

THE BANGOR LITERARY JOURNAL

WINTER ISSUE 21



FEATURING THE WINNERS OF THE WINTER EKPHRASTIC
CHALLENGE: 'PIVOT POINTS AND PORTALS' AND LOTS OF
BEAUTIFUL WINTER THEMED POETRY, FLASH FICTION, ART
AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

PAINTING: 'DEER IN WINTER SNOW' BY MARY HOWLETT.

Editors' Welcome

Welcome to our special Winter Issue 21 of The Bangor Literary Journal.

We have had a very enjoyable time reading the Winter submissions and have selected a wonderfully diverse selection of themed pieces for your enjoyment.

Alongside the talented contributors, sit the six winners of the Winter Ekphrastic Challenge, which called writers to respond to our image, writing and editing within a three hour time-frame. Four other pieces were shortlisted alongside the winners of the challenge. Well done and congratulations to you all!

There is also a small feature showcasing the collaborative publication 'Pivot Points and Portals' by Karen Mooney and Caroline Johnstone, with two lovely poems from the collection for you to sample and whet your appetite.

Thank you, as always for your support of Bangor Literary and we can't wait to see what you have in store for us when we open the submission window for Issue 22.

PS: The FORTY Words Competition is NOW OPEN! Get sending us those polished micro poems and fiction. Carve away those unneeded, extra words!

A peaceful holiday and New Year to you all—

Amy and Paul



Contents

Pages 4-6	Photography and Poetry	Angela Graham
Pages 7-8	Poetry	Moyra Donaldson
Pages 9-10	Poetry	Mary E. Ringland
Pages 11-13	Poetry	Anne Donnellan
Pages 14-16	Photography and Poetry	Yvonne Boyle
Pages 17-20	Photography and Poetry	Andrea Ferrari Kristeller
Pages 21-27	FEATURE	Winter Ekphrastic Challenge
Pages 28-29	Poetry	Annie Egan
Pages 30-31	Poetry	Olwen Rowe
Pages 32-33	Photography	Liz Burke-Jones
Pages 34-35	Poetry	Conor Smyth
Pages 36-37	Poetry	Rhona Stephens
Pages 38-39	Flash Fiction	Sarah Rigby
Pages 40-41	Poetry	Sue Steging
Pages 42-43	Poetry	Doreen Duffy
Pages 44-45	Photography	Margaret Manning
Pages 46-48	Poetry	Trish Bennett
Pages 49-51	FEATURE	Pivot Points and Portals
Pages 52-53	Flash Fiction	Janet Armstrong
Pages 54-55	Poetry	Ella Walsworth-Bell
Pages 56-57	Poetry	Jackie Lynam
Pages 58-60	Painting	Mary Howlett
Pages 61-63	Poetry	Martin Mooney
Pages 64-65	Poetry	Louise Macartney
Pages 66-67	Poetry	Frances Roberts-Reilly



Angela Graham's new poetry collection is *Star: poems for the Christmas Season*, 2024 (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 Cymru-nominated screenwriter. angelagraham.org

Green Sky, Lavery's, Bradbury Place, Belfast



This shot was taken during rush hour on a November evening in 2017, a bitterly cold month. I try to capture the hot, dark colours of this lane against a strangely tinged, green sky. At ground level everything seemed composed of blocks of darkness, huddled together, irradiated by burning neon, in contrast to the pale sky; yet because the cold intensified every movement and perception – one was even aware of the effort to breathe – what was experienced was a wholeness; that everything has its place: all opposites, such as the ephemeral colour of the sky and the lumpy bins; the back lane and the sky.

Rush-Hour, Belfast

November – evening – breathlessly cold.
In a city-centre canyon, its floor crawling
with scarlet tail-lights and churning gears
– night, brewing itself among the cars.

The letters of LAVERYS are neon rungs
leading nowhere, downwards, fast
and an arrow flashes to urge
immediate movement.

November – evening – breathlessly cold –
from the wrist of the crescent moon
a star-drop hangs.
Relinquishment.

The day is leaving. The sky is green
as the pale soul of a wave,
and calm, and holding
that moon, that star, for our desiring.

And the cold is so intense, so charged
that it accosts me on the pavement,
importunate till I acknowledge
– yes, the pure sky, the moil of traffic

are one –
the exquisite, the mundane;
the murk, the marvellous –
are home, for all of us here.

By Angela Graham



Moyra Donaldson has published ten collections of poetry. In 2019, she received a Major Individual Artist award from ACNI. Her latest collection, *Bone House*, was published by Doire Press 2021.

Crone Goes Looking

for her power and strength,
her wisdom – where *is* it
this promise of herself?

Crone Has Always

liked the feel of her bones.
Liked to wrap her fingers round
the small circumference of wrist.
Liked the jut of hips; ladder of ribs,
shins just there beneath the surface;
the scimitar of collar bone
with its evidence of hurt -
the whole articulate structure of self.

