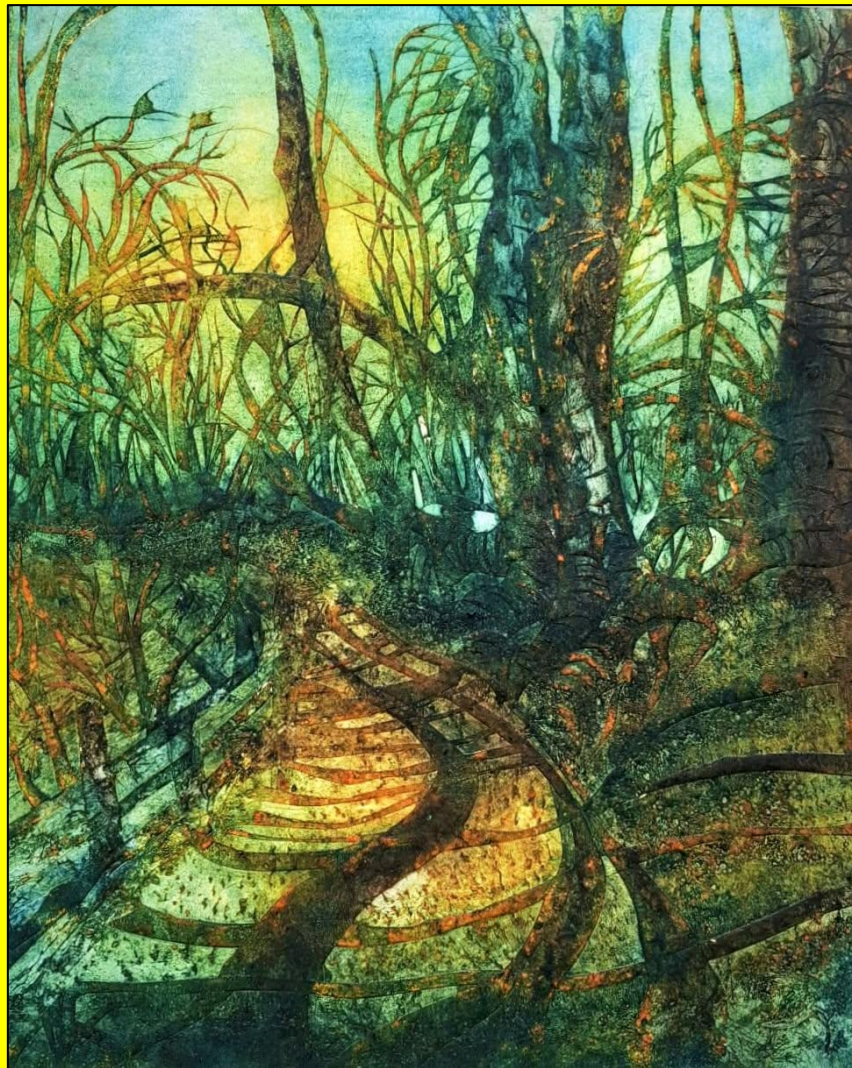
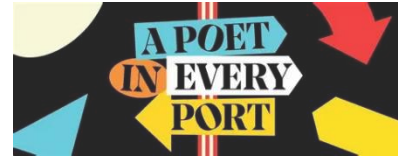


ISSUE 24
THE BANGOR LITERARY JOURNAL

A POET IN EVERY PORT SPECIAL
ASPECTS FESTIVAL
&
SOUTHBANK CENTRE LONDON



Editors' Welcome



Welcome to an exciting and energetic **Issue 24** of **The Bangor Literary Journal**.

We are delighted to showcase the **ten shortlisted poets** from this year's **Annual Bangor Poetry Competition**—now in its **thirteenth year**. To make the competition even more special, this time it was not only part of **Aspects Festival**, but also **Southbank Centre** (London)'s '**A Poet in Every Port**' initiative.

The ten shortlisted poems (selected anonymously from **over 500 entries** from all over the globe) were displayed on our online gallery, where **members of the public voted on their three favourite poems**. (**1st choice: 3 points / 2nd choice: 2 points / 3rd choice: 1 point**)

We are delighted to announce that **this year's Winner** of The 13th Annual Bangor Poetry Competition is **Colin Dardis** for his multifaceted, highly skilled and utterly compelling poem '**Bogwood**'.

Siobhán McCafferty is this year's **Runner Up** with her impressive, emotionally-charged poem '**Admin Error**'.

Anne Rainey received **Highly Commended** for the beautifully constructed poem '**She Wrote, She Spoke**'; while **Cathy Ryan's** strikingly evocative '**Love Story**' was **Commended**.

With just **over one thousand votes** this year from all over the globe, it was absolutely wonderful to see these talented poets getting such a well-deserved response to their work! **Well done to every single one of you who made the longlist, shortlist and were placed in the competition- it was quite a feat!**

And finally... We hope you love reading (and seeing) the amazing poems (and book stacks) created by our **SPINE POETRY CHAMPIONS**. This challenge was so much fun. We promise to facilitate another one soon—with extra twists and turns!

Thank you to everyone who made this year's launch and competition so memorable. This wouldn't be possible without all of your support.

WE CERTAINLY POET-ED IN THE PORT!

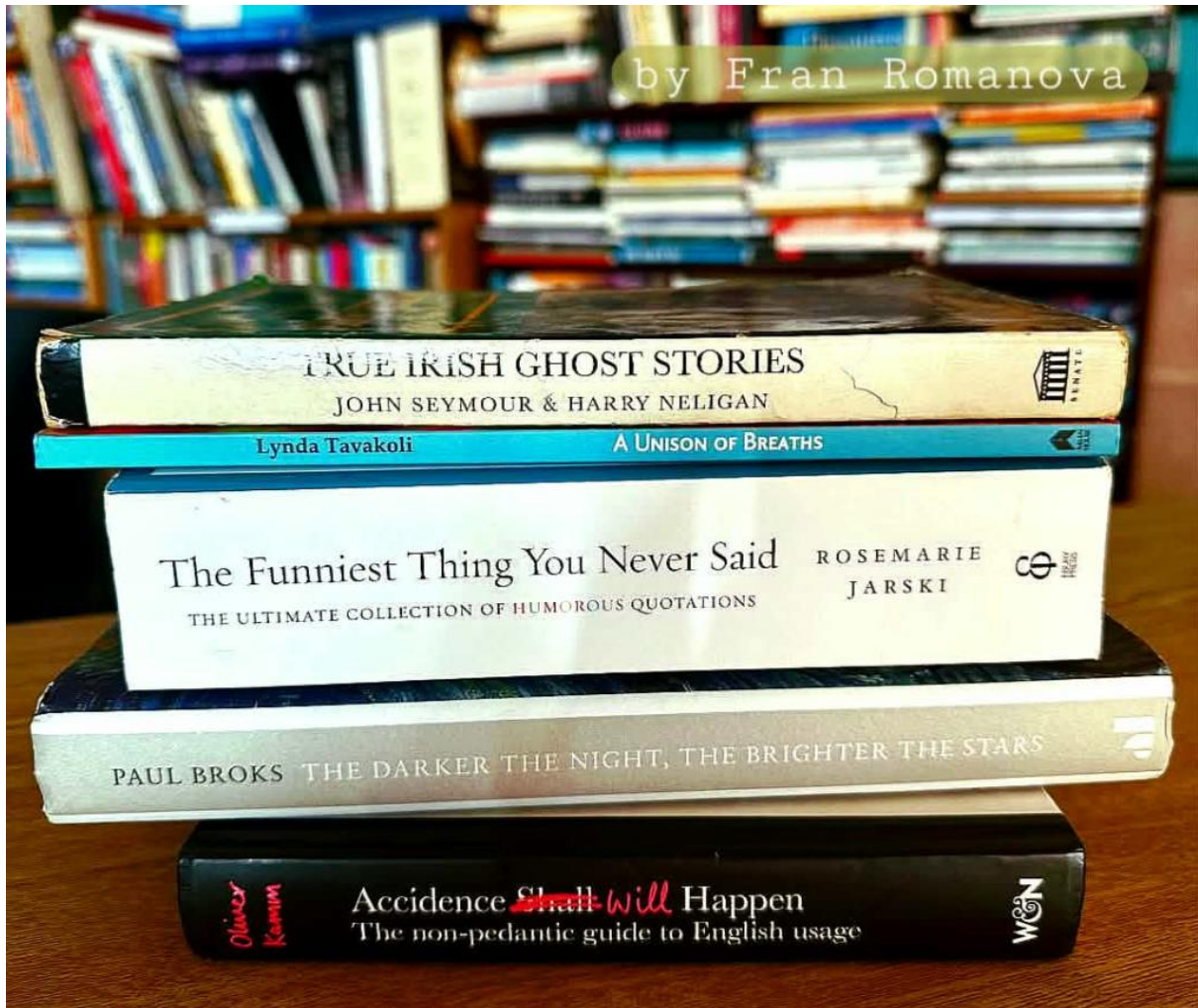
Amy and Paul



PS Our gorgeous cover image is a collagraph by **Seacourt Print Workshop** artist and printmaker **Alice Wyatt**. '**Sanctuary in Solitude**' is part of Alice's new body of work which will be exhibited in 2027.

SPINE POETRY CHALLENGE

CHAMPIONS



We challenged you to create a poem using a stack of books!

These are absolutely brilliant!

Congratulations to our Aspects Festival and Southbank

Centre: 'A Poet in Every Port'

SPINE POEM CHAMPIONS 2026!

FRAN ROMANOVA

SPINE POEM

Fran is a writer and poet who is currently studying A Levels in Ethics, Philosophy and Criminology. Fran has performed at Aspects Festival and The Southbank Centre's National Poetry Mobile Library open mic as part of 'A Poet in Every Port'. She has been an editor and creative producer of the Inkwell Journal @ SERC Bangor Campus for over two years. Fran's work engages with a range of vital issues, influenced by her passion for women's rights and her philosophical interests. Fran was the first poet to create a spine poem for this challenge; and her model poem was used as an exemplar to all other poets entering the challenge on The Bangor Literary Journal website! GO FRAN! Thank you for going first and inspiring us all!

