.

Eager to kiss Spring Sonoma days,  
with heart call of deer,  
wild rose pulse  
and petrichor of sage,

you, gather tinder and flame.

***By Roisín Browne***

*Imbolg is an ancient Irish pagan festival celebrating the start of the Celtic Spring (1<sup>st</sup> February). The English translation of the Irish word 'Imbolg' means 'in the belly'.*



## Poetry

## David Edelman

David Edelman's poems have appeared, or are forthcoming, in various publications, including *Skylight 47*, *Mudlark*, *Freshwater*, *Seattle Review*, *RHINO*, *SLANT*, *Rio Grande Review*, and others. Brooding Heron Press published his chapbook, *After the Translation*. He and his wife are retired teachers, and are currently residing in Galway, Ireland. He is originally from Seattle, Washington.



## **Virgil at the Zoo**

*after reading "To See or Not See"*

When Virgil, as he was called by Oliver Sacks,  
regained his sight after forty-five years  
he couldn't see. The surgeon removed

thick cataracts from his retinas,  
but couldn't remove the ensuing  
chaos of color, light and form. At the zoo,

where he'd hoped to see the animals,  
he found the gorilla and elephants  
incomprehensible. To his disappointment

he was still blind to them. Walking  
through an exhibit, he was shown a brass  
statue of a gorilla and was allowed to touch it

meticulously with his fingertips,  
its protruding brow, stony fur, large knuckles  
and bandy legs. When he was returned

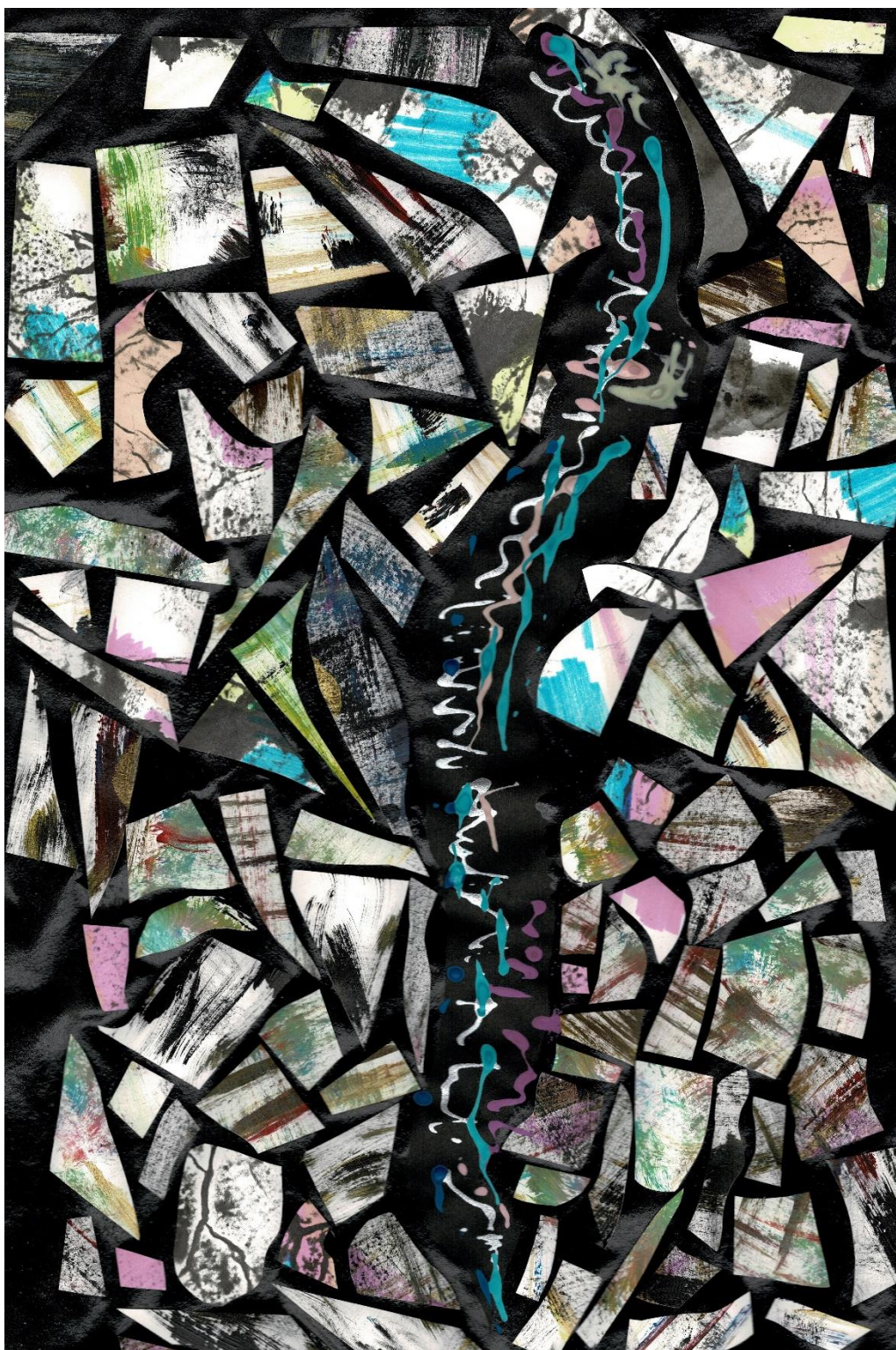
to the zoo's rainforest, there it was, just as he  
felt it and now could see  
lumbering among the trees.