Crone likes to imagine
how the bones will sound
without her.

By Moyra Donaldson



Mary E. Ringland is a poet, prose writer, and therapeutic counsellor. She has travelled far and wide but now lives on the Antrim Coast, near Larne. Her poems have been published in The Belfast Community Arts Partnership Anthologies, The Storms Journal - Issue 3, New Isles Press - Issue 3, The Morecambe Poetry Festival Anthologies, Issue 1 & 2, Live Encounters, and previously in The Bangor Literary Journal. Mary has recently completed her MA in Creative writing at the Open University, and her debut collection is due for publication in 2025.

Winter Blues

I remember a time when all I had to do
was slip off stale summer sweat
crawl into the underpass of an Aspen equinox
and wait for Maple mists to dissipate.

As energy dipped and daylight faded, I would fold
my sapless branches into the heart of December
and hibernate in a state of ataraxia, as darkness
tucked me into a snowdrift.

But someone turned the heat up
and I can't get no sleep.

I skate tentatively across a surface of hot ice
rest uneasy in a watery season – sleep lightly
under the LED glare of a streetlamp – drift
in and out of crystal vapour dreams – drown
in a frenzy of rising meltwater.

Someone turned the heat up
and it's messin' with my mood.

My mercury is mean – unstable as a continental glacier.
My forecast is foul – wanton as a weather front named Vivienne.

Is there no end to this autumnal limbo
to the beating of raindrops on my winter pane
to this alphabet of Atlantic retribution.

Someone turned the heat up
and I ain't feeling good.

I miss the guy with the crooked carrot nose and his buddy
Jack – the nose nipper, the toe pincher, the ghost
of winter past – trapped in an ancient tinsel memory
a memory melting faster than Arctic permafrost – melancholic

as the white bear weeping over his lost wonderland – growling his way
through a tepid tundra – beating a muddy path towards extinction.

By Mary E. Ringland



Anne Donnellan lives in Galway. Her debut poetry collection 'Witness' was published in December 2022 by Revival Press Limerick. Anne's work has appeared in several poetry journals including Crannog, Skylight 47, Drawn to the Light Press, Orbis and the Bangor Literary Journal. She was the 2023 winner of the Allingham Poetry Competition.

Night Drive

December night roads glint with black ice
I drive from Doolin to Fanore north of the flaggy shore
beneath bullet-holed skies, eyes tied to white centre line
on slippery space where mad Atlantic waves cavort
with wise silvery shades of Burren moon.

I listen, let beats from beyond
cradle me in fluency of native melody
Micho Russell's prize palette of whistle tunes
fills my ears, his jigs and reels with rolls and rounds
of glottal stops swell and ebb, deliver me
from coastal dreams to below Ballyvaughan
where I close the door on the Clare lore
drive in dissolved moonlight of freezing fog
restored in raw rhythm.

By Anne Donnellan

Poetry in Salthill

It happens sometimes in the ladies' changing hut
purple bodies bounce in cutting chill
of Winter's swim and modesty melts as frozen feet
warm with welcome poured from the boiled kettle
like kelp coaxes growth in a sandy spot
sea sprouts my crude confidence.

In this tight mildewed space
laced with scent of drenched neoprene
fluorescent light yellows weeping walls
I command the mob of plastic-capped heads
their quivering lips stiffen to listen
sea causes a lightness in their reason
floats them fleetingly on a pinkish crest
meshed in the small spell of my January verse.

By Anne Donnellan



Yvonne Boyle has had a range of poems, flash fiction and photographs published in a variety of newspapers and anthologies. Her poems and photographs have been published in the online Bangor Literary Journal. Other publications include the award-winning WomenAloudNI lockdown anthology 'North Star' and *Windows Too*, III and IV, Arlen House. She was a NI Arts Council SIAP Awardee 2018/9. She is a Causeway Coast and Glens Councillor.

Christmas Lights and Potted Shrub



Blue and white Christmas lights on branches of a tree in Coleraine by the River Bann. A little bit of winter light in the sky behind them at dusk.



My potted azalea shrub in a pot after snow in my back garden

Winter Benedictions

May the remembrance of summer warmth hold you in the pale dull days.
May the night stars of the expanding dark lighten your long nights.
Make the faded creams and gentle grey greens of shrubs and reeds
delight you when missing summer radiance. May you learn to self soothe
in your cool familiar home with silence, soups, slippers and slow fires.

Birds have flown, wind in the trees.
Cold, bright, fresh, startling air.
Deep, deep are the seeds. Quiet is the breathe
of hibernating souls. Something is coming.
A sacred patience hangs over the earth.

By Yvonne Boyle



Andrea Ferrari Kristeller is an Argentinean teacher, bilingual writer and naturalist. Her poems and short stories have been published by several different American, Canadian and British magazines. Her nouvelle “The Land Without You” was published by the University of Misiones Press and self- published in English on Amazon in 2023.

