The book cover features a deep blue background with a fine, woven texture. Scattered across the cover are white line-art illustrations of various leaves, including some with serrated edges and others with smooth margins. The title is centered in a large, white, serif font. Below the title, the subtitle is in a smaller, bold, orange sans-serif font. The editor's name is in a white serif font, and the publication date is in a bold, orange sans-serif font at the bottom.

Unwhispered Legacy

**An
Anthology of Poetry**

Edited
by
Paul Short

Spring 2026

Unwhispered Legacy

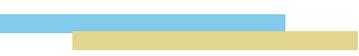
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Editor: Paul Short

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Foreword

The idea of creating an anthology had been on my mind for some time. Over the past few years, I have read more than one hundred collections for The Book Bag, and the experience deepened my appreciation for the power of contemporary poetry. When I floated the idea in the Write Here, Right Now Poetry Writing Group, I knew it was a project I wanted to bring to life.

Like any new editor, I wondered: would poets respond to my call for submissions? As it turned out, I needn't have worried. The poetry community responded generously, providing an excellent range of work and styles including many of the poets who have featured on The Book Bag, as part of The Book Bag: Poetic Voices feature or attended a Book Bag Open Mic. I want to say a huge thank you to everyone who submitted and for trusting me with your words. It is truly a privilege.

For those who are interested in the title, it comes from watching Dead Poet's Society where Robin Williams is explaining you can hear legacies calling out. I used that as a starting point and went with it.

The work in this anthology explores multiple themes including identity, nature, place, love, and grief. The arrangement of the poems is intentionally mixed. Rather than grouping the pieces by theme, I've followed my instincts, allowing poems to shift focuses and perspectives. My hope is that readers will feel surprised and curious about what awaits them on the next page.

Another reason for curating this book was to raise funds for an important charity, Médecins Sans Frontières. If you wish to make an optional donation, please scan the qr code at the bottom of this page.

I hope this anthology brings you happiness, hope and comfort.

Without further ado, let's get to the poems...

Best wishes,

Paul



Scrip

There's no better place than an urgent care centre to centre the universal life force. Or at least demand – hope – expect that it turns up today in full throat, maximum wattage, doesn't decide to phone it in, half-arse it.

It's a comfort to think there's not one god but an infinity of them. So many more places to appeal to, whisper to, cry to, shout at. Why shouldn't a hard grey plastic chair provide comfort and *comfort*? The gravel on

the flat roof? Every pebble a miniature Eir waiting to become protective armour when asked nicely enough. Prayer isn't prescription, but have faith the most unlikely arrangement of atoms might, just might, actually save you.

Rishi Dastidar

Weather Predictions

Who dares put glasses on a rainbow,
implying a need to clear-up its
gorgeous blurs from one colour to the next?

Or, blinders on a cloud – denying it the
opportunity to know its backdrop (sky blue, or
slate; perhaps aegean in preparation for a storm)?

I've tried many times to clap for thunder
but I'm usually drowned out. Apparently
it's modest and doesn't care for the applause.

We could take pity on raindrops
or dewdrops – lolling about aimlessly
on meadow grass and window glass.

But the drama queens are the wind
(there's simply no predicting her),
and the sun – when she refuses to shine.

Samantha Terrell

A Cobweb's View

I've spun myself into the hush of your indecision.
Thread by thread,
I've learned the rhythm of your almos.

You see me settled in my corners.
Imagine how I look down on you.
You think, maybe today.
But the duster stays idle,
And I stay whole.

I've become part of the architecture.
Not decoration, not defiance,
Just a soft witness to your overwhelm.

I catch the tremble of all you meant to do.
I feel safe while you feel guilt.
We both know this is not about me.

Jenni Thorne

Fetheren

Fetheren. Middle English, meaning ‘to furnish with feathers’

Greet the descent as furtherment to the flight,
and you will begin to see it as I see it: an arc
of feathers, fingertipping to their farthest
reaches, then ellipsing, Daedalus-heavy
in freefall. The circle completes, an accidental
sundial made of future memories. For now
all is suspense, torsion, fluidity. Some combination
of the three defines an ambit we are yet to
decide. We open our arms skyward. We are ready.

Victoria Spires

Call Me By Any Name

spring sunshine graces your smile
through the Grassmarket holding hands
birds sing in praise of the saints
and you call me
by any name
that means love

summer heat warms to our communion
running fast enough to catch our breath
birds fledge
their nests left behind
you call me softly
by names only we can know

autumn comes early
rains close around us
smoke from cosy hearths fills the air
the fieldfares leave for warmer lands
you call me
in a whispered voice

winter's northerly hints at snow
I wrap up against the elements
those who remain
search for shelter
alone in the spaces
in between

Andrew Williamson

Threshold

The massive door
has always been locked

until now

it stands slightly open
like parted lips whispering
yes.

You imagine
turquoise sky, peach sorbet clouds,
non-existent in this grey-world.