***By David Edelman***

Worm 5 & Worm 6







**Biography:** Sarah studied textile design at Leeds University many moons ago. Having worked in a range of grown-up jobs she is now a housewife. Besides writing and gardening she enjoys nothing more than spreading paper, paint and glue over the dining table (she puts a cover on it first!). She belonged to an art group when she lived on the west coast of Scotland which exhibited at the Beacon Arts Centre in Greenock. Just over a year ago, she moved to north Wales, with her family. Her work has appeared in the Bangor Literary Journal previously and she is excited to see it back up and running. Hip, hip, hooray.

Niall Murphy is a writer from Dublin. An advertising copywriter by day, he has had a short story appear in the magazine *Rabble*, and a short play produced by Fishamble The New Play Company and published by New Island Books.



## **A Departure**

Cars move either side of the river, their white and orange and red lights casting coloured clouds along the quays in the misty morning air. It is dawn in October. The sunrise is there, but not visible.

Last night, he came to say goodbye.

His leaving was not what surprised me; the American vessel's departure date was always known. It surprised me that a goodbye felt appropriate.

In April, my mother phoned. As the conversation wobbled towards its conclusion, she took a breath, unsure, then asked: 'Do you have anyone, love?'

I didn't. I hadn't, ever.

His ship arrived in June. The grey of town was pocked with the white of naval uniforms.

After an official welcome, the officers dispersed through the laneways and pubs. I was writing in one. He, taken with the idea of coming to a place of noise and celebration to write.

We arranged to meet the next day. He asked me to show him Dublin. I had no idea what to show him, so we went to the zoo.

We met every other day, usually for a drink. He told me things about myself that I thought nobody would ever know or notice.

That fact that he was leaving loomed, superseding the realness of everything else. But everything else began to feel real. The week of, he asked me to move to Virginia. I doubted his sincerity.

He left at 11.45 last night. This morning, it isn't visible, but the sunrise is there.

***By Niall Murphy***

Angeline King was Writer in Residence for Ulster University (2020-2023), where she completed a PhD in Creative Writing. Angeline's latest novel, *The Secret Diary of Stephanie Agnew*, was published in 2024. Previous novels include *Dusty Bluebells* and *Snugville Street*. Angeline's poetry has featured in several regional journals, including the *Bangor Literary Journal*.





### **Ever-narrowing Window**

Did you expect me to be tribal when you gave me knolls  
and drums of yellow, yellow whin, where Hawthorn snows  
hedgerows and dandelions' whisperers toll  
a wish on feathery parachuting seeds I puff and blow.  
Why did you pollute my eyes with glens — to show  
or not to show me life beyond the industrial sight,  
chimney pots smoking yellowing yellowing grey. No,  
I tend towards clutching clouds and clocking cuckoos in flight  
in yellow yellow fields at Ballykeel at eight on April nights.

Who am I in this house with no sides, and a long skinny lawn  
in yellow yellow spring when the old wall is disguised,  
opaque in the midges' haze, block brick opposite odiously spawned;  
yet the fat bumble bees languorously thrive  
on lions' teeth; and I, no more able to compromise  
weeds than to see the habitat of porpoises and puffins go,  
for gas caverns. If I am always to be here, and there besides,  
I must build better walls, give up poetry — grow;  
learn to watch yellowing yellowing life from my ever-narrowing window.