Books used to create 'True Irish Ghost Stories'

John Seymour and Harry Neligan

True Irish Ghost Stories

Lynda Tavakoli

A Unison of Breaths

Rosemarie Jarski

The Funniest Thing You Never Said

Paul Broks

The Darker the Night, The Brighter the Stars

Oliver Kamm

Accidence Will Happen

True Irish Ghost Stories

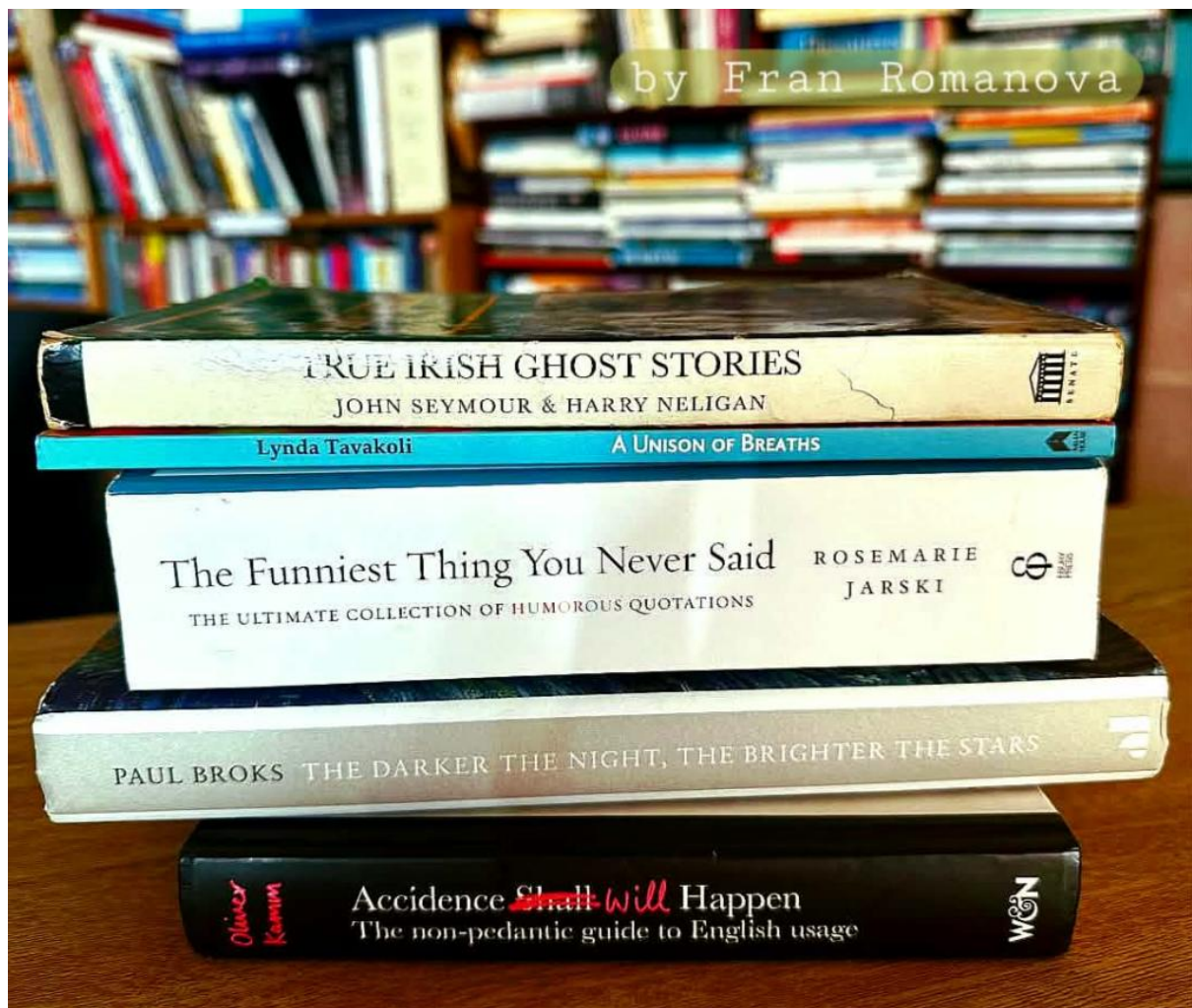
True Irish Ghost Stories

A Unison of Breaths

The Funniest Thing You Never Said

The Darker the Night, The Brighter the Stars

Accidents Will Happen



TREVOR PATTERSON

SPINE POEM

Trevor Patterson lives in Helen's Bay, Co. Down and is a fresh emerging voice in poetry. His poetry can be found online in Poem Alone, and explores his surroundings, identity and belonging, and he is experimenting with a range of style and form, from traditional, modern, and free verse.

Books used to create 'As good as it gets'

Kathryn Mannix

Listen

Sally Rooney

Normal People

Matt Fitzgerald

How Bad Do You Want It?

Richard Reed

If I could tell you just one thing...

Robin Mark

Warrior Poets of the 21st Century

Richard Askwith

Feet in the Clouds

Hanya Yanagihara

A Little Life

As good as it gets

Listen, normal people,
how bad do you want it?

If I could tell you just one thing,
warrior poets of the 21st Century,
feet in the clouds.

A little life, conversations with friends,
a poem for every day of the year.

As good as it gets?



WALLIS JAY

SPINE POEM

Wallis Jay has performed at various Aspects Festival events. Longlisted in The Bangor Poetry Competition (2026), Wallis Jay performed at 'A Poet in Every Port' open mic in Ward Park and took third place at the 2026 Aspects Poetry Slam.

Books used to create 'BENDING'

Lucy Greeves

Curious Poses

Cordelia Fine

Delusions of Gender

Deliah S Dawson

Bloom

Time Powers

On Stranger Tides

Bessel Van Der Kolk

The Body Keeps the Score

Bending

Curious poses;

Delusions of gender

Bloom

On stranger tides.

The body keeps the score.



CLARK CHAMBERS

SPINE POEM

Clark Chambers has penned numerous poems and several short stories over the years with degrees of varying success, but recently has become increasingly happy with his work. He has had poetry and photography published in journals and read his work at a wide variety of events and festivals. Clark finds that writing is simultaneously an escape from the world and oneself, but conversely, always ultimately connects one to who they are.

Books used to create 'Autumn leafing'

Michael Walsh

James Shapiro

Professor Stephen Westary

Kate Newmann

J Krishnamurt

Publications International

As Time Goes By

1599

Fragile Lives:

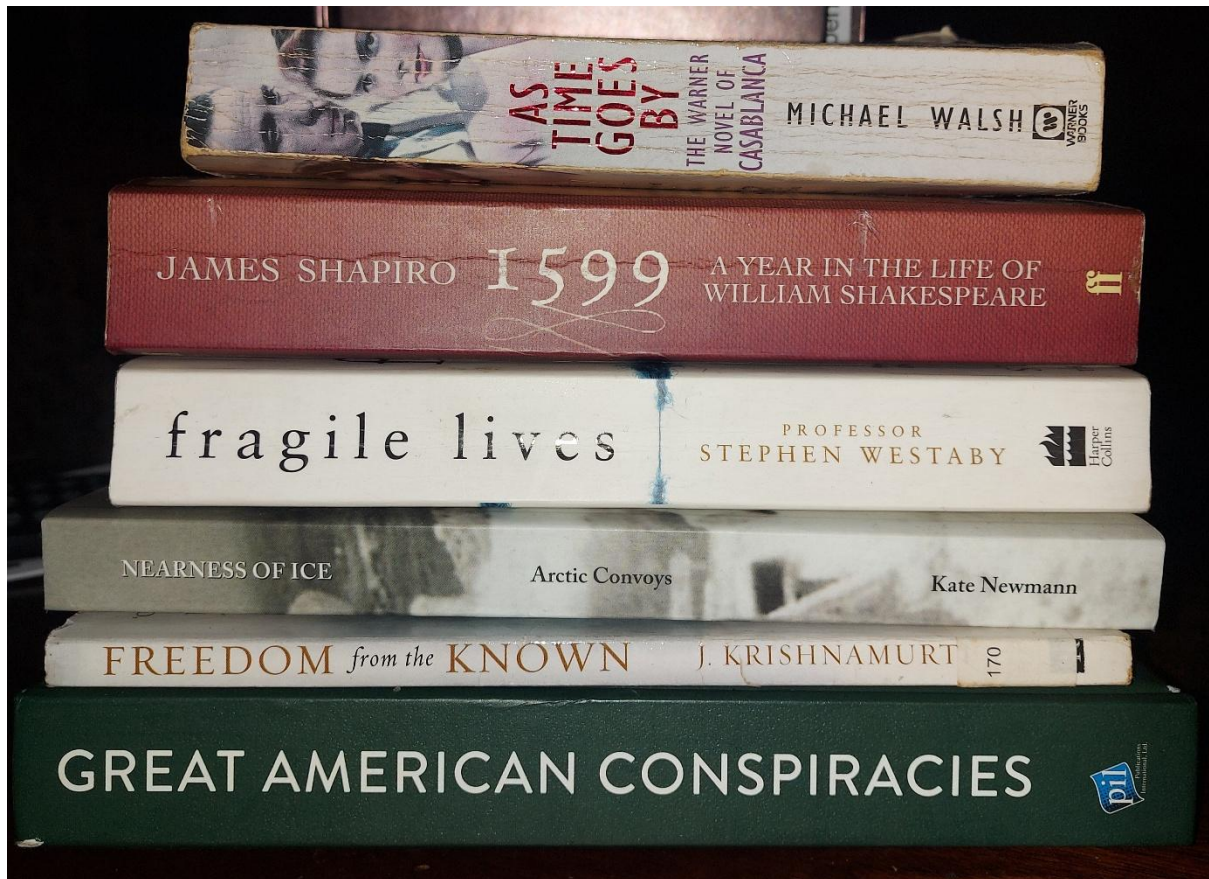
Nearness Of Ice:

Freedom From The Known:

Great American Conspiracies.

Autumn leafing

As time goes by,
The 1599, and the rest,
Fragile lives struggling,
Against the nearness of ice,
Disconnected from themselves,
Longing for the freedom from the known,
Great American conspiracies.