You touch the weathered wood
dotted with knotted eyes,

wonder how far eternity is—
how wide? How deep?

But there is the latch, undone,
there is the handle,

so, you inhale, exhale,
pull—

sea-salt breath brushes your skin
as you step over the sill.

No more doors. No more locks.

This is where your life begins.

Merril D. Smith

My Own Rumpelstiltskin

I have coughed you out.

You with your fidgeting
twigs of fingers
clacking your magnetic stones
in my chest.

You black-cloaked,
word swallowing
lung-shallower.

I forgive you now
for the time you stole,
for shadowing me
with the thunder of leaving.

I can even thank you
for this solstice
as I stand under the rising sun.

I am naming you,
loud and clear,
my own Rumpelstiltskin
to set you free.

Sue Finch

Train

abound in fritters
light rebounds
eye flick freeze

get off around
the hand went
where it didn't

fall it fell so
look you can't
scy free scy to

la ca the rib
ca diss this Dis
free of it knee

run now scratch
my fuh my sides
the head my head

what'll it no
it's know a now
of past we will

shortly be
loves are were
never-loves

thrusting to the
train unclothe in
thought here

just get off
then hot we
are now hot

arriving and be
bebebeep soon
bag down to

shake their heads
and drift back
in dark dignity

and go yet stay
here stay and
hornet at my face

Paul Connolly

Petrichor In Spring

if I were searching for a sign:

would I have found it on shimmering Myrtle Mountain,
written in Saharan dust on windshields
in the looping shapes drawn over terracotta rooftops,
swifts and swallows racing anticlockwise that day.
or the ringing of Sant Joan's bell,
death toll of anticipatory mourning
the sudden metallic taste of coffee with milk,
wicked cravings for ensaimada, loaded
with sugar hills and valleys licked off your fingers.
the absence of blood, the swelling of breasts,
sickness and the animal hunger for you.
a window opened, petrichor in spring
floods bursting the opal Xúquer river wide open,
the knife grinder's whistle, his piercing cry,
a fight between sparrow and locust on the wing
thin space between solitary and multiple.
scars inside barely healed
poison in my blood, removed by renal tubules,
the liver tender and heart enlarged
entrails examined and the sac, the sac.

a human tower toppling, before
the child is held aloft.

Eleanor Holmes

Winter Term at the Glasgow School of Art

Later she said,
my seipin hair froze...

those curls as brittle
as her independence,
crackling in the Clydeside air.

I sobbed in the car,
handbrake pulled up tight
against the ice of Dalhousie St.

All mothering runs
to an undersook.

Her dimples swept me almost
as far as the Border.

(undersook = an undercurrent flowing in the opposite direction to the surface water)

Sarah O'Grady

Arcade Promise

We juggle children around its neon show,
pin ball twenty pence coins, watch them
disappear

like magic,

the claw / picks / out
the winners,
convinces us to pursue probability,

pushes us over the edge like the 2p coins to break dance with a refresher lolly
or troll keyring with punk rock hair.

We are *dazzled* by the trickery of carnival lights,
jukebox carousel and the jangle of celebrity
/ puked / from a Pac-Man mouth,

discover we can spin without moving,
throw knives without hurting anyone,
contort ourselves into a thousand identities

behind a joystick or plastic wheel.

The truth / fades /
like a vanishing handkerchief,

slap-stick pleasure sweet as candyfloss
until it
melts.

Sarah Raybould

The Lovers (Lifetime Supply of Uni)

In my searching wonder, I almost missed you standing beside the sea.
Your emerald gaze was all I needed to be convinced that I had found
my sea anemone treasure of endless uni, so rich and buttery.

Will you fly away with me now? The sky will hold us in our cloud
kingdom of water particles and reverie.

Hold me close in the marmalade sunrise. Overturn conch shells, pink
like the rays through the slats. Kiss me before the sun finds us.

Rachel Turney

Horseshoe Crab Blood

*"I know a lady in Venice would have walked barefoot
to Palestine for a touch of his nether lip."
Shakespeare, Othello. Act 4 Scene 3.*

A plague was approaching
like a predator. The midnight
you left me wearing

your invisible doctor mask
to save other lives, I had a dream.

I was a horseshoe crab
on a half-ruined bridge
in Venice, a faceless crowd

was collapsing around me,
and I was screaming.

You held me on your palm
to kiss my wetness
before you carried me through

dirty canals to a sterile lab
under fluorescent lamps.

You strapped me
onto a cold steel stall,
pierced the soft tissue

of my skin with a needle
pushed into my heart.

Then you threaded a catheter,
the other end dripping
into a glass bottle,

and you harvested my blood.
I watched it pour indigo

like the Mediterranean
separating us. All night I bled
balm for you until a vermilion dawn.

Özge Lena

Just Before

Just before the childhood junction
of a father dying,
we are found again in his car, returning at night
on a fast-flowing M4,
traffic's intrusive sweep of curious passing lights
seems looking now,
a little-understood fiery burial ritual;
the pre-sorrow rain,
a thurible's attempted blessing
cast against our cloistering unrepentant
windows.