***By Angeline King***



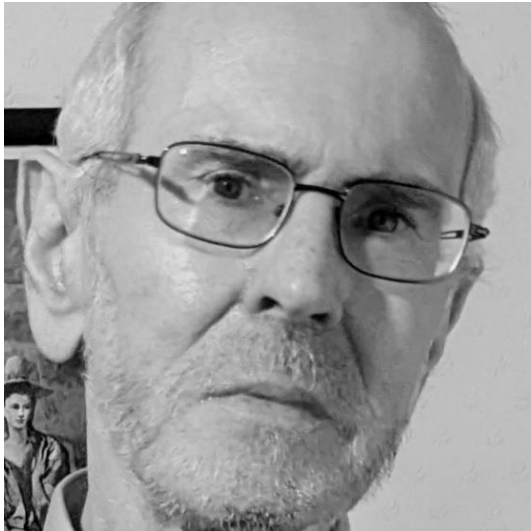
**Halloween is coming**

The silken webbing left by Ermine moths at Kearney

**Biography**

Karen enjoys a *Peninsula Pause* most weekends, where she enjoys exploring the scenery and history of the area.

Peter Adair's poems have appeared in many magazines. He is a recipient of an Arts Council bursary under the Support for Individual Artists Programme. Peter's e-pamphlet 'Calling Card' is available from Amazon: <https://amzn.eu/d/9fcQRQg>



### **Quietus, 1968**

So still the sea at Helen's Bay.  
Birdsong, the damp path,  
sunlight lapping the sand,  
the leaves wounded red.  
A monk from Comgall's huts  
brushes by that pillbox,  
once gunned, manned,  
where summer boys played  
at soldiers, had their fill  
of killing. Now  
it is barred and historied:  
war's theme park.  
Over Belfast lough  
six birds – not blackbirds,  
not Heinkels – perform  
their placid manoeuvres.  
A steamship, stilled,  
charcoalled in,  
a wisp of smoke,  
appears, disappears.

***By Peter Adair***

## **Poetry**

## **Helen Hastings**

Helen Hastings is a poet based in County Down who finds intrigue and inspiration anywhere and everywhere from the marvellous to the mundane. She finds consistent creative value when reading between the lines of everyday life and giving words to what normally can't be spoken. Helen loves nothing more than daydreaming about empty and abandoned places and is never more creatively productive than when she's having an existential crisis! Her work has been published across different platforms including the Bangor Literary Journal and Community Arts Partnership anthology. Helen's online collection 'Calling Card #2' was published in 2021 with Rancid Idols Productions. Helen also writes a mental health column with Down News and facilitates the Words for Castle Ward writers' group.



## Human walls

No one seems to know  
how many moons sailed  
over this place since the windows broke  
but slowly we lost count of seasons  
the dust of summer settling on winter  
and the curtain that is left waves in storms

the flag that flies in tragic surrender  
declaring the shelter nearly gone from here  
clinging on in thin silver threads  
lead flashing knitted to Mourne stone  
But I still feel the heartbeat here

I hear it rattle through the rendering that lies  
in small pieces by the kitchen door  
Hear it pound through the shard of glass left lonely  
in the window frame, threatening  
like a yet to be committed murder

This is sadness born of emptiness  
of the voices that can't be heard anymore  
Cocooned between the four walls  
is a lesson that seeks to teach us  
a lesson of love in the empty spaces  
a love with nowhere to go  
nowhere to be carried to  
and no one to carry it

So, what to do  
when stopping outside this forsaken place  
but to surrender my eyes  
to the oceans of the world above me  
and pray that if the sky ever falls  
it will put this place out of its misery first

There were roses round the door once  
This place stood in clichéd glory  
and the image is locked within me  
of two people who lived and loved  
but lost  
then left

And what they left is brutal  
A corpse whose bones reach  
into the salted air  
the guts spilling in the form  
of a chest of drawers  
heaved halfway out  
before the world gave up completely

***By Helen Hastings***

Katie is studying English with Creative Writing at Queen's University Belfast with ambitions of writing a book. *Photograph taken at Aspects Literary Festival.*





## **Opportunity**

Hannah pushed her body into the pub. It smelled like sweat and stale crisps. John winked at her from his usual corner, and she smiled sweetly just to annoy him.

It had just gone 5 and the pub was already packed with men, all waiting for the same thing. Hannah switched on the TV and received a few hollers and notes of joy. These men, she thought, were easily pleased, until you had to push them out at 12, their hands slipping to your bottom.

Hannah had been working in the pub for 6 months. She just needed a job to help pay for uni, but the more time she spent in the pub, the more she wondered if this was all life had to offer her.

She tried not to be discouraged, but the news stories she read about “Mickey Mouse Degrees” made her despair in the quiet hours of the night, as she went to sleep with the burden of her life choices pressing down on her body.