Spider: Such a tender crab spider



Scarab: Unidentified but beautiful



The following poem, "Christmas Calendar", accompanies these two photographs which were taken at the same moment that inspired the poem. I am aware, though, that Christmas for us in the Southern hemisphere falls in summer, and perhaps the imagery is discordant for anyone residing in the North.

Christmas Calendar

Morning Glory honours its name
so many purple heads belling around as if
an expert on holiday decorations had worked
overnight

If you peek inside, such surprises

In one, a black and red bug (a scarab?)
frolics around the stigma dispersing
pollen as confetti in a party. It even
lays tummy up, and its serrated antennae
move to a song I can't hear but surely
is the movie track

I go around each bell as if I were
opening a Christmas calendar all in one day

(even the empty ones hold violet amethysts)

In the last one, a spider.
It's one centimetre big
but it is playing stalker, giant hunter,
leopard or jaguar

Against the white of the centre of the cup
ignited by a sun ray just for these few seconds
it looks at me with wild orbiting eyes
as if it would devour me and all of my kind
in one bite

I take the picture, but it's eyes will haunt me
for days and days before festivities
that never include light in belled cups, spiders,
or insects inside flowers in the morning sun.

By Andrea Ferrari Kristeller

FEATURE: WINTER EKPHRASTIC CHALLENGE



We had just under 40 people respond to the photograph above, taken by our very own Paul Daniel Rafferty. The challenge was to write a poem (no longer than 20 lines) or a prose piece (no longer than 200 words) in response to the image. Respondents were asked to spend no longer than 2 hours writing their piece and no longer than 1 hour editing it. We selected a shortlist of 10 pieces with the intention of publishing 5, but we were torn between 2, so we have published 6 of the pieces instead! We were very impressed by the standard of work produced in a short period of time and the diverse and thought provoking responses sent to us. Thank you to everyone who participated!

The four additional shortlisted pieces were: **'Snow Storm in December'**; **'The mountains touch the sky'**; **'Lost'** and **'Shadows on the Ice'**.

Shinshin

Marie Studer

Shinshin: a Japanese word to describe the sound of snow falling silently.

Up the snowy trail I go
to stall seasonal flurries,
advent calendars, stocking stuffers,
a crescendo of Black Friday deals.

Feet shoosh slow, serene steps
evoking the Japanese word
for snow's stillness, shinshin –
sound of no sound.

I go deep in the in and out breath,
pause at the crackle of thaw
on cheeky peeping grass blades,
witness birds' etchings

as the sun and clouds dance shadows
like a slow mountain train.
I stay awhile at the starting point lough,
watch the slow melt of its calm,

swallow its excess of beauty.
Return home surging hope
to turn from streets twinkling lights
and snow globes' storms.

Biography

Marie Studer is widely published in journals and anthologies. She is a past winner of the Trócaire/Poetry Ireland Competition. Her poems have been placed in many competitions, most recently in the Francis Ledwidge International and The Denis O'Grady International Poetry competitions. Her debut collection, *Real Words* was published by Revival Press (2023).

Paradise Lost

Sue Steging

I'm silenced by the glory of those sea-sky blues. The white cliffs rise, confuse themselves with clouds. But curiosity drives me on – remember you can find out more -try zooming in (ignore the quiet echo of technology-threatened doom).

The trudging figure makes it possible to speak. The question that arises - how they came - in turn shows me a road. And are there pylons there, all faded out? Full dark, they'd spoil the dream.

When I saw only sky and sea, I had no wish to spoil, intrude. A moment of old innocence, a child's delight returned. But others were already there. The damage has been done.

I hear my hope that careful words can gather, make a change. I dread this frozen Eden is already lost, wish paradise regained.

Biography

Sue Steging lives by a quiet river near the Giant's Causeway. Her poetry and short fiction have been published in national and international journals and anthologies. Longlisted in 2021 and 2022, she received The Seamus Heaney Award for New Writing in 2023. Her 3 haiku were included in the CAP Awards for Good Relations in 2024.

There was no dramatic big bang at the last.
After the forests burned, came
hurricanes, tsunamis, famine and pestilence.
Then there was a great silence over all the earth.
It's so long since I saw another living soul
upon this bleak frozen landscape
where once there was teeming life,
before godforsaken humanity
despoiled and defiled her,
exploited her abundance,
raped and abused her fruitful soil,
watched as she groaned and slowly died.
While the rich men in their castles
filling their coffers even at the last,
too late in vain tried to turn back the rising tides.
Look then upon this panorama,
wasteland of continents lifeless and bare
stretching from sea to barren sea,
and despair at the terrible beauty of desolation
wrought by greed and indifference.