Both cosy and alone
I'm belted in both states
though soon to be a slick of separating oil
and water;
all on that rear pew,
sat behind my father's front-fixed face,
racing the dark,
and I specifically remember
his never once
turning back.

Julian Cason

The Wounded Swan

The wounded swan
of your unconscious,
mute and directionless,
floats in an entanglement
of umbilicals and entrails – red
ribbons on the cusp of a dream of a lake
before thought becomes forbidden
fruit in the womb of perpetual forgetting.
Feathered enigma, born of a virgin
plume, slips like water through the fingers
of your mind and bleeds, bleeds, bleeds out
into the great abyss. You bind this cold
delicateness in satin, silk, lace, lingerie – anything
to keep it alive.

Rhona Greene

This Year, The Spider Is Invited

polka-dot-pom-party-hat
will not fit on head!

stickytable!stickyglass!sicklycake!stickycocktailstick!
stickybin!stickywall!stickyjamtrappuddles!

who wants to be the thimble and go in my
car there are 2 pink plastic pieces and I am trading
a career as a race car driver for a veterinarian!

Leia Butler

An Englishman on Mount Devas

Full- blooded poppies,
courting a vampire's kiss.

A precipice coloured purple
by mountaineering irises,
tired of Stanley Spenser's
border in Cookham.

Owl flies in their blue
cloaks of visibility-
as stealthy as their namesakes,
and as deadly.

Carpenter bees
share a violet and black
light and sound show.

Painted ladies drop in
from Marrakesh.

Blackbirds are at home
in this Addlestrop
of juniper and wild thyme.

Ian Tattum

Lionheart

I think you allow yourself
to love me
in the afternoon.

And late,
in the dark,
when you're alone and your legs
hug the outside of the duvet
and you nearly invite me in
by leaving that x hanging there.

If you could touch just a corner
of the fabric of my blanket
and feel the greatness
of what I think
it would feel like
to lie in your arms
you'd not stop yourself-

You'd love me in gaps too
like the teeth of comb
you'd stick your tongue
through them to feel the rasping
friction.

Laura Cooney

Impaled

America rages against itself,
stuck under the thumb of a madman,
sullied by the stench of hate.
She is a country strangled by chaos,
by vines that grow from saplings of fear,
slither and suffocate.

The sky splits apart,
clamouring with avarice
while the roots of compassion
are ripped from the earth,
brutal hands
covered in the sludge of self-interest.

We mourn the loss of dignity,
see it buried
deep under the detritus of greed,
spend weeks in the apartment
listening to the world crumble.

We hold our breath until we can run,
feel clean air in our lungs,
see only green for miles.

Watching from a distance,
our eyes are impaled by the horror
of men with ruthless fingers
eviscerating the heart of America.

Susan Richardson

I dreamed of the horse and you again

and we were riding
up the valley on our bicycles,
stopping, skidding on the gravel—

you almost ran to its chestnut glow.
You — in your worn-out shorts
and frayed top, boots untied,

long hair filtering the sun—
reaching for its shining flank,
copper face, black mane. And you

so poised and pleased as it moved
gently, in the heat, under your hand.

And at the top — this part, I think, was real—
we lay by the corrugated barn
and watched the valley spread—

the red-brick terraces, blank white warehouses
and heard the clangour
of the distant scrapyards.

And in that sound, it became the time
we got lost in a narrow field
with a nervous, stamping horse,

our bikes a muddy hindrance,
time running out on a frozen afternoon.
We had gone so far that day

but still I was afraid to climb the fence.
You only laughed and said nothing:

then crouched — hands cupped,
and braced.

Robert Galpin

Ghost Life

If I were a ghost, I'd haunt you,
stick by you like a stalker
through this life after life,
drift through the misty chill like a snowflake
in a cold October wind,
hang unyielding on each hot life-breath,
this humanity that remains, in the envelope
between life and the everlasting nothing.

Roger David Smith

Almost There...

The air is freshly laundered,
clouds tumble-dried.

Above a pail of milk,
a powder-blue sheet is in
full billow.

Silversprigged with birdsong
and peppery stamens,
the cherry blossom flosses;

shy bluebells dip
sky-washed bonnets, and,

timid pilgrims of the dark,
snowdrops whisper
their angelic prelude,
chorister sleeves tintured
in forested cuffs.

Blood-warm as a curled fox,
the terracotta is starred
with dusky phlox and,

tinted pink in a tulip womb,

a bee

rakes its velvet pile,
and baskets pollen,

miles from home.

Helen Laycock

Blue

At nineteen Pablo leaves Spain
for Paris with Casagemas. They paint

the town rouge, then Casagemas
shoots himself, believing he's killed

his fickle girl-friend first. Pablo slides
into dead-friend's shoes to salve

his pain, solve the guilt. He reels
into paint, careers into blue, spilling

his big loss, seeding his sick
fear in stricken, suffocating blues.