“Hey, wee girl,” John shouted from across the room.

Hannah turned from wiping a sticky table and looked at him patiently.

“Spell ‘opportunity’ would ye.”

All the men treated her like a walking dictionary because she did English. She didn’t mind at first, but the more they laughed and jeered, the more she wondered if they too thought words were useless.

“I’m sorry, I don’t know that word.”

John’s eyes bulged, then a slow smile spread across his face.

“What good to society are ye if ye can’t spell?”

***By Katie O’Connor***



**Canyon**

**Biography**

KJ Hannah Greenberg uses her trusty point-and-shoot camera to capture the order of G-d's universe, and Paint 3D to capture her personal chaos. Sometimes, it's insufficient for her to sate herself by applying verbal whimsy to pastures where gelatinous wildebeests roam or fey hedgehogs play. Hannah's poetry and art collections are: *Miscellaneous Parlor Tricks* (Seashell Books, 2024, Forthcoming), *Word Magpie* (Audience Askew, 2024), *Subrogation* (Seashell Books, 2023), and *One-Handed Pianist* (Hekate Publishing, 2021).

## **Poetry**

## **Angela Graham**

Angela Graham's new poetry collection *Star* was published in August 2024 by Culture And Democracy Press. Her collection of poetry, 'Sanctuary: There Must Be Somewhere' 2022 and collection of short stories, 'A City Burning' 2020 are published by Seren Books. She is an award-winning film maker and BAFTA-nominated screenwriter. [angelagraham.org](http://angelagraham.org)



## Justice

The woodcutter and his child go hand-in-hand through the forest maze.  
The boy sees that the axe-head on his father's shoulder  
has his father's mother's eye. Nestled there, *You'll burn in hell*,  
she mouths at her grandson, grinning.  
The boy has breakfast bread turning to crumbs in his grip.

Behind them, the birds are gathering – so many and with such a sound  
that his father falters. *We could stop here*, the boy says.  
His father looks away. The birds flock round them, hungrily.  
His father lets the axe-head drop, runs his hand along its edge,  
smears the blade well. *Run*, he tells his son, then turns back, heavily.

When I hear it said of a man like this, *He was doing the best he could*,  
my heart clenches. I don't always do *the best*. Neither do you.  
So why must it be true of anyone? That father gave to a tyrant  
the loyalty we owe only to love. Among her implacable trees he longs  
for accusation, so that his heart can break and call out for his son.

***By Angela Graham***

## **Flash Fiction**

## **Mark Campbell**

Mark Campbell is a graduate from the MA in Creative Writing at Queens University Belfast, currently based in County Down, Northern Ireland. His work has appeared in 'The Honest Ulsterman', 'ThereAfter' and The University of Exeter's 'Q Journal' where he studied English.



## **How Not to Throw a Punch**

Gentlemen we went over the rules in the back.

Fighting is in the blood.

Protect yourself at all times.

Hands over fists. Hearts beating.

Plop like a wishing well. Red button. Push to play.

Square to the trapdoor, guard up, bobbing and weaving. As if it might punch back. That upside down jack in the box. A balloon. The Punching Machine.

Splat. Scores settle like a spinning top. Pride swallowed up.

Not really hitting the bag. Snatching at minnows in a pond. Banging heads against a brick wall.

No one ever taught me how to throw a punch.

***By Mark Campbell***

## **Poetry**

## **Julie Craig**

Originally from Massachusetts in the US, Julie Craig has resided in Northern Ireland, Botswana and now in England, where she teaches English and linguistics at secondary and sixth form levels. Her writing reflects the range of concerns and natural surroundings as well as the diverse cultures she has experienced during her upbringing in the US and in her more international travels.



## **Streetlights**

Back fences formed frames  
you clambered and swung from,  
until the day two pickets gripped  
your ankle, vice-like:  
The rip of tendons. The silence.  
And then the scream.

In dying embers of evening,  
you would ride your battered bike  
like a banshee loosed upon the Earth,  
screeches of triumph and loss  
echoing in streetlight carved out  
of growing shadows: the call to bed.

I yielded to the dark long before you did.  
You pedalled on into the night—  
until that final call to sleep.

***By Julie Craig***



## Poetry

## Nina Quigley

Nina Quigley is a writer and visual/performance artist based in Inishowen, Co Donegal. Her first poetry collection, 'Legacy,' was published by Lapwing in 2001, and her second collection, 'Melancholia,' was published by Three Dancing Oaks Publishing in 2023. Her third collection, 'Working for the Mafia,' was published in April, 2024. Her artwork has appeared at the Artlink Members' Show at the Saldhana Gallery, and at the Carndonagh Local Artists' Show.