Biography

Gifford Savage is from Bangor, Northern Ireland. His poetry has been published in various journals, including Honest Ulsterman, The Storms, Flight of the Dragonfly, The Bangor Literary Journal, Lothlorien Poetry Journal, Agape Review and The New Verse News. He was included in the CAP anthology 'Across the Threshold,' has performed his poetry on local television station 'Northern Visions TV' and was winner of the Aspects Festival Poetry Slam 2022.

High up, nostrils flare in icy air,
Where frozen frost gleams, where
flat pewter viscous water, mirrors dark
against the pristine snow, to sign its mark
dramatic, bright yet often stark.

Now its contoured curves revealed
what lies beneath its fall, concealed.
Silent and still the sombre surface pours
as rising ripples, somersault to shore
giggling as they freeze to flow no more.

Underfoot the brittle, bracken, breaks
Melting under every warm step it takes,
Leaving brown slush, in its wake.
High up, nostrils flare in icy air
alone with winter tones, I stare,
Aware.

Biography

Barbara Hartigan has been a full-time self-employed artist for almost 50 years. She has been President of Limerick Art Society for the last 3 years and a founding member of the Market Artists. Barbara is a founding member of the Castleconnell Literary Group and has regularly participated in writing competitions with some success (Woman's Way, Anthologies, Clare Radio, Limerick Live95, and RTE to name but a few.) Her preferences are flash fiction, short stories and autobiographical Articles, but she loves poetry and has attended a number of online courses purely for pleasure.

Silent night

Iain Campbell

Bleak midwinter stretches
icebound fingers
to scrape a rouge of sunset
upon your silver mirrored face.

Your hard hills are empty,
their ruddled paths no longer
bleat where filigree of bracken
rusts, crisp and snapped.

Long since, the shepherds left
the cold white ash of bothy hearth
to tread along the sinners' shore,
by hoof mush and the shadow.

There are no wise men here
with time to trace that evening star,
to question kings and politicians;
they never travelled quite this far.

Biography

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 Hybriddrech in July 2021.

always the same
even in the cruellest weather
she would turn around
find him there
looking at something
calling her back
insisting
pointing
poking at the ice
taking a photo of her
just one more!
asking the question
did you get it?
the notification conversation
nerpal
golomyankas
hornwort
the word *endemic*
his lingonberry IKEA joke
this would be the last time
he would drag her
to Lake Baikal

Biography

Glenn Hubbard has had work published in a variety of journals including *Stand*, *Strix*, and *Skylight 47*. Some years ago he was the winner of the Bangor Literary Journal's 40-word poem competition. Although it may not always be obvious, he owes much to the poetry of R.F. Langley.



Annie Egan lives by the sea on the west coast of Ireland with her partner, three daughters, dog, two cats and guinea pig. She works for the UN Refugee Agency in Dublin. She is new to writing poetry and has previously been published in the *Galway Review* online and the *Belfast Review*.

The Gift

I would give it all to you.
With raw fingers, I would unplug the toggles of my winter pelt
Shrug it from my back and heft it over your young shoulders.
I would scrape the hair from my head, gather it into a soft pile
And pocket a warm nest of it for your hands.
I would give you my voice for company.
My eyes to see more clearly.
If I thought I could ease your pain
I would make of myself a salve:
Crush each nail upon its tender bed
Strip the skin from my form and grind this body dry.
But I think you would probably be happier
If I just gave you a 1996 retro North Face jacket
Like you asked for.

By Annie Egan



Olwen Rowe lives in the west of Ireland where she writes poetry and prose, and enjoys exploring the local landscape with her dog. She was awarded a Greywood Arts Bursary for Carers in 2023. Olwen is interested in how we occupy spaces and places, in the physical world and on the page.

untitled

winter storm strips bare
shivering sky, golden light—
blankets for the dead

By Olwen Rowe

Safe haven



Love in the Winter



Winter Colour



Biography

Liz Burke-Jones is retired and currently trying various creative outlets. She is experimenting with Haiku and ceramics. She loves her garden and riding her Harley Davidson Sportster, dabbles in photography and paints a little.

All three images are photographs taken when in Stavanger earlier this year.



Conor Smyth is an amateur writer based in Bangor. He has had poems published in The Bangor Literary Journal, A New Ulster, The Merida Review and Cold Coffee Stand, and previously contributed to Culture NI. His work frequently features aspects of mental health, nature and formative experiences.

Milltown in December

In the season of giving
I often think of what was taken, and
the smashed window on the advent calendar
The crunch of every frost embossed cemetery step
taken as if in military unison
The diamond white rays from a hopeful sun
belying our appropriate apparel and chain smokers' breath
As we sway a sea of black
on the pure white Milltown canvas
fallen tears now indistinguishable from frozen dew

By Conor Smyth



Rhona Stephens lives in Scotland. Her poems have been short-listed for *Wells Festival of Literature Open Poetry Competition*, long-listed for *Bangor Literary Festival* and *Rialto Nature and Place Competition*, and included in a few anthologies. Her poems for children can be found in *The Toy*, *TygerTyger*, *Parakeet*, *PaperBound* and *Dirigible Balloon*.