LIZ BURKE-JONES

SPINE POEM

Liz is retired and loving it, enjoying pottering in her garden and has started ceramics, making pieces for her home and garden. She supports the Green Bay Packers in the NFL and would love to travel to Wisconsin to watch a game. She still rides her Harley Sportster occasionally.

Books used to create 'Travelling'

Bill Bryson

Lonely Planet

Bill Bryson

AA

Bill Bryson

Bill Bryson

Bill Bryson

Notes from a Big Country

Canada

Notes from a Small Island

Menorca

The Lost Continent

Down Under

Neither here nor there

Travelling

Notes from a Big Country

Canada

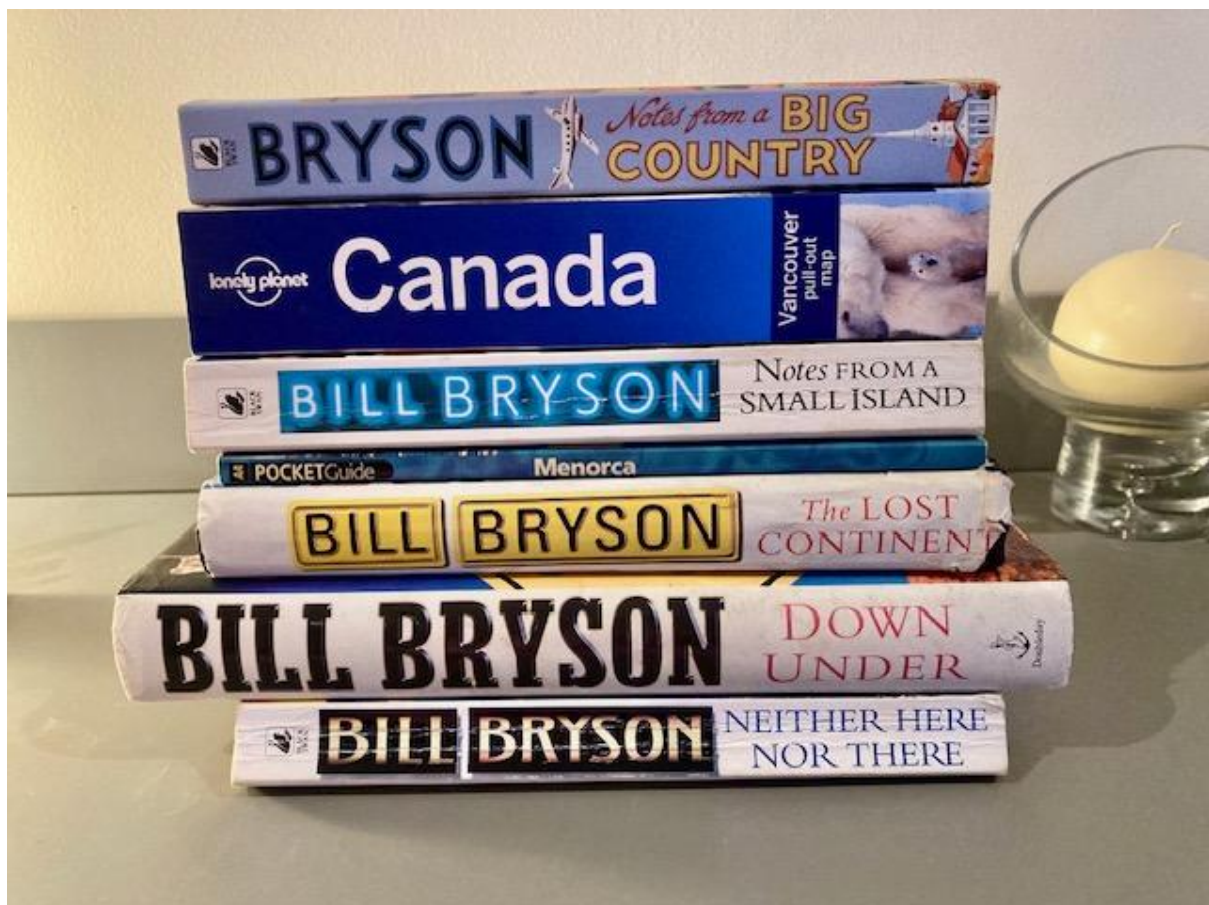
Notes from a Small Island

Menorca

The Lost Continent

Down Under

Neither here nor there



MEG MCLEERY

SPINE POEM

Meg studied at QUB and UUI and is a former college lecturer in English Literature and Creative Writing. She also ran Creative Writing workshops in Community Centres and her latest poetry publication is in the Poetry in Motion Anthology “Endure” (August 2026). Originally from Belfast Meg now lives in North Down.

Books used to create ‘A Ghost Wedding’

Gerald Dawe

In Another World

Clare Leslie Hall

Broken Country

Alice Roberts

The Goddess Queen

Lily King

Heart the Lover

Mary Costello

A Beautiful Loan

Stevie Van Zandi

Unrequited Infatuations

David Park

A Ghost Wedding

A Ghost Wedding

In Another World

A Broken Country

The Goddess Queen

Is Heart the Lover

A beautiful Loan

Unrequited Infatuations

A Ghost Wedding



GIFFORD SAVAGE

SPINE POEM

Gifford Savage is from Bangor. He has appeared in various journals, including The Bangor Literary Journal, Honest Ulsterman, Hedgehog Poetry Press, The Storms, Flights, Agape Review, The New Verse News, Poem Alone, Lothlorien Poetry Journal, the CAP anthology 'Across the Threshold' and won the Aspects Festival Poetry Slam 2022.

Books used to create 'Life is a dream'

Paul Durcan

Christopher Paul Carey

Jonathan Magonet

Mary Ruefle

Terry Pratchett

Joan Baez

Lisa Marie Presley & Riley Keough

Life is a Dream

The Grandest Adventure

From Autumn to Summer

Madness, Rack and Honey

A Stroke of the Pen

And a Voice to Sing With

From Here to the Great Unknown

Life is a dream

The grandest adventure
from Autumn to Summer:
Madness, Rack, and Honey!

A stroke of the pen,
and a voice to sing with
from here to the great unknown.



IAIN CAMPBELL

SPINE POEM

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 in July 2021.

Books used to create 'Find'

Poetry in motion compilation

Jack Caradoc compilation

Ross Thompson

Lynda Tavakoli

Find

Summer Anywhere

Threading the Light

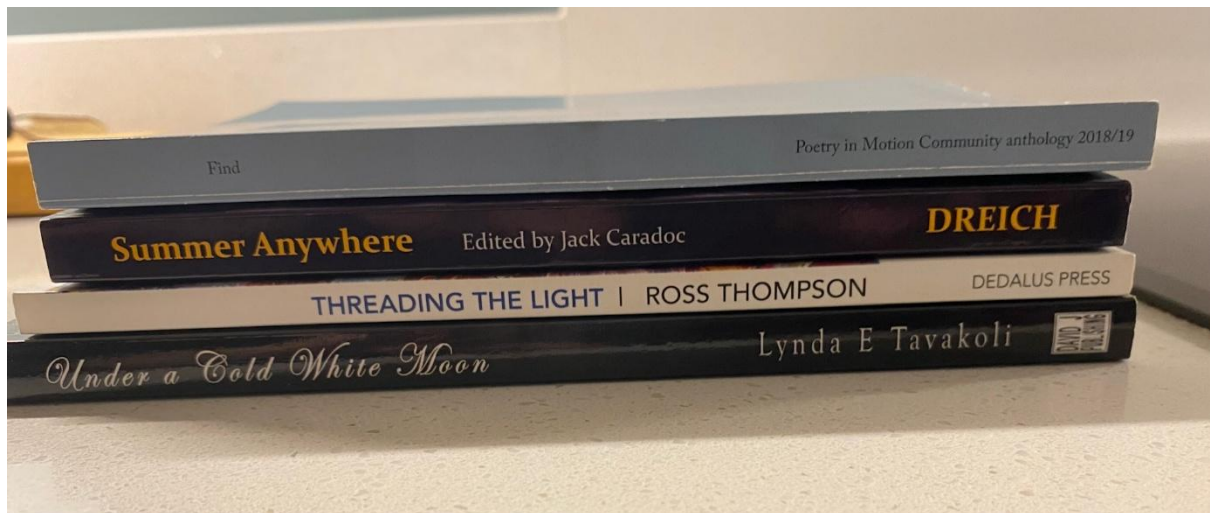
Under a Cold White Moon

Find

Summer anywhere

Threading the light

Under a cold white moon



MORNA SULLIVAN

SPINE POEM

Morna Sullivan is a member of Coney Island Writers Group and volunteers as Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) Regional Advisor (Ireland) leading a team supporting children's writers and illustrators across Ireland. Writing in English, Scots and Ulster-Scots her work has achieved national recognition in creative writing competitions.

Books used to create 'Midst Moonlit Mountains'

Victoria Hislop

One August Night

Carol Kirkwood

Under a Greek Moon

Lily Seafield

Scottish Witches

Steve Cavanagh

Twisted

Jennifer Niven

All the Bright Places

John Betjeman

Summoned by Bells

Elly Griffiths

The Frozen People

Anthony J Quinn

Disappeared

Khaled Hosseini

And the Mountains Echoed

Julian Barnes

The Noise of Time

Midst Moonlit Mountains

One August night,
under a Greek moon,
Scottish witches
twisted
all the bright places.
Summoned by bells,
the frozen people
disappeared,
and the mountains echoed
the noise of time.



GARY DEVENNEY

SPINE POEM

Gary Devenney is a poet from the North Coast. His writing explores themes of love, loss, and life, with philosophical undertones. Gary first began writing during lockdown, an endeavour he later returned to after the devastating loss of his partner, Fiona, to skin cancer at the age of 36 in January 2024. Gary writes to honour Fiona's memory and to express the love he can no longer give. He recently published his poetry collection, *I Talk to Trees* available here: [I Talk To Trees: Shadows Beneath The Leaves: Amazon.co.uk: Devenney, Gary: 9781917272193: Books](https://www.amazon.co.uk/Devenney-Gary/dp/9781917272193)

Books used to create 'wild hope'

Humble The Poet for HarperCollins

Max Porter

Don Miguel Ruiz

Donna Ashworth

Things no one else can teach us

Grief is the Thing with Feathers

The Mystery of Love

Wild Hope

wild hope

things no one else can teach us;

grief is the thing with feathers.

the mystery of love:

wild hope.