He will find that everything changes:
blue grief will give way to rouge

on the lip and rose on the cheek;
even the airless tomb and more sickening horrors

will collapse into sharpened form.
Out of composed

destruction
he will change everything.

Gill Barr

I always knew it would end in falling

still, I caressed those wings,
feather-soft and waxy

felt the rush of air
as he propelled upwards

breathless, his form
blotted small against sky

hot light
blinding vision.

In the end, I lost him -

but oh, how sweet,
to watch him reach for the sun

and almost

catch it

Leusa Lloyd

No Mirrors in the Forest

The trees don't compare
their skin. Here is the giant oak
trunk ribboned with stretch
marks, here the silver birch,
black-blemished and peeling,
here the pine, pockmarked
where it nurtured woodpeckers.
And here is my body,
pocked, and blemished, and stretched.
I compare it every day. Trace
with want, condemn each life
line in the mirror. I want
to splinter my limbs,
to count the rings inside me,
bury my feet in peat like a cutting,
take root, hair curling wild
like moss. I want to stretch my arms
out, let them sag
with the weight of birds,
while spiders weave silk
through my armpits.
I want bark beetles to tickle
my sides as they bore tunnels
into my flesh,
make spacious homes
from the decay, so finally
there is comfort inside
my skin.

Ella B. Winters

What Do I Know Of You?

You, who emerged from Time's
strange river and worshipped
the goddess of lightning
in summer's orchard.

Your loss is ancient:
an iron spell wrought in the bones—
your desires, molten
and honeyed—

you laugh at the abyss
where the world trembles
between beauty and brutality
on cliffs of myth—

where words are arrows
exiting your wounds,
piercing the shooter
and the shot.

Saraswati Nagpal

Still Life With Lovers And Fish

Discs of lemon stacked neatly in a bowl,
the heavy slab of the snapper watching

from the glass-domed mansion of its eye.
I am told that I can avoid a bland meal

with certain preparation — that I must
scour the membrane of its minerals,

lock the flesh with citrus, release its oils;
unhook the tail, peel away the spine.

The shredded zest will lift the taste,
the pan of heat softening the cells

to infuse the shards of salt with parsley
in the keel-broken waters of longing.

You hardly notice the flavour,
or the gooseflesh rippling across my skin.

Kate Vanhinsbergh

Safe Spaces

What is a safe space to you?

Is it your mama's garden ripe with jumping beans, radishes and sundried tomatoes?

Is it your child's smile they wear as ivory feathers when they return to greet you?

Is it the book you read by candlelight in the blushing nape of the night?

Is it the wine you wash regret and grief away with, as you bathe in the elderberry twilight?

Is it Billie Holliday on toast?

Is it gazing at Georgia o' Keefe under a cerulean canopy of dust?

Whatever it means to you-

I hope your space feeds you with love.

Carmella de Keyser

Forty

'I'll never be forty,'
Our dad always said,
'If I'm ever forty,
I'll wear pants on my head.'

The number was high,
It was so far away,
As far as the glint
Of the weathervane
On a still cloudless day.

'I'll never be forty,
My beard is *all* black,
My arms can still spin you
To Mars and then bring you,
All the way back.'

That number grew closer,
And then thirty-nine,
Stole its path onwards
Through snowdrops and tulips,
Bluebells and wild celandine.

We wrote out the card,
Our mum iced the cake,
We weren't very certain
Our dad was that glad
About reaching forty,
But time has no brake.

And look, there's the photo,
He did what he said,
When he turned forty,
He wore pants on his head.

Rebecca Leek

Imagine Yourself a Body of Water

that you might believe the rain was yours to gain
that you could stop the wind and still it
for a few moments, and draw a flat calm
over your surface, though ripples disturb its peace.

You know it to be impossible yet you know
how to dream and draw a vestige of its shape,
telling you that all things are possible
in this world, though fleeting, and almost always
written on your twilight vision in ciphers,
like the augury of migrating geese above
or the jackdaws nesting in your chimney.

Fame, ubiquity, chance and fate are the teeth
of the ratchet, holding you prisoner, tethered
by Gordian knots of reality and science,
muddying the unblemished stream that runs
through your own unfathomable body of water.

Glenn Barker

Walking With My Brother on New Year's Day

Our sons leap
through frosted reeds
as they attempt to whistle:
a wheeze, whoosh, raspberry.

They chase their breath
as we did,
jump on firework carcasses,
burst into view and out again.

It's not birdsong
from the Hawthorn trees
that remind us of home
but the stretched notes of boyhood.

Chris Campbell

I don't know a peony

From a rhododendron but I can still love
the blood-pink punch of it in the garden,
its tightly held fist of a bud bursting as if responding
to the heatwave or the late evening sun or even
a snippet of song from my daughter's bedroom.