Christmas Greetings

The first card falls upon the whiskered mat,
writing shaded by the fading light.
I picture you, deep-digging memory's vault,
gliding pen upon those Christmas pages,
the slant-script flowering of your mind and heart
delivering new words to old homeplaces.
Enfolded in each envelope, warm hand-held
greetings, echt affection for a friend.

And what I want to say to you is this:
I breathed the same peat-scented earth as you
and stepped in time with you through history,
but my life has not borne a treasury.
It rains when it should snow. But no, I cannot
bring my buttoned memories to bloom.

By Rhona Stephens

Every December, for over three decades, Seamus Heaney produced his own Christmas cards for an ever-growing circle of friends and family. Each card contained an individual handwritten greeting, together with a fragment or text of a new poem.

Flash Fiction

Sarah Rigby



Sarah Rigby is a former accountant and new writer, based in the north of England. She has recently completed a master's degree in creative writing from Hull University.

Winter's Passage

She found early winter was manageable, even the seemingly ever-present dark, brightened as it was by the prospect of Christmas. Shop windows glittered. Lights dripped down every high street and lifted sodden gardens to fairy status. The tougher times were, the earlier people's lights went on.

She had watched her parents' festive efforts dwindle over the years. No lights went up. A tree wasn't worth it just for the two of them. A diminishing pile of cards were sent and received; the writing wobblier each year. The turkey shrank to a small chicken. Only the pre-lunch champagne remained. They kept that tradition to the end.

She had vowed to be different, to keep believing that it, that she, was worth it. To delight in unwrapping each treasured bauble, bought or inherited, vintage ones now in vogue again; in dressing branches in starry lights and garlanding the banister.

The pleasure was all in the anticipation of course.

Then January, and worse, February. Bitter winds invading every gap. Sludge grey skies. No wonder desolate towns left their Christmas lights on, glinting on shop windows red with sale signs, not Santa. She and John used to have a party just to cheer January up.

Yet, just as you despair, snow-white heads peep above the blue-green parapets of leaves and yellow stars pop beneath the trees. You can measure the extra daylight, and crocuses billow, yellow, purple striped, and the wind is kinder and the skies lighter and winter is behind you.

By Sarah Rigby



Sue Steging lives by a quiet river near the Giant's Causeway. Her poetry and short fiction have been published in national and international journals and anthologies. Longlisted in 2021 and 2022, she received The Seamus Heaney Award for New Writing in 2023. Her 3 haiku were included in the CAP Awards for Good Relations in 2024.

a season's skies

we
thank you,
winter, for your skies
for high bright noons, pale suns
and paler moons, for skeins of geese
and lines of swans, the moments when still rivers
mirror sun-gilt leaves, for soothing memories of silent snow,
for stars that spike the blue of midnight's mind,
and thank you, winter, for your gales, storming our defences,
pressing us to change

we save the seeds
of circling years
to sow in ground
your cold will clear

By Sue Steging



Doreen Duffy (MA) Pushcart Nominee. Published, Poetry Ireland Review, The Irish Times, The Storms Journals, featured on iambapoet. Her story Francis MacManus Competition, 'Tattoo' broadcast, RTE Radio One.

Christmas Lullaby

The flash of a red coat, the girl strides ahead of me
along O'Connell Street, I follow,
but stay a bit behind
jostled among the Christmas crowds
Someone says they're wishing for snow.
People make space around me now
that smell that gets into clothes
when you wear them night and day, sleep in them.
get used to the footfall, use it as a lullaby,
I think of my baby
He was born Christmas Eve
He didn't cry.
I left the hospital
with tiny handprints and his name
I touch my pocket make sure they're still there
The girl in the red coat stops
her reflection in the window
is mine

By Doreen Duffy

Red Clover on a Frosty Morning



Scentless Mayweed on a Frosty Morning



Biography

Margaret Manning is a poet and nature photographer whose work has been published worldwide.

I went out early on a frosty Winter morning to try capture the first sunlight on wildflowers which glistened with frost. It was a rewarding experience seeing wildflowers covered in ice crystals.



Trish Bennett, a multi-award-winning Irish writer and performer, draws inspiration from a life filled with diverse experiences. Her youth was a whirlwind of changing jobs, careers, cities, and nappies, a rich tapestry of adventures she later tapped into when she succumbed to the urge to write. Her writing, spanning poetry, memoir, and short stories, is a reflection of her life ethos: laugh in the face of adversity. Like life itself, her work is a blend of highs and lows, infused with a strong vein of humour that never fails to entertain and uplift. She delves into a myriad of themes, from the landscape of her people to the comical escapades of her family and other creatures. Her debut collection 'Stench' has just been published by Arlene House and is available to purchase here: [Books – Trish Bennett](#)

Food Shopping at the Frontier on Christmas Eve

I did five laps of the lot, played car-park chicken with a Sligo beamer to take the last space, and of the thirty trolleys in the bay, I picked the one that steered sideways.