## **Ghostwriter**

I'm a solitary ghostwriter living at the limit  
of the known world, watering the plants and picking

ripe berries that present. I squeeze  
lemons for morning water, and grow light.

On Tuesday evenings I pull out a black bin  
or a blue, and Wednesdays I take them in.

They're both empty now like me, and weightless,  
our carbon footprint fading as I release

my iron hold on things. Today jam asks  
to be made, and I pick off stalks to make ready

for the pan. I stand and stir, patient for the gel,  
and write messages in molten sugar on a plate.

***By Nina Quigley***



**Girl picks flowers as Christ watches from the cross**

This is a statue, near Saul, Downpatrick. I noticed a little girl picking flowers and was struck by the contrast between the stone religious statues and the little girl in her bright yellow top.

**Biography**

Gaynor Kane is a writer from Belfast and is published by the Hedgehog Poetry Press. Gaynor has curated and performed at several literary festivals. Recently, she was guest sub-editor for the inaugural issue of *The Storms Journal*. Her latest chapbook, *Eight Types of Love*, was released in July 2022.

## **Poetry** **James Connolly**

James Connolly is the author of *Picking Up The Bodies* He has published 100+ poems, 18 short stories and many essays.



## **What the Nun Told Me**

changed the flight of geese rising  
from the pond where that boy  
went under and drowned,

the way my wife smiles, the grief  
we bring to the wakes of children.  
It eliminated salvation, forgot the entropy

of the sun, the freezing land. She told me  
how to walk around the hospital, to look  
inside, to believe in circles, the crocus,

the light off a Datsun's chrome,  
blue jays scattering wrens – why, that's  
the way, she said. She said pray

for the black elk you've never seen  
and bow into victims you would never  
have held, study the faces we all

would have stoned. Understand how  
the marsh constricts. Memorize how  
the river moves. Remember Latin,

the grammar of row upon row of stacked  
bodies. She said learn it all and study,  
she said pray for that boy and do it now.

***By James Connolly***

## **Poetry**

## **Glenn Hubbard**

A former winner of the Bangor Literary Journal's Forty Words competition, Glenn Hubbard recently returned to the UK after half a life spent in Spain. He now lives in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne where he divides his time between writing poems and supporting Newcastle United Women. You would not guess it from his poems, but his most important influences have been Yeats and R.F.Langley.



**March 8, 1944**

*i.m. Filip Müller*

After you'd seen

how the Terezin families got down from trucks  
that had not taken the turn for Heydebreck  
how the clubs and whips confirmed their error and their eyes  
the true nature of the "International Information Centre"  
how some confronted Obersturmführer Schwarzhuber  
how they beat them, the SS  
how most would not get undressed  
how they all sang the Hatikvah

you followed them into the chamber  
to die. Why continue  
living, trying to survive  
in the *sonderkommando*?

But some women waiting  
to be gassed said no —  
your deed would mean nothing.  
You must live and be heard.

And I hear you now, Filip,  
as once again I watch you  
telling it through tears.  
I picture the women  
gathering round.  
But don't have enough imagination.  
Can't hold in my head  
a nobility which would not fit  
inside a vaulted cathedral.

**By Glenn Hubbard**

*Obersturmführer Schwarzhuber had reassured the families that they were being taken to Heydebreck Labour Camp.*



## **Poetry**

## **Chad Norman**

Chad Norman from Nova Scotia in 1992 won the Gwendolyn MacEwen Memorial Award For Poetry. His most recent book is Parental Forest, AOS Publishing. His poem, The Shoulds, included in the Lunar Vagabond Collection, part of a time capsule scheduled for lift-off to the moon November 2024.





## **Everything Snow**

*for Jessie Lendennie*

A view takes place between the days a hawk  
decides to hide in one of the back-yard firs,  
bloodied tiny white feathers impaled  
on the selected end of a harmless twig,  
hunger and death's perfection in the breeze.

From retriever to receiver I somehow marvel,  
at times I can't see myself, who I am isn't who I am  
then, a crow nearby spoke once when I told it  
the truth, when I tried to say we can be the same.

To know lights of a neighbourhood during the day  
is like an unread letter held in a hand, and chance  
becomes a little girl's bedroom after she falls asleep  
never knowing an early friendship begins in a dream  
always ending as a snowfall fills the stronger branches.