JUDITH THURLEY

SPINE POEM

Judith Thurley lives in Co Down and her poetry has been published in journals and anthologies in Ireland, the UK, Canada and the US. Judith often writes in Spanish and translates this work into English. She has been listed for The Seamus Heaney Award for New Writing.

Books used to create 'An Unquiet Life'

Frank Pantridge

Wilkie Collins

Michael D Higgins

Carol Graham

Marcia Golub

Gaby Morgan

Linda Cracknell

Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill

Ian Wilson

Easkey Britton

Manchán Magan

An Unquiet Life

The Woman in White

The Season of Fire

Into the darkness toward the light

I'd Rather Be Writing

Read Me

A Wilder Vein

The Fifty Minute Mermaid

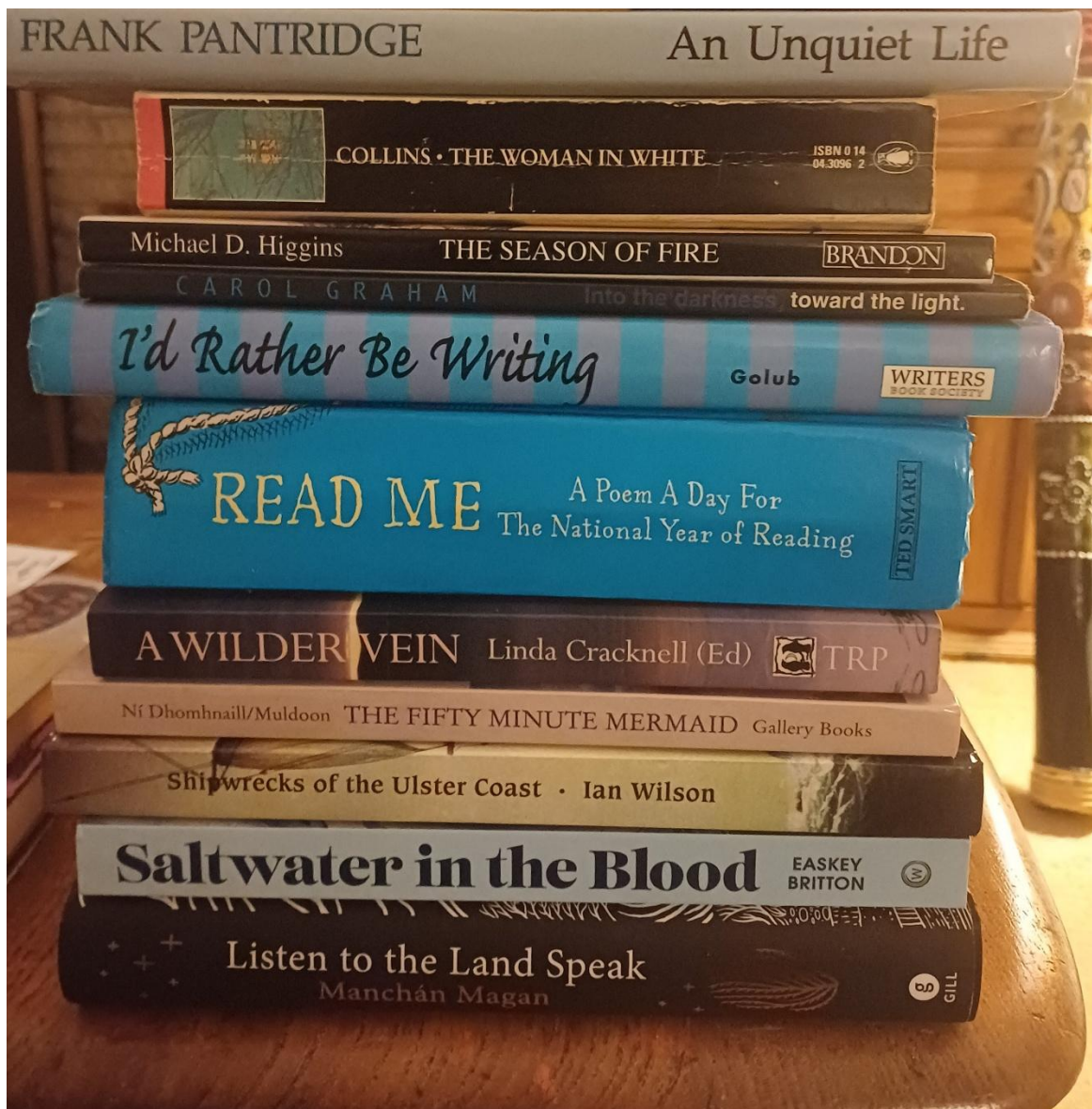
Shipwrecks of the Ulster Coast

Saltwater in the Blood

Listen to the Land Speak

An Unquiet Life

The woman in white:
the season of fire -
into the darkness, toward the light.
I'd rather be writing -
read me!
On a wilder vein
the fifty minute mermaid
and shipwrecks of the Ulster coast:
saltwater in the blood,
listen to the land speak.



MARION CLARKE

SPINE POEM

Marion Clarke is from Warrenpoint, County Down. She was runner-up in the Seamus Heaney Award for New Writing, 2023. As a short form poet, her work features regularly in international haiku journals and anthologies, and was published by invitation in the first two national collections of haiku from Ireland.

Books used to create ‘Good Advice’

Maeve O’Sullivan

Wasp on the Prayer Flag

Sean O’Connor

By Dōgen’s Stream

Poetry in Motion: CAP

Making Memories Arts

Bridge House Publishing

Devils, Demons and Werewolves

Poetry in Motion: CAP

Measure

Anatoly Kudryavitsky

Between the Leaves

Dempsey & Windle Publishing

What the Peacock Replied

Poetry in Motion: CAP

Find

Steve Kowit

In the Palm of Your Hand

Dr Brenda Liddy

Common Things that are Suddenly Special

Good Advice

A wasp
on the prayer flag by Dōgen's stream
is making memories,
while devils, demons and werewolves
measure between the leaves.
It asks what the peacock replied...

*"Find in the palm of your hand
common things that are suddenly special."*



LYNDA TAVAKOLI

SPINE POEM

Lynda Tavakoli lives in Baillies Mills, County Down. She is a professional member of The Irish Writers Centre and has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net Awards. Her poetry and prose have been widely published both at home and abroad.

Books used to create 'Leave Taking'

Paddy Donoghue

Leave Taking

Brian Turner

Here, Bullet

Gillian Clarke

Making the Beds for the Dead

Mel McMahon

Beneath our Feet

Margaret Fishback Powers

Footprints

Clare Shvili

Hope

Joan Wilson with Alf Mc Creary

All Shall be Well

Leave Taking

Here, bullet,

making the beds for the dead

and beneath our feet -

footprints.

The hope

that all shall be well.



VERONICA KEYS

SPINE POEM

Veronica is from Donegal, based in Belfast. Her work has appeared in The Belfast Review, The Honest Ulsterman, Skylight 47, Martello Journal, Frontline Voices Anthology. She was shortlisted for The 12th Annual Bangor Poetry Competition as part of Aspects Festival, and was a recipient of John Hewitt Summer School Bursary Award 2025.

Books used to create 'Where are the Kings?'

Fiona Scarlett

May All Your Skies Be Blue

Isabelle Allende

In the Midst of Winter

Doireann Ní Ghríofa

Said the Dead

Manchán Magan

Listen to the Land Speak

Donal Ryan

Where are the Kings?

Michael Moore

Stupid White Men

Rita Ann Higgins

Jiving With Wasps

Gina Arnold

On the Road to Nirvana

Gabor Maté

In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts

Teju Cole

Every Day is for The Thief

Where are the Kings?

May all your skies be blue

In the midst of winter,

Said The Dead.

Listen to the land speak.

Where are the Kings?

Stupid white men

Living with wasps

On the road to Nirvana.

In the realm of hungry ghosts

Every day is for the thief.



CLAIRE SHANNON

SPINE POEM

Claire Shannon is a writer, researcher, and retired librarian. She was born in Belfast, studied at Bangor Technical College while living in Groomsport, and continued studying at Loughborough University. Claire completed an MA in Creative Writing at LondonMet in 2011. She is working towards her first collection of poetry, and has been published in a variety of online and print publications.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nXxr-08dv9k>

Books used to create 'The Hard Life'

Nuala O'Faolain

Are You Somebody?

Dr Aric Sigman

remotely controlled

Virginia Woolf

To the Lighthouse

Hollie McNish

Nobody Told Me

P D Woodhouse

The Man Upstairs

Victor Bockris and Gerard Malanga

up-tight

Flann O'Brien

The Hard Life

Christopher Ward

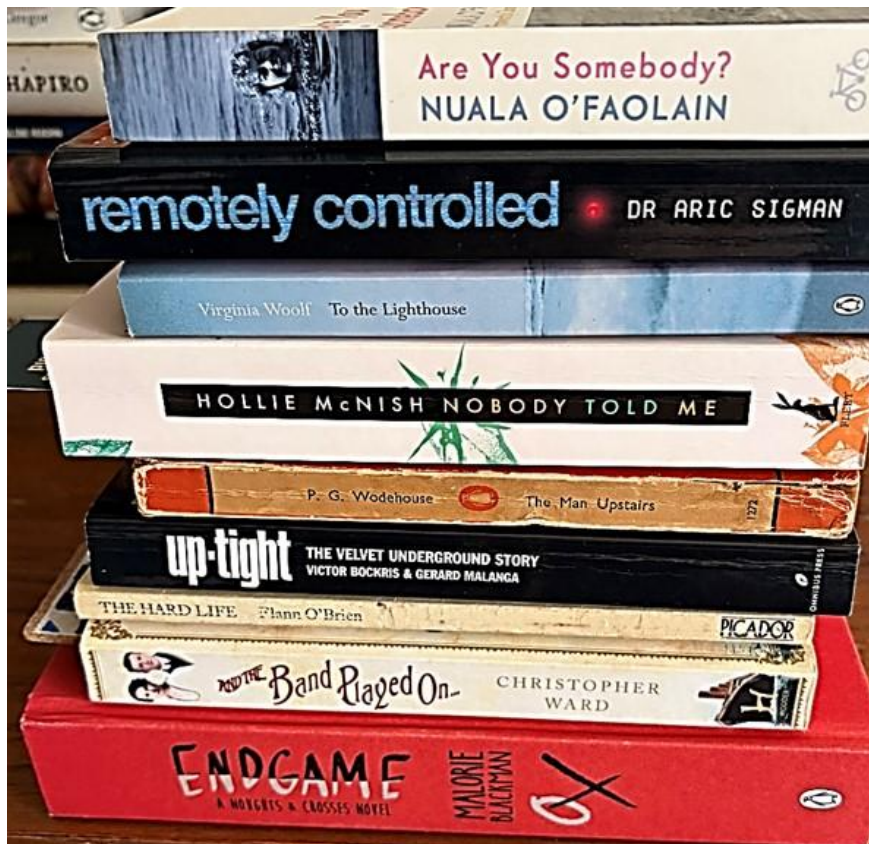
And The Band Played On...