I don't know how it has survived my shrugs
from the decking, my absent-minded plucking
of dandelions, or the rolling field of mint
I never hack back, but here we are together again
careless, living on our instincts.

We're in it together. I don't know what you call all
of these blossoming tough guys, their dresses
and bonnets, but I know they hunkered down - survived the hard times -
and that they're ready, now, to put on a show.

Vanessa Napolitano

Canterbury Beeches

It was nothing. Nothing but a trick
of angles, made that pair appear
to tear themselves apart. Of course,
those beeches do not stand for us.

Past inosculation exposed as wild
mistake. Inexorable uncoupling,
conducted at tree speed, with a writhing
shrug. These are no sylvan cyphers,

impatient to be decoded.
Simply big grey plants, twisting
towards light, behind a cathedral
garden wall. Old trees don't fall,

in or out of love. About that,
we can say we're certain.
Here, in this ancient, pilgrim city,
famous for its history of bad blood.

Matt Gilbert

american testament

on the First Day the media refused to print the truth
 preferring instead to cut to lies it had spent months
 before promoting

as many for the first time saw a fight was on
 the Second Day hate declared a national emergency
 bigotry became a federal sport

there was blaming and much leaving there was
 mourning and support the Third Day
 saw an attempt to strip all rights away

to replace the accurate with hate but truth endured
 untouched because it knows kindness matters more
 than hurt then on Day Four

Difference began to build their signs rallied allies
 and supporters marked defence in dangerous times
 determined to overcome in numbers

as the Fifth Day came with a certainty of forty days
 of rain the seas the temperature began to rise
 big business could no longer look

surprised nor escape the blame this new creation
 myth as yet has no certain end no Day 6 that remains
 the powerful and many's duty is to fix

the sands already running fine for those who thought
 they were Gods as we wield the power they can't buy
 sharing hope that we'll never yield

S. Reeson

We, the People

Overwhelming discrimination, credos, politics
saturate, society rends itself apart.
Life resembles a hypnotic sleepwalk
to the edge, the forever
dread of nameless years
seems like a biting scourge.
A world indifferent to
the striking catastrophes affects,
we rise akin to lightning in the dark sky.
When societal sewers are full, clogged,
gardens need water, we lash like
uninhibited rain.
We are the herd of deer, moving
across miles and miles—noiselessly,
but really fast as if wildfire.
Our elephantine shadow sweeps,
identical to mutiny for parity and justice—
our sense of democracy comforts the weep.
United, our rites of natural wizardry
eliminate the virus from each infected city.
Our footsteps quiet, shifting at a tranquil pace,
awaken the bedight fairness,
as each golden tongue reveals
that every man is free.

Sreelekha Chatterjee

In pursuit

I chased my tale

appearing busy.

I told myself

I was a great hunter,

pursuing the day

from dawn until done.

Ignoring skinned knees between long leaps

and grand schemes.

I forgot to see all

the little things.

I forgot to notice

my cup of tea

forming skin.

Donna Faulkner

Whisper

A cobwebbed whisper of wind
wakes and stirs. The breath

of the ancient gods
is upon me – all at once

I am weeping. The air
is thin and lucent

as bees' wings.
I can almost distinguish

the aerosol swirl
of the disappointed dead –

drifting like snow against
the sleeping ramparts

of this,
our woebegone world.

John Adlam

Far and away, a chime

After the rain,
the desert smelled of licorice and ice.

Birds darted through scented timber,
browsing the pious hills and all of
nature's promises.

You brought blackbirds and madrigals,
stirring,
and just then the hills turned white.
I handed you a star. A fossil and a map.
Every so often, I remember your words,
unruly, full of luminance, carillon bells.
Promise me you'll return,
with madeleines
and butterflies.

Quiet pools linger in gulches,
reflective and trembling with our lust for time,
betraying the stormy violets of the rolling dark,
and all the hidden miracles.

Regine Ebner

Thread

Each one of us
a silken thread
woven with complexity.

A delicate weave,
no beginning, no end,
just infinity.

Fragile.
Will it outlast
the raging storm?

The web
lives and dies
by those links
of delicate
silken thread.

Anthony J.P.

She Purchases A Semi-Precious Gemstone Bracelet

not for her, for her adult daughter,
no specific occasion - just desperation -
she clutches at opals' cosmic powers.

A mother's love examines every stone,
prays it glitters tints of potent gold,
a potential gift from apologetic gods.

She holds it aloft to the sacred sun,
searches for some scarred secret,
willingly follows its pagan whispers.

She gambles faith in glassy glares,
dares to dream they'll full-moon glow
to absorb a pain's silent screams.

Finally, she forages for flints, hints of hope
hidden in each stone's soily imprint,
the spot where Mother-Cosmos birthed it.

Finn Cassidy

A Lost Balloon at Stapleton Road Station

My son's balloon slips
from his pushchair,

floats down the track:
a yellow glint

below winter clouds.
He'd seized it from a kids' rave:

it shone amid glitter canons,
glow sticks.