The shop was packed, faces on folk like smacked arses, clearing shelves as if that one day shut was the start of the apocalypse.

It'll be lonely this Christmas was stuck on a loop as I looped-the-loop down the aisles.

It'll be lonely this Christmas without you to hold...

What a whiney git, I thought as I reached for the sausages.

When I steered into *Laundry*, a Cowboy from Cavan was in a howl't with a local brave. The brave held tight to the last box of detergent and shouted, *Youse free staters are always coming into our town to take our Bold.*

The Cowboy replied, he was only up for the day.

Could she not let him have it?

Before she went for the scalp, my trolley swung in like a horse with no mouth. The Cowboy galloped off, lavender-scented-66-washes, to the wife loading saddlebags in *Beer and Wine*.

As it filled, my trolley started to settle, full to the grills on Hennessy, Smirnoff, and a dozen bottles of wine, fifteen packets of crackers and cheese, six tubes of Pringles, four tubs of Hagen Daz Cookies and Cream, boxes of Celebrations, Heroes, and Quality Street, tins of USA, Victoria, and Family Circle, to be wrapped for the annual 'Pass the Parcel'.

It'll be cold so cold, without you to hold, this Christmas...

Has that buck heard of central heating?

It's bad enough cooking, cleaning, and making up beds without Lonely Boy's moan year after year.

Feck Christmas cheer, it's Christmas dread.

That buck wouldn't know what suffering is till he shops in Enniskillen on Christmas Eve.

He'll understand when his hip's done, his feet's sore, his back's seized
after wrestling a mustang trolley to the till to be relieved of two hundred quid,
dragging all to the car to offload, to realise that the only real food he's got
are five loaves, two packets of fish-fingers, and a lasso of sausages.

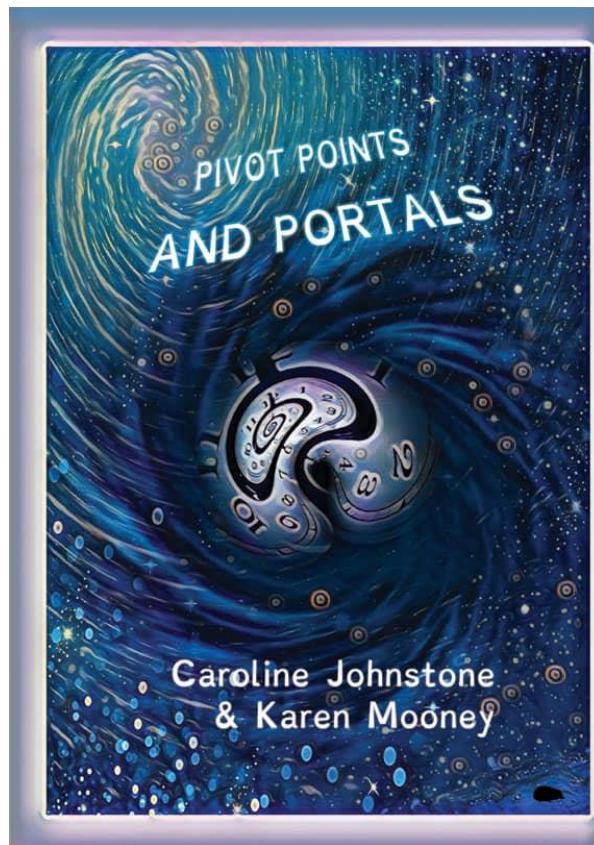
By Trish Bennett

*Inspired by Anne Enright's passage about Constance's Supermarket shop for Christmas
from 'The Green Road', May 3, 2016 by W. W. Norton & Company.*

FEATURE:

POETRY COLLABORATION

‘Pivot Points and Portals’



‘Pivot Points and Portals’ is a poetry collaboration between Caroline Johnstone and Karen Mooney and dedicated to those “who like to chat, those who need to be heard” and invites “those who so often cannot find the words” to dip into the book where they might find “that a conversation is a pivot point in life or a portal into another.”

The Hedgehog Poetry Press published the pamphlet, which is available at : [Pivot Points and Portals- Poetry Pamphlet | PayPal](https://www.paypal.com/pwd/PIVOTPOINTSANDPORTALSPOETRYPAMPHLET) All proceeds from copies purchased directly from the authors are donated to Kidney Cancer UK. So far, £350 has been raised.

Caroline’s husband was diagnosed with kidney cancer in 2020; it’s the 6th most common cancer in the UK and often is difficult to diagnose – it doesn’t respond to chemotherapy or radiotherapy so they wanted to support the charity, Kidney Cancer UK, and raise awareness too.