When the moment, everything snow, turns to dawn  
lighter and lighter as one season welcomes another  
places to hide in order to strike with a surprise  
are fewer and fewer, hawk chased off by a chipmunk,  
crow out now on the wires no longer says a thing  
drops to drink the settled flakes, tired of a window  
gone black with the body of a trusted homeowner  
soon to join a still and blinding journey into a forest  
where the predicted accumulation is much deeper.

***By Chad Norman***

# Featured Artist

## Jossiepops



Johnny Hamilton, better known as Jossiepops, is a mural artist from Northern Ireland on a mission to turn his hometown of Bangor into a street art wonderland. After reigniting his passion for art during the pandemic, he's been busy transforming blank walls into larger-than-life portraits of local legends and Hollywood stars like Gerard Butler, Liam Neeson, Foy Vance, Colin Bateman and Gary Lightbody. With a cheeky vision to make Bangor 'The City of Faces,' Johnny's murals bring a burst of creativity and pride to the community. Through his art, fundraising efforts, and unintentional workshops, Johnny continues to drive Bangor's emergence as a destination for public art, capturing attention both locally and internationally.

**Johnny, we are delighted to have you with us for this interview. Can you tell us a little about your artistic journey?**

I was a passionate artist during my time at Bangor Grammar School, but the career advice back then pushed me towards what seemed like a safer path. After years of feeling unfulfilled in the corporate 9-5 and navigating the cutthroat world of Engineering/construction, I found my way back to Art in the form of portraiture. Since making the full-time leap back into art, I finally feel at peace and know that I'm making a difference in a way that truly matters to me.



Jossiepops pictured with his Gerard Butler mural

**How would you describe your style and who has influenced you the most?**

I've always been the hip-hop kid, completely obsessed with breakdancing from a young age (not the Australian kind, lol). That passion naturally led me into spray painting and tagging. While I love street art, I've never been into the fast-paced, run-and-gun style like Banksy. I prefer to take my time and avoid relying on stencils. I'm a big fan of Banksy, Mr. Brainwash, Obey, and Space Invader, but I also look up to local artist Colin Davidson for his breathtaking portrait work. On a recent visit to the Van Gogh museum, I found that I really admire his art, but I'm especially drawn to his earlier works, particularly his portraits.

**What is it about portraiture that draws you in?**

It's all about the connection with your subject. Even though I often work from reference photos, I know I've done the piece justice when the subject feels moved enough to reach out. I love the whole process—picking the perfect reference image, collaborating with the photographer, selecting the wall, and then executing the mural. The real cherry on top is when the subject feels warmed by the effort and reaches out. These days, most people stay within their own circles, but art has a way of breaking down barriers and putting everyone on a neutral, relaxed ground.

### **Is there an element of fear in painting famous faces?**

Definitely not. At this point, I'm confident in my work and only sign it when I'm truly happy with it (and I'm very fussy about that). It can be nerve-wracking knowing the audience is watching as I push through the rough stages, but I also understand that it's all part of the process to get where I want to be. A huge part of being a successful artist is sharing that process—people buy into you as much as your art. With the rise of AI posing challenges for digital artists, I feel it's more important than ever to showcase my talent through videos, tutorials, and even my 'happy mistakes.'

### **You are known best by the moniker Jossiepops. Is there a story behind this?**

I would like to give you an interesting story here, but it literally is a pet name my mum gave me when I was young and it stuck, lol. Jossiepops, Jos, Pops, J Pops, I really respond to anything if you shout it loud enough and with enough conviction. It also works well for branding and murals, as its more catchy and easier to tag.

### **Many people would describe you as a visionary. Why do you think art is so important in 'Making Bangor Great Again'?**

I don't know about a Visionary but definitely someone who has experienced Bangor as a lively beautiful place. I have seen a glimpse of its potential but know it has so much more to give. Art doesn't just brighten up blank walls; it brings energy, personality, and pride back to



the community. For me, it's about more than just murals—it's about telling the stories of the people and culture that make Bangor unique. As previously mentioned, Art has this magic ability to break down barriers, spark conversations, and get people excited about where they live. It shows that even in a small town/city, we can create something bold, beautiful, and memorable, turning Bangor into a canvas for something truly amazing! I would say Bangor's days as a shopping destination are no longer viable, but an exciting time is ahead if we embrace it as a cultural and creative hotspot. Let the out-of-town shopping centres, amazon and even Ards take over the retail side and we can have the fun part.