Now his tears
could put out flames.

I picture a train driver
catching the prize,

his cab window ablaze.
Passengers cheer.

He takes it home
for his grandchild.

When my son asks why it has gone,
I answer.

He stares, knowing another's
small hands might hold his light.

Chris Campbell

Stormtrooper

I yearn to be a full burning sunrise,
not a pricked runny egg yolk.
A yellow face of glory,
not a dandelion soon to become
windblown wisps – beautiful
but gone in an eyeblink.
I wish to be a stormtrooper
who masters tumultuous winds.
Hurricanes visit me regularly.

I do not know the body counts
on my flooded lands,
the number of trees bent too far
who snap. Then comes the sun
its glory shines upon the devastation.
Is the blue sky that follows a denial
of death – or a new beginning?
Perspective shifts are so beguiling.
They push and pull, exert astonishing
inspiration to press on another day –

Sandra Beth Levy

Recurring Dream

The man with the herringbone cap
and dirty bristles sparks
a tattered rollup,

flaring the dark,
then strums the match out. Puddles
of grey edge and arc

across the road whose cobbles
slope down to his darkness
under the bridge. Dulls

of afternoon stretch
to where a coal dray
shabs its cart up the wet

brown stones then away
from workshop shanties on the hill
to the woods beyond. Her face

is cold, but warmth spills
round her then darkness. The blade
looks pewter with watery glits

under the fag-embered face
which inspects it. Rubbed
clean on his scarf, it waits.

She'd scream but her lungs
collapse into the grab.
It comes and feels like a punch.

Paul Connolly

Slivering the Sky

Emptiness cuts so keenly at night,
when there is nothing to do
but miss the dead,
slices of light pushing against
the smoky window
like fire irons through a cataract.
I look to the moon
slivering the sky so delicately,
recall the joy
that lived in my mother's eyes,
blow a wish to the stars.
Maybe tonight I will see her,
a bluebird perched
on the edges of a dream.
I need to believe
she watches over me,
even though I never learned
to believe in God.

Susan Richardson

Bradley Woods

I'll wear a shirt of Lincoln green,
step out towards the woods near Bradley Cross,
embrace the hedge, slink quietly by, ease past
Sylvanus, labouring with his boundary stones.

I dodge between the thousand oaks
with their thousand years of weathering the hunt
of Odo and his train. My feet are sinking,
soaking up the blackened waters of rotting leaf litter.

I'll crouch upon a fallen log in the heart
of this glade, taste the bitter green sight
of the nettle and the friendly dock leaf,
wait for a light-winged dryad to flit past.

I slip into the muddy pond, feel
the dank cold water creeping up, around my groin,
I'm still, imbibing the willow warbler's song,
dissolving beneath the oak's far-stretched canopy.

Bradley Woods, in North East Lincolnshire, UK, are recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086

GP Hyde

Sentinel Species

Do they remember the pelagic soup
of their youth,
before they settled
and secreted walls.
Before stability called them
to follow the crowd –
and stay put.
Freedom is filtered now
through cirri waves,
and unseen neighbours
who probe, uninvited.

Regret is sessile.
Cemented,
and
lacerating.

Rachel Burrows

1973

The thud and the slip of it I remember.
The cool air thickening. The goal growing pale.
Blackening grass exhaled its musky evening perfume
as twilight fell. The football softened,
glowed with magic. No one
had called us 'in'.
Alone, emboldened, exhilarated,
we played
on.

Tim Green

Sea Cucumber

Seabed Hoover of shallows, dark benthic depths,
tentacles wriggle, finger, guide dead coral, detritus
towards insatiable mouth.

Sea worm, *beche-de-mer*, innocuous;
significant enough to name a human tongue.*
The herd feeds, oblivious of exploitation,
declining numbers sating human tongues.

Quietly they slide across sea floor, eat,
recycle nutrients,
help.

**Bislama, the official pidgin language of Vanuatu, derives from beche-de-mer, the French name for the sea cucumber.*

Carolyn Thomas

The Backroom Of My Dreams

You might say the spark was slow to ignite,
yet it waited there, patient, still bright
in the dim backroom of my dreams.

Some move through life
with eyes wide shut,
never noticing how embers
stir awake
at the faintest passing breeze.

Sometimes we shape our words
only to please
while the mind circles its silent orbit,
turning, turning
without end.

We can't always pass,
through stormy seas
but we can still reach
that final destination

Francis H. Powell

Hours after Midnight

brailled,
traced,
nailed,
by the lover
whose fingertips
are falling petals.

Matthew M.C. Smith

Look at Me

I'd set my heart on all you loving me
so learned the ways to catch your needy eye
I've sussed the greedy blatancy of fame
and how to blag a freebie with cool cheek
I shine and strut with sleek insouciance
while flashing charming smiles to devotees
I'm setting shame apart for it is just
that my smart clique should pleasure out its days
since I was yearning for this as a child
and mildness never stopped a bee's despatch
I shall be earning squillions at this mine
as others bend the knee and trudge for miles
I shall have been...
What?
Your bad. I was misled. I swear you'd said
I had to stitch an epic thread on grammar.