Two Poems from the Collection

Stakes In a Wasteland

I fall in love with each
abandoned house I notice;
want to fill them up
with love and light // and life again,
rescue them from // oblivion,
neglect,
their falling apart.
Here, windowless eyes
observe a small grove of trees
once planted for shelter, firewood –
Roots, undisguised,
deep in the river's edge
are stakes in a // wasteland
declaring it home.
There, by the lintel,
scattered with sheep droppings,
the door sags // begging for sustenance //
hangs on resolutely
by the one hinge left.
Flaked paint tells the same
pride and joy story,
asks why everyone left.

Borrowed Seasons

April tears up the Almanac,
refusing to cast off winter's clothes.
Squatting in doorways, she inhospitably
blocks the admission of seedtime.
Ragged, malnourished, begging
for sustenance yet obstinate,
denying invitational warmth
of extended light on old bones.
Her debt to the seasons is overdue.
Will they underwrite her mulish
denial of time, compensate us for
keeping her company as she lags behind?



Biography

Caroline Johnstone grew up in Northern Ireland but now lives in Ayrshire. She is an author and award winning poet published in the US, UK and Ireland. She is a board member of The Federation of Writers (Scotland) and is Poet in Residence at Dundonald Castle.



Biography

Karen Mooney started writing poetry in 2016 and has been published in the USA, UK, and Ireland. Her work first appeared with The Hedgehog Poetry Press in *The Road to Clevedon Pier*. In 2020, she co-authored *Penned In* with Gaynor Kane, followed by her debut pamphlet, *Missing Pieces*, in 2022. Follow her on Facebook @observationsbykaren



Janet Armstrong is an emerging writer based in Argyll, Scotland. Her influences include Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Oscar Wilde. She likes to blend the traditional style of the fable and fairy tale with modern fantasy while also exploring the existential issues that haunt her characters. Drawing inspiration from the rugged beauty of the Scottish west coast and highlands, Armstrong's work often explores themes of identity, belonging, and the enduring power of nature to heal. Armstrong is a graduate of the University of East Anglia and the University of Hull.

Winter

The first snow had fallen in October; now it was April, and there was no hint of a thaw. The stench of scorched peat filled Katya's tiny cottage. Her lungs heaved as she stirred the soup pot hanging from a hook over the fire. Katya patted her stomach and rubbed her hands before settling in the wooden chair where she'd nursed her ten children – all long since gone away. But Nikita would soon arrive with bread, vodka, and perhaps a rabbit.

He'd pass by sometimes to bring some small treat – mushrooms, flowers, or herbs to hang from the ceiling. On the harshest nights, they'd sip tea from the samovar or vodka from Nikita's flask. Then, he'd swing his knapsack onto his shoulders before stepping out into the blizzard to trudge the long path back to the village.

It had been dark for some time. Katya laid out two wooden soup bowls and two cups. A sharp chill crawled up her back, and she tightened the shawl around her shoulders. Her eyelids grew heavy, and she drifted into a deep sleep.

She woke early the next day. From the cottage window, the outline of the forest canopy was just visible under a shroud of silvery mist. A solitary squirrel skipped through the branches, its ice-tipped tail flicking from side to side. The soup pot had boiled dry; bowls and cups lay untouched on the table, but Katya just gently placed them back on the shelf until the next time.

By Janet Armstrong



Ella Walsworth-Bell is a speech therapist living in Falmouth. Her work has appeared in the *Leon Literary Review*, *Annie Magazine*, *Mythic Circle* and has been broadcast on BBC Upload. She placed second in the Perito Prize and leads *Mor Poets*, a women's poetry collective who create poetry about the sea, supported by Arts Council England and shortlisted for the Holyer an Gof award. She swims year-round.

Anchored Just off Falmouth Town

1

A boat is a very small place
in the rain

thunder-sound of engines
the Dock's massive piles queening up from a sea-bed of shopping trolleys
kelp roots, bones

here we are in town again

squawk and call of gulls
someone shouts low tide
damp cushion under my bum

2

today is grey
grey as in unshed tears

some sections of sky thicker
closer to the sea of masts

today smells of petrichor
today could be a doughnut day, a croissant day
a kinder to my children day

we don't know how long we share this space
my granny would have said

3

further over in the grey sea
a cormorant dives
his back a rounded n

perhaps he will be lucky

By Ella Walsworth-Bell



Jackie Lynam is a writer from Dublin. Her poems have been published in several journals and anthologies, and have been shortlisted for prizes including the Anthony Cronin International Short Poem Award and Write by the Sea Writing Competition. Her debut chapbook *Traces: Poems and Essays* was published in 2023, and was longlisted for the 2024 Carousel Aware Prize for Independent Authors. She recently received an Agility Award from the Arts Council and she is working on a full collection of poetry.

Kitchen Essentials

On an icy November night
a dripping tap wakes me from my slumber.
But now I'm back in Johnswell Road
and you are standing in the scullery,
the steam from the kettle enveloping
the narrow rectangular window,
as you show me how to release the air
from the swollen hot water bottle.
You twist the cap slowly,
your palm pressed on the body of the rubber vessel.