**As a multi-faceted artist who works on a variety of scales, what are the additional challenges (and/or freedoms) with public, large-scale mural painting?**

I touched on this previously but it's the fact that you are fully open to making mistakes live. You are also putting yourself out there when it comes to ridicule. Strangely I work of a formula that if 90% plus of the comments are positive and if the subject appreciates it, you have done a good job. Art is out there to be critiqued and that's why it works so well in the form of murals. It opens it up to people who wouldn't normally set foot in an art gallery to see a huge portrait but in a high footfall area. Yes of course, there will be trolls as your popularity rises and of course you can always do better, but a big thing is knowing when to stop. If I didn't I would still be halfway up the side of the Independent working on Liam's neck, lol. Put your best foot forward, give them something to talk about and take it on the chin when it comes to feedback. Easy.



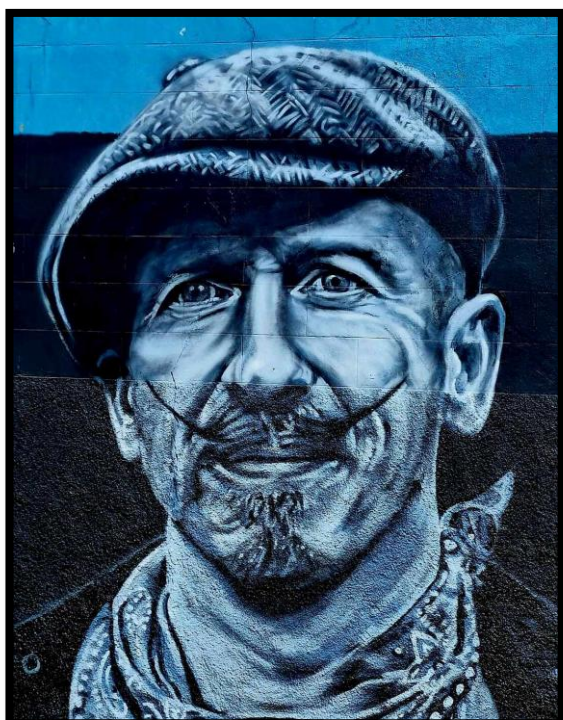




### And finally, what's on the horizon for Jossiepops?

I'm just getting started! I've got a few key players I want to showcase in Bangor, and I'm determined to prove that with positivity and purpose, even 'Joe Bloggs' can help make a place great again. Since kicking off this passion project, I've already seen the people of Bangor come together, taking real pride in the town. Shop owners and other creatives are getting their mojo back, and it's been incredible to watch. There's more than enough to go

around, and like I said in my GoFundMe video, either we come together as a team, or we die as individuals. I guess my mission is complete when I can march sheep down the main road and I can see that Bangor has truly been made great again.



Search for **Jossiepops** on all social media platforms:

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Pinterest
- TikTok
- X
- LinkedIn
- YouTube

You can view and purchase Jossiepops' work and keep up to date with his story via his website: <https://jossiepops.com/>



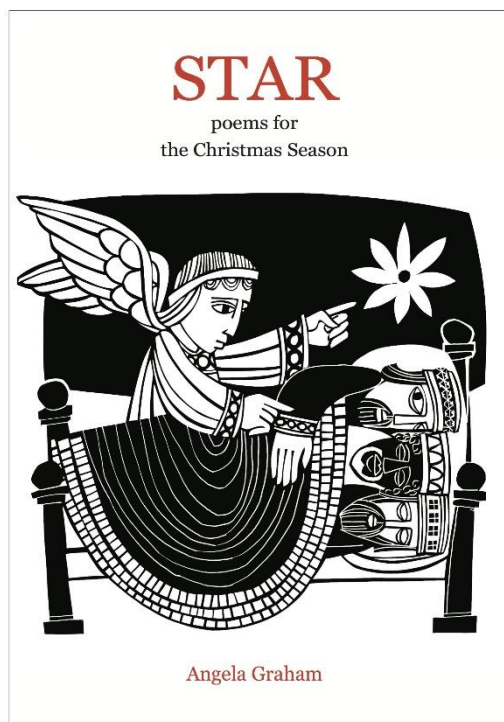


*Original Jossiepop paintings on display at The Launch of The Bangor Literary Journal—Issue 20—at Bangor Castle, during Aspects Festival.*



## Review of 'Star' Poems for the Christmas Season

**By Angela Graham, Reviewed by Caroline Clark**



Angela Graham is well known for her screenwriting, her short stories and her poetry. Originally from Northern Ireland, she has written in Ulster- Scots; now resident in Wales, this collection shows her interest in several languages.

“Star” will considerably expand the range of traditional Christmas readings. It provokes the reader to consider aspects of the story and their implications which may have been neglected. The poems relate to many aspects of ‘Christmas’ but focus on the tradition of the Magi (here Middle-Eastern astronomer kings) and the star.