Malorie Blackman

Endgame

The Hard Life

Are you somebody
remotely controlled to
the lighthouse?
Nobody told me
the man upstairs
was so uptight
about
the hard life,
that when the band played on
he saw the endgame.
Again.



MARTINA KEARNEY

SPINE POEM

Martina's work has been included in Dublin City Co Winter Lights Festival; Dublin City Co anthology of writing ILLUMINATIONS; A little Book of Brigid, an Art Book project by Blueway Arts/Kildare Co Co.; The Storms IV, and eatthestorms podcast. She has read her work widely.

Books used to create 'The Fallen Sea Wife'

Danielle McLaughlin

The Art of Falling

Virginia Woolf

The Waves

Eric Newby

On the Shores of the Mediterranean

Margaret Drabble

The Sea Lady

Carol Ann Duffy

The World's Wife

Damien B Donnelly

Back From Away

Anuk Arudpragasm

The Story of a Brief Marriage

Donal Ryan

heart, be at peace

The Fallen Sea Wife

The Art of Falling

The Waves

On the Shores of the Mediterranean

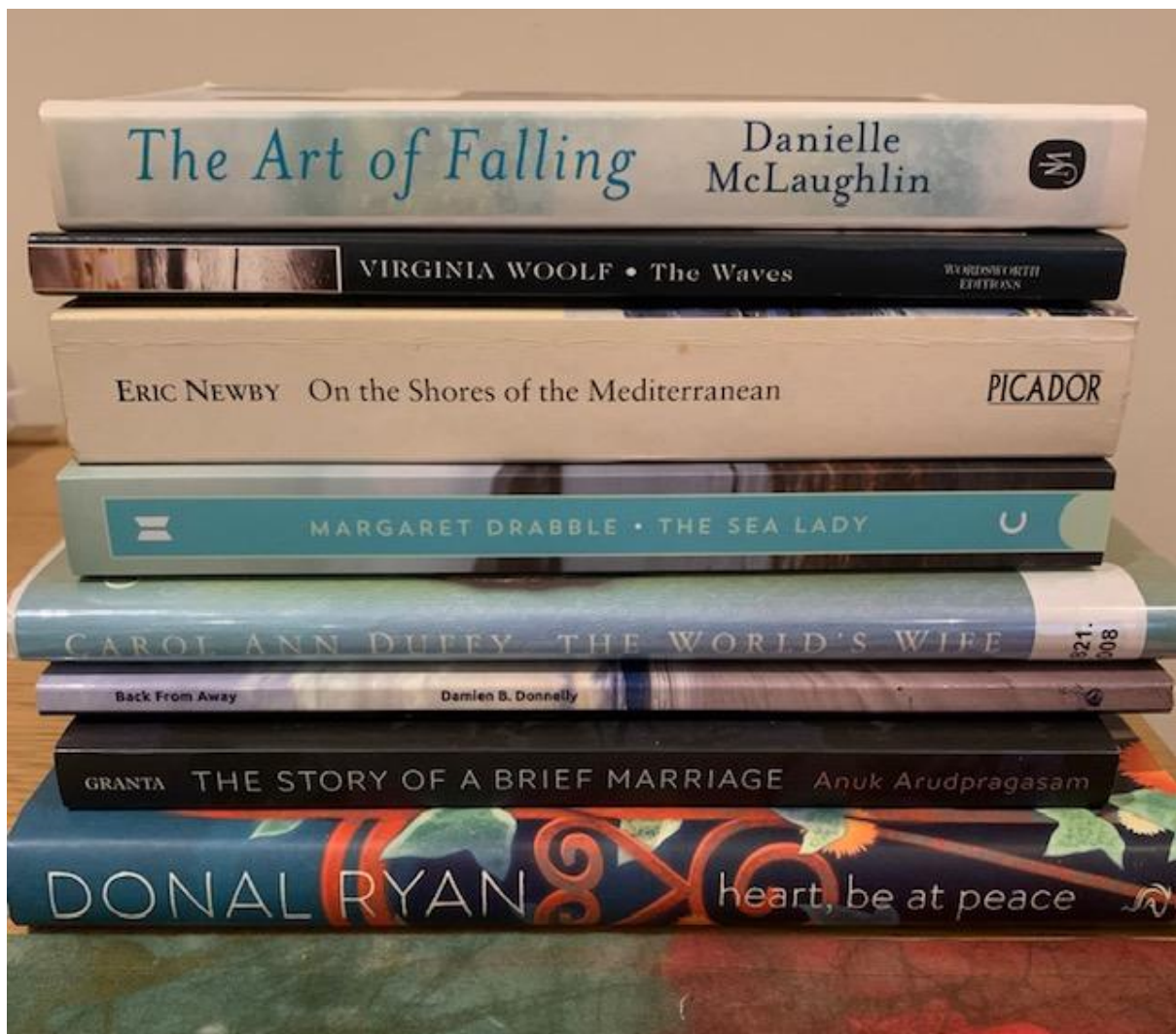
The Sea Lady

The Worlds Wife

Back From Away

The Story of a Brief Marriage

heart, be at peace



D.J. ELLIOTT

SPINE POEM

Born in Fivemiletown, Co. Tyrone, D.J. Elliott, studied at Q.U.B in the early 1970s, lived in Fermanagh, L/Derry and raised a family in Castlewellan, Co. Down. Elliott taught for many years, serving different traditions. Elliot has three short stories published in N.I.W /The Irish Press and one published in the anthology 'Best Irish Short Stories' (whilst at Queens).

Books used to create 'Watching The Door'

<i>Kevin Myers</i>	<i>Watching the Door</i>
<i>Paul Robinson</i>	<i>From Ballybannon Hill to Magilligan Strand</i>
<i>John Grenham</i>	<i>Tracing Your Irish Ancestors</i>
<i>Kay Ryan</i>	<i>The Best Of It</i>
<i>Cherry Smyth & Craig Jordan-Baker</i>	<i>If the River is Hidden</i>
<i>Karen Armstrong</i>	<i>Tongues Of Fire</i>
<i>John Pepper</i>	<i>John Pepper's Ulster-English Dictionary</i>
<i>Max Porter</i>	<i>Grief Is The Thing With Feathers</i>
<i>Matthew Flickstein</i>	<i>Swallowing The River Ganges</i>

Watching The Door

Watching The Door

From Ballybannon Hill to Magilligan Strand

Tracing Your IRISH ANCESTORS

THE BEST OF IT

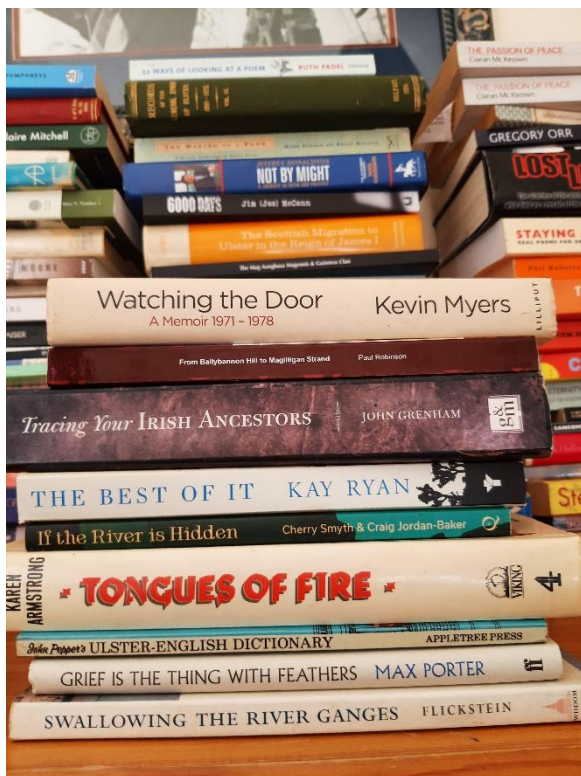
If the River is Hidden

TONGUES OF FIRE

John Pepper's ULSTER-ENGLISH DICTIONARY

GRIEF IS THE THING WITH FEATHERS

SWALLOWING THE RIVER GANGES



MARY LAPPIN

SPINE POEM

Mary Lappin is a poet from Bangor, Co Down. Mary was the winner of the inaugural Bangor Poetry Competition and has read her work at Aspects Literary Festival as part of Southbank Centre's 'A Poet in Every Port' celebration.