Hiss then it deflates.
You turn the cap to the right
left loose, right tight
and retrieve a checked tea towel from the top drawer.
I take it from you and wrap it around the bottle,
hold it close to my chest.
Night, Aileen
Night girl, sleep well.

You're gone nine years now but live
on in our kitchen
Nannie D's trifle
Nannie D eggs (fried)
Your teddy, we christened Holly, sits on the shelf under the telly.
I drink hot whiskeys from your dark wine glasses and
serve birthday buns on your Wedgwood cake plate,
which languished in your mahogany cabinet.
No crumbs ever touched its flowery pattern while you were alive.
Display model only.

By Jackie Lynam

Heading Home



Medium: Watercolour. This piece depicts a girl walking home through the woods in the snow carrying her lamp and accompanied by her faithful little dog.

Windswept



Medium: Acrylic on canvas. This painting portrays a girl sheltering under her red umbrella trying to get protection from the Winter wind and rain.

Deer in Winter Snow



Medium: Watercolour. A mother deer and fawn in the forest on a cold snowy Winter morning as the light comes in.

Biography

Mary Howlett is a writer, water colourist and mixed media artist, her work has featured in various publications and she also exhibits her art locally. She began her writing and art journey when she retired and is inspired by nature and the countryside around her.



Martin Mooney is the author of four collections of poetry – *Grub* (1993), which won the Brendan Behan Memorial Prize and was shortlisted for the Rooney Prize and the Forward Prize for a first collection, was followed by *Rasputin and his Children* (2000), *Blue Lamp Disco* (2003) and *The Resurrection of the Body at Killysuggen* (2011) (the first from Blackstaff, the last three all issued by Lagan Press). A New and Selected is currently seeking a publisher.

Snow Rescuers in Their Own Words

'It seems strange in the 21st century that we're still at this type of game.'

Red Cross volunteer quoted by BBC NI News, March 2013

Belshaw came to the rescue of a couple who had been snowed in for five days.

'The wind's blowing and it's burying lambs and ewes.

It's just putting the tin hat on it.'

It's just putting the tin hat on it. 'We've also used helicopters.

Nothing works. It's hard to even walk in it.'

The weight of the snow.

'The weight of the snow took the trees down

and the trees came down over the lines and that took the lines down.'

We put snow in buckets.

'We put snow in buckets and let them lick it.'

Belshaw came to the rescue,

and McCullough opened the road to a dairy farm in Carnalbanagh.

By Martin Mooney

Ushet, on Rathlin

Roof gone, door gone, glass long gone –

at the heart of life

there's desolation, and vice versa,

a hole in the wall where a man

brought his boat into the kitchen

during a storm.

By Martin Mooney



Louise Macartney was born in Belfast in the 70s and grew up in Bangor, via a decade in Scotland. When she's not lobbying political figures about green or socially-conscienced issues, she spends some time doing little illustrations, a bit of painting, and occasional flurries of written word. This she fits in and around the day job in a college library, while she tries to wait patiently for the ADHD diagnosis that would help make everything make sense.

Winter Swim

Lean in
In earnest.

Here is a raw place,
a place of purity.

Here, there are no more demands to harry and chafe.

Find breath.

This cold Demands exquisite confrontation. Dare to open sadness with its rusted hinge!

All is laid bare
None may hide.

Maybe the sea will commute our sorrow?

If this vast volume could but bear it, if I could thole -
I ache to know.

By Louise Macartney



Frances Roberts-Reilly was born on the Welsh border and grew up in England. She's of mixed-heritage Welsh Gypsy-English, a descendant of Abram Wood, the notable family of musicians and storytellers.

True to the Roma diaspora, she has an international profile as a Romani writer. Frances has published *Parramisha: A Romani Poetry Collection* (Cinnamon Press), Firebird Award. Her poems have been published internationally in well regarded anthologies in Canada, U.S., U.K., Wales and Europe. She is a recipient of a Poetry Wales Award. She began writing seriously, whilst working at BBC television in London, England. After making award-winning documentaries on human rights, she earned BA (Hons) degree in English Literature at the University of Toronto. Frances credits her Romani heritage for inspiring her human rights work.

She is Producer of Watershed Writers, a radio documentary and podcast series showcasing a community of writers at www.watershedwriters.ca

Gypsies Nomadic Prayer

I whisper your Gypsy bird name;
Ah God! who has long departed,
where do we go from this time?

Pen shukar teero Kalesko chiriclo nav;
Ai Debla! kai churla
Odoi kai kair jaul paupalay?

Alas Winter's sorrow.
Tai Vendesko tuganes.

By Frances Roberts-Reilly

Accompanying Folk Art linked to the poem. Credit to Artist: Ildiko Nova