The central story of the three kings is fleshed out: proud Balthazar is disappointed, repelled by the destination, then shaken by Mary’s ‘gift’ of the child to him. Melchior, worldly wise, realizes they have become Herod’s pawns but thereafter carries

the fear that the family may not have escaped. Old, gentle Caspar, haunted by that guilt, senses at last that the child “has come into his kingdom ...As though mercy is the hand turning the wheel”, but his wife knows that the “inner guiding star” had never left him.

The star comes to stand for the essence of light – reflecting love – a God waiting, “for a man to look up at the sky / and recognize and seize / the chance of joy.”

This poem, *Autun Cathedral, Magi*, describes a carved capital of the kings being wakened by an angel, and the formalized, mediaeval style of this is used by Martin Erspamer to provide a series of brilliantly composed images to complement the poems.

The first and last sections are mostly concerned with contemporary and personal experiences of Christmas and what the star of promise can mean to us. Her writing has great range and variety, from the epigrammatic *Christmas* to the voice of an Ulster-Scots man speaking of his personal epiphany in a supermarket, *Chrissmas Eve*.

In her hands the commonest experience resonates – a four-year old’s delight that “It’s going to be Christmas AGAIN!” reminds her “We have a need to tell each other every year / that we will always make room...”

In the last section the Christmas holiday and the associations of New Year are still influenced by the challenge of the star’s message – the light of hope. The spontaneous, braided circle dance of ‘Auld lang syne’ draws in friends and newcomers – “We are each other’s angel choir / promising peace, our hearts’ desire.” And in *Opening Christmas Gifts* “So we give

each other presents, wrapped because / Love must always emerge, ...shy saviour of the world.”

In *Worship in Winter*, darkness is “that other light ...” (in Welsh, *golau arall*) “by which we see the stars...” and “we honour necessary darkness. / We honour reconciliation of all things.”

Angela Graham does not shy away from darkness – the implications of violence by Herod and his kind, and of Man’s indifference, pain and weariness – but any light is hope. There is nothing facile about that hope. In *The Cost of Christmas*, one of her most challenging poems, keeping faith is crushingly hard. In *Revolution* a candle in the window, “a light, an open door...” is “our stand against the mighty”. In *As the Year Begins*, one of her most personal poems, she imagines her own grave “marked not by a stone but glass” and that glass capturing memories of intense joy: “So, passing anyone might say, / This grave is bright. / What must the life have been?”

Her characters stay in the mind, as do the characters of her short stories. Her writing is at once very accessible and truly profound. In the poems she captures so many new reflections on the meaning of the Christmas story that I am sure this collection will be very popular for many years to come.

Caroline Clark

*STAR: poems for the Christmas Season* is available from Books Council Wales <https://www.gwales.com/bibliographic/?isbn=9781068694608&tsid=3> from No Alibis Books and The Secret Bookshelf, and from Amazon.

### **Praise for ‘Star’**

A wonderful gathering of poems – such a lightness of touch with the old tropes, so much music and energetic imagination at work, so many new notes sounded. Not a line is predictable or a thought expected ... Angela Graham refreshes the familiar. These are lyric poems of poignancy and some pain, alert to joy, the unexpected and the promise of better lives, more grace, greater love ...

**– Damian Smyth, Head of Literature and Drama, Arts Council of Northern Ireland**

Many of the poems highlight the extraordinary in the everyday. They spin a luminous thread through the dark end of the year ...The power of this collection lies in the scope of the poet’s imagination and her ample skill to realize it on the page for the reader. The striking folkloric images by Martin Erspamer enhance the sense of human story and ongoing quest. *STAR* is aptly named, as Angela Graham’s collection shines a light on the core values of the nativity, deftly revealing ‘the kernel – love.’”

**– Ruth Carr, writer and editor**

### **Caroline Clark**

Caroline Clark's poetry collection *Out at the Bright Edge* is published by Y Lolfa. Her poems and short stories are widely anthologised. Born in Birmingham, in Wales she has been heavily involved in local community theatre, organising festivals, adjudicating playwriting competitions for the Drama Association of Wales, and advising on Welsh Arts Council committees.

### **Angela Graham**

Angela Graham divides her time between Wales and Northern Ireland. She is a distinguished producer in TV and Film. Seren Books published her highly acclaimed debut poetry collection, *Sanctuary: There Must Be Somewhere* (2022) and her short story collection *A City Burning* (2020) which was longlisted for the Edge Hill Prize.



## Aspects Festival Launch Event Photos