Books used to create 'Safe Passage to Healing'

Chrystine Oksana

John Stott

Reverend Mac

Alain Le Garsmeur and Ian Hill

Steven Ash

Safe Passage to Healing

The Birds Our Teachers

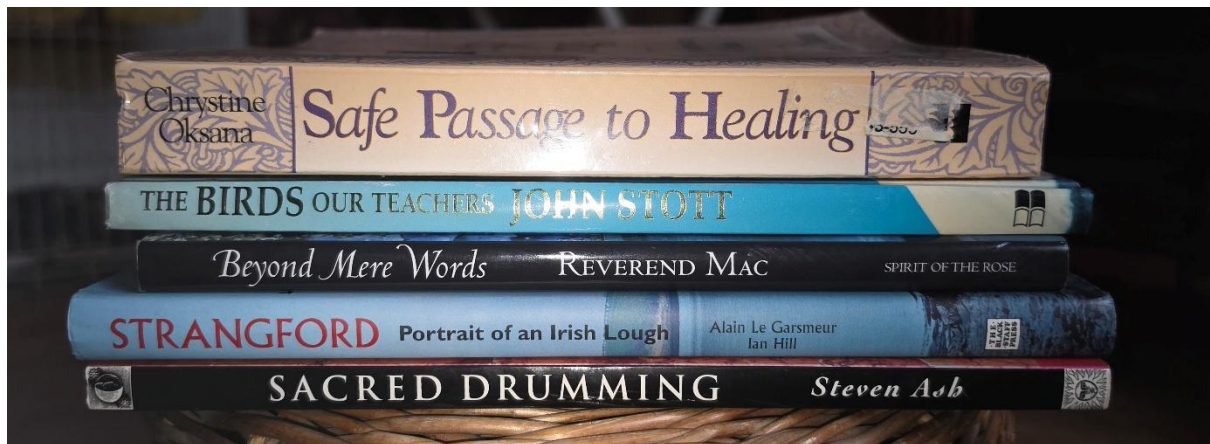
Beyond Mere Words

Strangford, Portrait of an Irish Lough

Sacred Drumming

Safe Passage to Healing

Safe passage to healing,
The birds our teachers,
Beyond mere words,
Strangford, portrait of an Irish lough,
Sacred drumming.



MARY HOWLETT

SPINE POEM

Mary Howlett lives in Waterford. She is published in Southword, Dodging The Rain, Frogmore Papers, Honest Ulsterman, Poem Alone, Steel Jackdaw, Swerve, Poetry Bus 12, Allegro, N&H Journal, Amethyst Review, Fig Tree, Waxed Lemon, Stone of Madness Press, New Ulster, Southlight 37, Soul Rice, Amethyst Review, Madrid Review and elsewhere.

Books used to create ‘Everything Gathers Light.’

Colin Dexter

The Daughters of Cain

Khaled Hosseini

A Thousand Splendid Suns

Tom Mc Grath

Unspoken

Herbert Lomas

A Useless Passion

Megan Nolan

Ordinary Human Failings

Christine Mc Neill

Kissing The Night

Jane Clarke

A Change In The Air

Paula Meehan

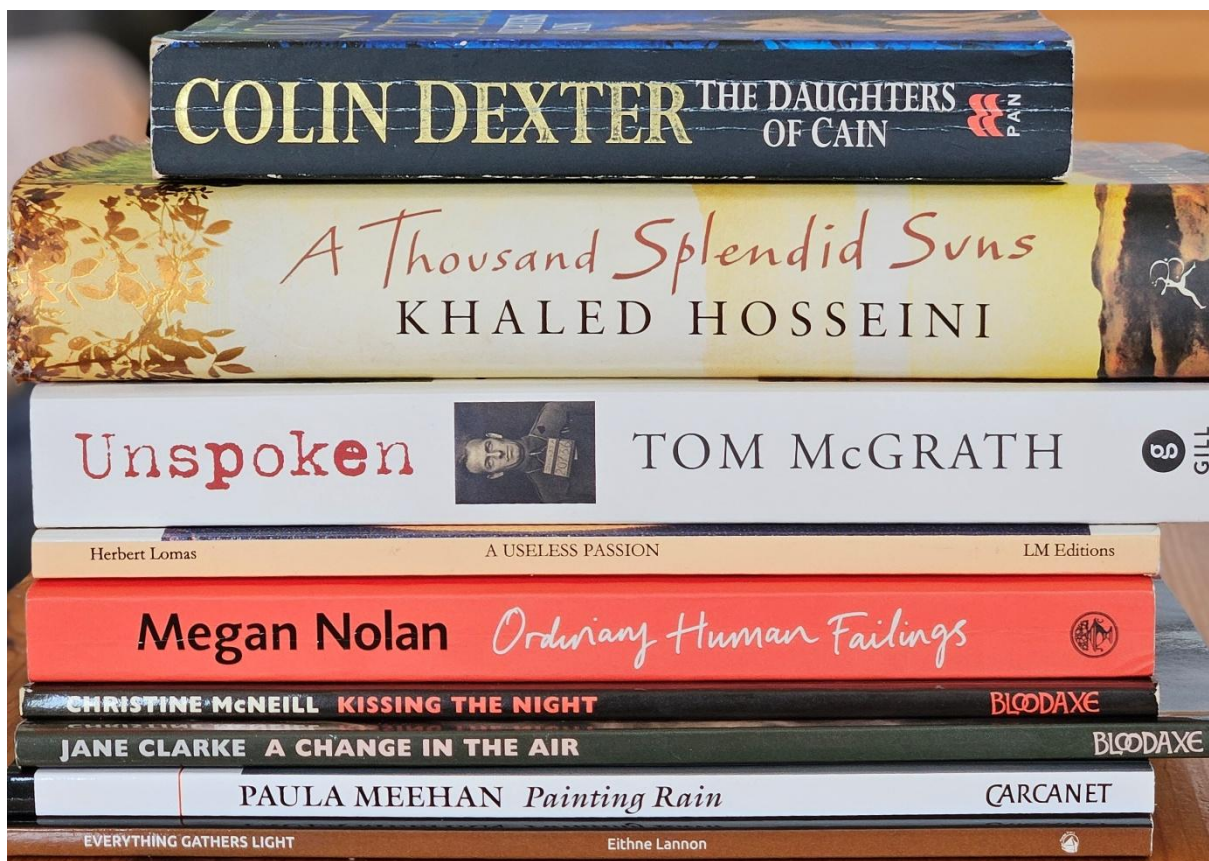
Painting Rain

Eithne Lannon

Everything Gathers Light

Everything Gathers Light.

The Daughters of Cain awaken
to A Thousand Splendid Suns.
Their Unspoken desires, A Useless Passion.
Those Ordinary Human Failings
of Kissing the Night.
There is a Change in the Air,
outside, clouds are Painting Rain
while Everything Gathers Light.



YVONNE BOYLE

SPINE POEM

Yvonne Boyle has a wide range of poems published in a variety of magazines and anthologies, including the Bangor Literary Journal, Dunfanaghy Writers Circle, Arlen House's *Washing Windows* and the Community Arts Partnership anthologies. She performs at festivals and open mic nights, including Pub Poetry, Portrush and Aspects Festival. She is a Causeway Coast and Glens Councillor.

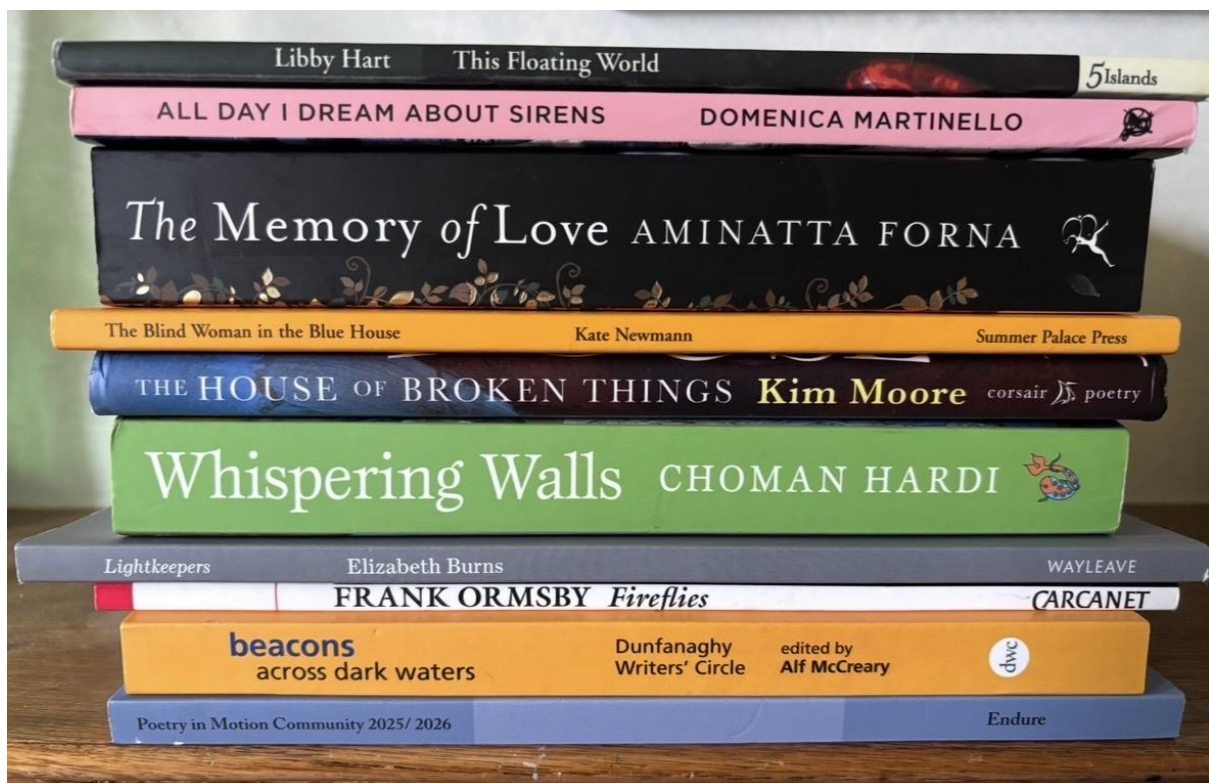
Books used to create 'This Floating World'

<i>Libby Hart</i>	<i>This Floating World</i>
<i>Dominica Martinello</i>	<i>All Day I Dream About Sirens</i>
<i>Aminatta Forna</i>	<i>The Memory of Love</i>
<i>Kate Newman</i>	<i>The Blind Woman in the Blue House</i>
<i>Kim Moore</i>	<i>The House of Broken Things</i>
<i>Choman Hardi</i>	<i>Whispering Walls</i>
<i>Elisabeth Burns</i>	<i>Lightkeepers</i>
<i>Frank Ormsby</i>	<i>Fireflies</i>
<i>Dunfanaghy Writers (ed: A McCreary)</i>	<i>beacons across dark waters</i>
<i>Poetry in Motion: CAP</i>	<i>Endure</i>

This Floating World

All Day I Dream About Sirens,
The Memory of Love.
The Blind Woman in the Blue House,
The House of Broken Things,
Whispering Walls.
Light keepers,
Fireflies,
Beacons across dark waters.