Paul Rapley

Seizure Sonata in No Light

My head is a church bell
with no Sunday left in it.
Sometimes I lie still enough
to hear the rot behind my eyes,
a symphony of gnats
tuning the silence.
The nurse with the swallow tattoo
asks me to rate my panic
on a scale of 1 to 10.
I ask her
how she scores
the daily collapse
of a sun.
Someone honks at a red light.
I scream in Morse code.
She offers me
a pill I can't pronounce
and a smile I don't believe in.

Joshua Walker

Arctic Sunrise

That's what you called it
the colour of his nose in the cold
and you made me smile -
the way you said it.

The bitter air softened
with a rush of laughter
on the walk home.

And no-one else heard it but me,
and maybe no-one else was meant to.

And later, we couldn't remember.
A kind of beauty forgotten
almost as soon as it was spoken.

And then we did.

And then later again,
when I was in bed with the soft hall light
reflecting on the ceiling,
tucked up,
I smiled again -
at your unexpected poetry.

Laura Cooney

Dust Angel

It came from nowhere, the creature at my feet
skittering around my ankles in the wind.

A wren or a mouse but weirdly transparent,
a fallen leaf now turned to lace.

It stopped, though its body still moved, changing shape
so alive – yet made of dust.

A clot of spider web, wisps of hair, seed heads –
almost spiritual.

A ghost of a creature that doesn't exist,
the wind had given it life.

This must be the way
new worlds are created.

Ellie Rees

A Poet Wanders a Garden in Spring

After 'Walden' by Henry David Thoreau

I daube my pen with
morning mist,
caress the page
like an orange-tip over meadow.

Underfoot, wild garlic oils me.
Bluebells and celandine
nod from the shade.

I'll save the sun in silk,
pocket it gently.

In a hawthorn,
a blackbird trills
unfussed.

Paul Short

Fait accompli

Yet what if a swift, salutary, reconciling, almost imperceptible action could undo what was done, if it could soothe the sting in merely an instant, could soak up the salt & cauterize the wound, what if this in itself was the salve, was the balm was the wish, was the peace, was the promise of possibility, would you for a moment hesitate to mend a broken wing, a fiercely gentle animal at your feet? What if the storm had simply gone on long enough, if the salt could be transformed, alchemized back to nothing more & nothing less than a prescription for happiness, a saltwater cure, each wave a restoration of the furthest-reaching illuminations of a brilliant, sun-gilded sea?

**Fait accompli* - a unilateral action undertaken without consulting those who will be affected by it, leaving others with no choice but to accept it.

Author's note: The world does as it pleases, but we're in conversation with it, and there's agency in that. We don't know what's possible until we try. Go bravely then. Try.

Jenevieve Carlyn

Ocean Memory

Pulse oximetry, tidal luminescence,
Da Vinci spoke of this:
the light of youth does not end in stone.

How deep, far back, or in reverse?
Prehistoric or plastic. A virus
that's always been here, we surely just forgot.

Is this my hand? That red glow
so hard to reproduce, blood carrying oxygen,
rendered in pixels and algorithms.

Watch the dancer move their body,
all rippling caustic: we ache
to swim through pools of sunlight.

Firefly Squid of Honshu die on one night
under a full moon. Ocean, lit and teeming,
memory full of awe.

Eleanor Holmes

Stephen

*i.m. Stephen Vanhinsbergh,
31/03/1955 - 13/08/2012*

The man's chest was cracked open
with a sound like a great branch breaking.
Inside the ribs, I could see

an ocean, and a boat, perfectly formed
with its curved sides and fragile rope.
Smaller still, a man in the water.

Even from this height, his hands
were perfectly clear. The scene resonating
with a sound like glass. It was so quiet —

and there, all those he had been,
every version of him — contained,
as the ribs kept lifting up their hope.

Kate Vanhinsbergh

Xylophone

Some benign kindness gave her a voice.
Drops on a water table. Bubbling earth.
Her distinctive s's.

Her ticks of multiple tongues.
With her ear to rebound. Sharp and brittle.
I do not own many recordings of her.

Sounds that pierce my side.
I long for her clear notes.
I want the shirty shrillness from teenage days.

Her wooden bars and death sit hollow.
Her transparent truth rings.
Locked into a bashful resonator.

I am her father.
Kept by her precise kindness,
I wait in the company of percussion dreams.