Endure.



AMY LOUISE WYATT

SPINE POEM

Amy Louise Wyatt is a poet and artist from Bangor. She is a member of Southbank Centre's New Poets Collective 2025-2027. Amy is working on her first full poetry collection.

Books used to create 'Pocket Guide to Stars and Planets'

Ian Morrison and Margaret Penston

Pocket Guide to Stars and Planets

Peterson and Niles

The Great Pursuit

Jay Jayamohan

Everything That Makes Us Human

Mel Robbins

The Let Them Theory

Ethan Watters

Crazy Like Us

Robyn Youkilis

Go With Your Gut

Dan Marshall

Mind Blown

Mark Sayers

Facing Leviathan

Pocket Guide to Stars and Planets

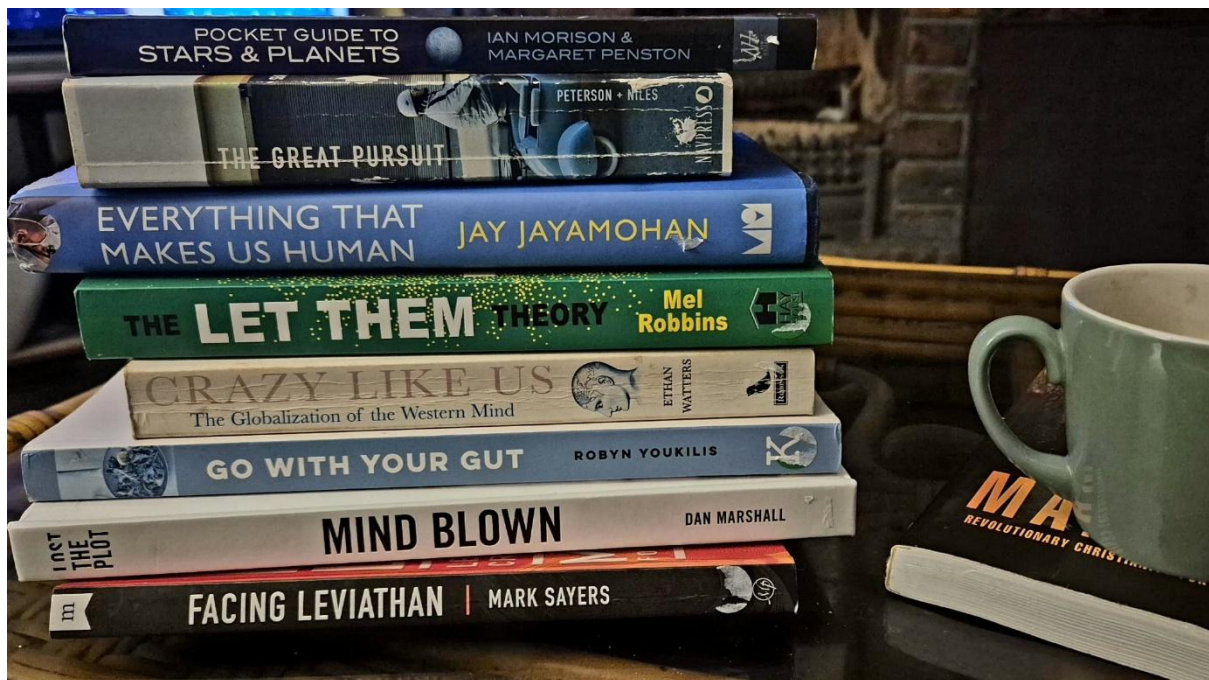
Yes! The great pursuit—
Everything that makes us!

Human? Let them be crazy

like us.

GO—

With your gut,
Mind blown,
Facing Leviathan.



ZOE MCGRATH

SPINE POEM

Zoe McGrath is a poet and artist from Bangor. Zoe has had poetry and photographs and artwork published and displayed in a range of publications; performing at an array of festival events; open mics and poetry slams. She has been both placed and shortlisted in the Bangor Poetry Competition and sold many of her handwritten and artistic creative pieces. Zoe's work has a strong link to her love of nature, wildlife and her passion for the environment.

Books used to create 'The Vanishing Year'

Kate Moretti

The Vanishing Year

Lucy Clarke

The Hike

Patricia Cornwell

From Potter's Field

R. L. Killmore

A Cinnamon Falls Mystery

Simon Beckett

Whispers of the Dead

Christopher Golden

The Night Birds

The Vanishing Year

The vanishing year,
the hike
from Potter's Field.

A cinnamon falls mystery:
Whispers of the dead—
The night birds.



RUTH FITZGERALD

SPINE POEM

Ruth is a poet and writer, who regularly reads her work at a wide range of events. Ruth has had many poems published in journals and anthologies and recently read her poetry at Aspects Festival and Southbank Centre's 'A Poet in Every Port' open mic event in Ward Park.

Books used to create 'Shades of Grey'

M. C. Beaton

Agatha Raisin and the Terrible Tourist

Charlotte Bingham

The Season

Daphne Du Maurier

Rebecca

L. M. Montgomery

Emily of New Moon

EL James

Fifty Shades of Grey

Coloured Grey

Agatha Raisin

(and the terrible tourist).

Throughout the seasons:

also Rebecca,

and Emily of the new moon—

coloured grey.



THE 13TH ANNUAL BANGOR POETRY COMPETITION

A POET IN EVERY PORT SPECIAL THEMES

ROOT. ESSENCE. JOURNEY



THE BANGOR LITERARY JOURNAL



WINNER of THE 13TH ANNUAL BANGOR POETRY COMPETITION

Colin Dardis *Bogwood*

RUNNER UP

Siobhán McCafferty *Admin Error*

HIGHLY COMMENDED

Anne Rainey *She Wrote, She Spoke*

COMMENDED

Cathy Ryan *Love Story*

SHORTLISTED

Ruth Foy *Autumn*

Helen Hastings *A storm of unusual violence*

Frank Farrelly *Roslevin House, Revisited*

Shelley Tracey *Candles*

Catherine Kay *On waking from another car journey nightmare*

Bern Butler *Tall Ships*

This Year's Longlisted Poems

Chad Norman *Nothing is a Word or Place*

Colin Dardis *A Distinction to the Act of Movement*

Frank Farrelly *Single Return*

Ben Montague Clark *Flesh on Flesh*

Colin Hassard *Riding the Pig's Back*

Colin Hassard *Shelia*

Ben Keatinge *The Architect*

Yvonne Boyle *Butcher's Pool*

Wallis Jay *Back Roads*

Carol Farnan *The Backwaters*



WINNER

COLIN DARDIS

Colin Dardis is a writer and editor from Northern Ireland. His recent collections include 'My Life is a Film I Haven't Yet Watched' (Buttonhook Press, 2025) and 'with the lakes' (above/ground press, 2023) . He co-hosts Purely Poetry open mic night in Belfast, and is editor of Poem Alone.



Bogwood

Recovered, I begin the slow, unsure process
of drying out: dry of my beginnings
inside a scattered fruit, split across my forest's floor.

Dry of tentative footsteps into soil,
roots fingering for moisture spots; hungry, keen,
asking for the rush of seasons to push me ever skywards.

Dry of rainfall, a retirement of withering,
of waiting, my cold bark revealing
only slices of my history.

Dry of bees using the sun as a dance partner,
seeing me as a maypole, streamers of branch
oscillating to tide of lakeside winds.

Dry of birds and the fall of perch and nest,
happy weight of fledglings entrusted to me,
each gala day of their release.

Dry of lovers looking for secret shades
and all my co-conspirators that turned
a grove into a glade for romance to tingle in.

Dry of children not knowing boundaries,
losing the days of tiny limbs sprawling
to explore me.

Now, what is ahead?
A jig, but no dance; a chisel's cruel kisses;
perhaps one thousand brushes of a plane

that gives no comfort. I fear the rasp,
dread the avalanche of saw teeth
that may fall upon me.

In my sleep, I see a bog without footprints,
singular in its temperament for holding
assured silence. Let me rest there,

and bring the cycle of my years down with me,
to melt into sloped, sloth-filled cadence
and become undiscovered.

RUNNER UP

SIOBHÁN MCCAFFERTY

Siobhán McCafferty lives in Northern Ireland. Her poem *Visiting Mother* was published in *A Poetry NI* anthology, *Poems for International Women's Day 2026*. She is a regular at the *Purely Poetry Open Mic* nights in *The Crescent Arts Centre*, Belfast.



Admin Error

When you say to me
My family name is wrong.
I understand;
when you log on

you no longer see your sisters
making fattoush – pilling torn pita bread, onions,
radishes and tomatoes; as high as Mount Hermon;
or your grandmother making kibbeh –
pounding bulgar wheat with meat.

I understand;
you no longer hear your brothers
kicking a ball in an old side street;
or the muezzin proclaiming the adhan;
calling you to prayer.

I understand,
your name is taller than the rubble
of your bombed out buildings;
longer than the roads you have travelled to get here;
deeper than the break
in your heart over your mother.

And when you say to me
It's all I have.
I understand.

HIGHLY COMMENDED

ANNE RAINEY

Anne Rainey is a Belfast poet and translator. She completed her PhD on Literary Translation at UU. She authored *Hiberno-English, Ulster Scots and Belfast Banter: Ciaran Carson's Translations of Dante and Rimbaud* (Peter Lang Publications, 2024). Anne was awarded First Prize in the Frances Browne Poetry Competition (English language, 2024).



She Wrote, She Spoke

Her home was nearish Belfast hills.
High-staked hips and haws. It wasn't
that she read books. More absorbed.
Language was, for her, a pure delight.
In careful hand, she wrote the witness
of her life. Punctuated by bell tolls.
Her mother passed when she was newly born.
No one fussed, at five days old,
when soot dropped in her milk.
They said she'd never live. She thrived.
Subtle strokes of growing things
caressed her hopeful spirit: The comfort
of a curlew call. Emerging whin and heather.
The pledge of a wholehearted man.
Her handkerchief displayed a seven-spotted
ladybird, lit on flowers of raised embroidery.
Ink blots presented a dichotomy.
An equal signalling of sorrow and of joy.

Her granddaughter reflected on the memoir
she'd passed down. A language lover,
she committed (as we do for love)
and moved to France. In her apartment,
shutter slats could not contain insistent
rays of light. Quatrefoil windows emanated
red from crumbling cathedral walls.
High up in a chancel, a lamp made sparks
of dusty motes. Somewhere in the Latin quarter,
a traveller traced his way along her clavicle.
Her fingertip retrieved a ladybird.
The tiny bead, initially stock-still,
recovered, next, moved busily,
marking out the steps for dos à dos.
She held him, then, spoke automatically:
'Fly away home!' Perhaps that's why
she wrote, nostalgically, of Cavehill whin.
Of high-staked hips and haws.

COMMENDED

CATHY RYAN

Cathy has been published in The Stony Thursday Book, 2025 and Orbis ,Winter 2025. She has been published in Cork Words Anthology 2020 and won first prize for poetry in the Westival Festival 2020. She had a chap book published in 2006, I Dare You (Tall Lighthouse, UK).



Love Story

I remember the stop in the desert

the shock of silence

before we knew where we were

the yellow smell of the seals

permeating the sky, miles

before we saw them, roiling and honking
in their thousands.

The men laughing at our
Toyota Hyundai before
it took us to the border through rivers

and ruts.

The lurch of jealousy I felt when
you ran out the door to greet your
son across the dusty compound

before I had time to pull my shirt on.

I didn't see that
you loved me as ferociously as the
African sun burns the
Skeleton Coast.

After that trip
I left you.

I remember the yellow plunge
at the shock of separation.

SHORTLISTED

RUTH FOY

I am a late comer in life to writing poetry although I have always had a love of literature. Joining a creative writing class led to poems being accepted and published in the CAP anthologies and long listed for the Bridport Poetry Prize in 2017 and recently in 2026 for Flash Fiction. I am particularly drawn to the small details and the everyday of life. The way in which something insignificant can spark a memory, an emotion.



Autumn

This autumn is different.
Instead of sweeping leaves
we gather memories,
discarding the black spotted,
cradling the unblemished in our arms.

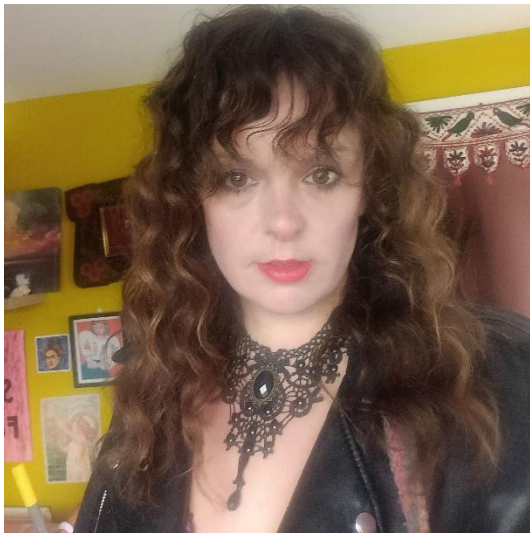
They gather in the corners
of our day, catching us
underfoot, crunching
in the middle of the night.

Chrysanthemums stand
in a vase borrowed
from another room and
we sit on the edge of your bed
holding onto one bright leaf.

SHORTLISTED

HELEN HASTINGS

Helen Hastings is a poet based in South Down. Her favourite topics include nature, existentialism and the end of the world. She has performed at many spoken word events including festivals. Helen facilitates the Words for Castle Ward writers' group and writes a mental health column for Down News.



A storm of unusual violence

This storm is not forecast
Warnings do not crackle softly from a radio
filling the room with nostalgic childlike excitement
a danger far from here

The genesis of this storm does not roar across the surface of a distant ocean
Instead, it gathers in the soft whites of his eyes
magicians' trick on irises
smaller and smaller, until they are angry pinpoints
navigating her to the centre
as if she has a choice

The first wave hits her shores
white bone China horses
That vase belonged to her grandmother
She stoops to pick up the shards of a promise broken
The seas within her rise and soon she is afloat
kicking and treading her waters, screaming out to no one

a cheekbone flowers purple and red into this season's crying shame
Tragedy
Travesty
Statistic?
A conversation over the fence between the many Joneses
'Sure, ye would never know what goes on behind closed doors'

This storm of unusual violence, only she can name
A storm christened in the dark and silent places
that no one else seems to know
This storm of unusual violence she calls love
And all great loves must boast their own brand of El Niño
A storm to call their very own

Later he promises that he shall never let his oceans rise
high enough to drown her
because this was of course a storm of most unusual violence
a private weather event never to be repeated
until

SHORTLISTED

FRANK FARRELLY

Frank Farrelly is from Waterford. A previous winner of the Rush Poetry Prize, Fingal Poetry Prize, Francis Ledwidge International Award, and Allingham Poetry Competition, his publications include a pamphlet, *Close to Home*, and two collections, *The Boiler Room*, and *Small Victories* (both Revival Press).



Roslevin House, Revisited

circa 2020

When I return after fifty years, expecting
to see it in the fork between two
railway lines, on the Ballymahon Road
—it is gone; that old Edwardian house

we rented when I was twelve, long after
hockey sticks and midnight feasts, dressing
up as Maritana or The Pirate King.
Gone the house, gone the grounds,

bulldozed for a blight of bungalows
and semi-d's, gone the half-moon
entrance bay, walled-garden, orchard
forbidden us by our father, stable

where he locked our dog in heat
—when the bleeding stopped, set her free;
I was boxing apples at the time,
shutting the lid of summer on their skin.

Roslevin House, in Athlone, closed as a Protestant boarding-school for girls, in the early sixties.

SHORTLISTED

SHELLEY TRACEY

Shelley Tracey's collection *Elements of Distance* was published by Lapwing (2017). Other are published in *The North*, *Abridged*, *The Haibun Journal*, *Artemis*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *Skylight 47*, *Lothlorien Poetry Journal*, *Drifting Sands Haibun Journal*, *Bangor Literary Journal*, *North West Words*, *Stag Hill Journal*, *Orbis and Ink*, *Sweat and Tears*.



Candles

The candle in my mother's bedroom spits and sputters, argues with itself, flares up fiercely, using up its energy too quickly.

My mother and I live on opposite sides of the world, in contradicting hemispheres. We live on opposite sides of an argument, on opposing sides of right and wrong. My mother is always on the only side of right, although I think I know now how right feels from the inside out.

When I was young, my mother peeled the mangos and the guavas and the yellow peaches for me in case I pared too far beneath the skin and wasted what she gave me. She never trusted me to cut the bread in equal slices, or to push the scissors through dress fabric in a no-nonsense line.

My mother lights the annual memorial candle to mark my father's passing. I light candles in my Irish family's church to breathe softly in the same space as our uncles did.

I light a candle to watch its golden dance inside the stained-glass holder, a butterfly curtsying to itself. I light a candle to still myself, to unhinge a locked door in the darkness.

My mother doesn't feel safe to utter words of love, to allow her feelings to peak and singe. My mother is still sure she always knows what's best, and what the world and I are doing wrong. I want to light for her a row of silver candles, tucked between strelitzia and amaryllis blooms, and observe every upright flame with her, as if we have all the time that we need to find a soft shared silence.

SHORTLISTED

CATHERINE KAY

Catherine Kay lives in Donegal. She has had work performed in the Waterside Theatre, Ten x 9 events, Bangor Lit Aspects Festival and the Armagh Flash Festival. Her poetry has been published in the Storms Journal Anthology 4, Caught Alight: An Anthology and Dark Winter Press.



On waking from another car journey nightmare

she dreamt they were angry
with her again
this triptych of family
that she tries to edge into
the lopsided daughter
back-seated in their ancient Corsa
forcing her long grown knee
through the leatherette
into her mother's broken back
calling out each messy misdemeanour
as motorway traffic blurs by
the sibling beside her
scowling disappointment
shaking his weary adolescent head
dissatisfaction and arrogance holding it high
that husband in the driving seat
eyes narrowed mouth tight
jabbing the satnav screen with
futile venom
'we're going the wrong way'
she says each night unheard
stepping out of the juddering car

SHORTLISTED

BERN BUTLER

Bern Butler is from Galway, Ireland. Her poetry has appeared in many print and online journals including: Abridged, The Ireland Chair of Poetry, Ink, Sweat and Tears, Skylight 47, The High Window, Ragaire, Crannóg, The Wild Umbrella. She was awarded an Irish Writers' Centre mentorship in June 2025.



Tall Ships

Holles Street Maternity Hospital, Dublin August 1998

A friend comes to visit, leaves Pirandello's
Six Actors in Search of a Play, whose lines
I unravel while you, third trimester, stray
then anchor; transverse barque in my womb
perplexing medics whose fingers bounce
the beach of my belly like men on the moon.
But you, compass-less star, could not remember
they let us only as far as the hospital steps
where all we could see past dusk's silhouettes
were white mast tips as the fleet surged, silent
up the Liffey. That night I dreamed of ghosts,
icebergs; of that which is but cannot be seen.
Go two full weeks over, titanic by the time
you coaster, turn cephalic, head toward light.

ALICE WYATT

COLLAGRAPH

‘Sanctuary in Solitude’



Alice Wyatt is an artist and printmaker from Bangor, NI. Alice is a member of Seacourt Print Workshop and has exhibited widely. Alice's collagraph which is the front cover image for Issue 24, is titled 'Sanctuary in Solitude' and is part of a series of new work that will be exhibited in early 2027. You can check out more of Alice's work at Seacourt Print Workshop, Main Street, Bangor, Co. Down.