Stephen Paul Wren

Ambient Language

Such a lovely whisper, breathy, hot,
 vowels expanding with the flash spark
 of lingual friction, a magnesium of the tongue
 igniting against teeth to fill the cold sonic
voids of my west coast Sound:
ten becoming tea-yen, kiyute refusing to be merely cute,
 elongating our adoration
on a whim of comfort, some deep safety,
 in the the language of a sanctuary
somewhere between West and Midwest,
 we scaling the Sierra Nevadas and the Rockies
full of many feline selves, to the Ambient Universe.
All the while my voice sang when I spoke,
The Guatemalan lilt of my heritage intermingled
with your homegrown diphthongs and tryphthongs,
 creating some linguistic line,
 a tether of len-gu-a y amor, amor, amor
una canción de la historia del universo.
I remember I coughed, choking
 on my own spit at a moment so intimate
that our plasma laughter filled the room,
 a wildfire of delight and dereliction,
each atom of the kinetic pressed up
 against the barriers of the potential,
the possible, the song of us together breaking
 beyond our bedroom walls, soaring above
the skyline and above all the dead,
gliding upon purple green licks
 of flame on feathered ambient wings above.

Michael DuBon

The Stone

Your Mama doesn't come much anymore.
Haven't seen her yet this year,
me and the cement bunny
hiding in the border
with the purple pansies
fighting for sunlight under the spreading
sheath of weeds and crabgrass.
It's time, that's all, not you or me,
or the shred of grief left intact
that binds us ever stronger to this earth.

It feels good to have hands
laid on again, and the warming sun.
An unfamiliar gentleman circles the grounds
searching for me and for your name,
which isn't easy to find under cover.
Why he was absent these thirty years
I don't know, but he must have loved you, no?
To pull the weeds, to set the rabbit straight,
to claw dirt from the letter grooves
and water your grave with his tears.

John Chmura

Tracks of Life

I waited at one station
While you departed at another
There was a possibility that
Our journeys would intersect
But as I stepped onto my train
Yours pulled into the platform
That my back was facing
You watched me leave
As I wondered if we'd ever meet.

Our timetables never did align.

Francesca L. Rolle

Fine

She said it again
But with use it grew more fragile
A tiny word once cherished like a jewel
Eroded to the merest suggestion
Of the brilliance it once held
And in the days and years that followed
She knew
In the fading of the light
That cracked gem carried hope
Concealed the mask she wore well
But behind the layers and the lacquer
Grief left its obvious marks
Memories caught in salted tracks
And in the plastered over cracks
Where only she could see them
Still, each time they asked
She said it again

Dawn Mclachlan

Field

I set out, again, to walk the field,
follow the roughshod path with metalled boots.
The old tree trunk's still there, shoved to the side,
white as sepulchred bones,

drenched with rain that's stripped its bark away.
I clatter on, past that black heap,
furnace-scraped, farmer-dumped,
placed for ploughing in.

I'll be that trunk, that heap of soot
so you can burn my bones,
plough me in so I'll spring up
with newfound friends.

GP Hyde

un | knotted || tucked

this love has
 no twists / other
 than one \ you can
 make / such as that one
 time \ when a breakaway petrichor

from a virga / splurged our way \ or that hot
 summer day when it hailed / and laid \ a lunar-toned tapestry
 of rounded unflavoured popsicles / on my chartreuse and your verdant \ terraces

or that bronze-sheafed / fall twilight \ when you waited / for the one
 you invited // to be dashed
 away... and yet

this poem | finds | you had me
 stayed || nestled like a gold leaf | dash-
 ed in-between || the folds of vellum sheets | of your
 love | ly invite... anyway...

C. Oulens

In the nightclub of my problems

In the nightclub of my problems you carry
glow bands in your slim white hands.
Music shrieks through fuzzy mouths
all the dancers say *let me out. Let me out!*
On podiums the pressing issues writhe
against their cages. Temporary containment.
The bass line rages;
the floorlight projects mazes.
Like in a dream of clothesless shame,
I'm shock-stopped and drinking shots
of river water to help me forget.

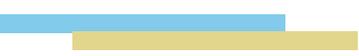
Won't you join me- or send a ladder
so I can climb from this grim basement?
A stamp on the hand admits re-entry.

Vanessa Napolitano

Retreat

The quiet
shining sea slips
away from the sand —
a glittering retreat
into bewilderment.

Rhona Greene



Words

I want to reach up into
my brain with a hook and
drag it out like a tapeworm
of words spilling out of my
mouth along my tongue to
reveal how I feel, what I
think, who I am. But it's
firmly rooted, teeth dug in
fast to my limbic system
sucking it all up and digesting
it into unrecognisable puzzle
pieces to be re-jigged
back together.

Francesca L. Rolle

The Professor Sighs,

we carve out our history into the cold grey earth,
we leave insidious marks any way we can,

we are other people's memories, falling on our sword,
we are the texture of clouds, transient and ephemeral;

even when I'm not thinking, I think of you,
I sometimes wonder if it's all a collective dream,

if I ever forget about you, will you cease to be?
If you ever forget about me, who's dream will we be?

Everything has changed but nothing has,
we carve our initials in a heart on an old oak tree,

today an exhibition opens that will change our lives,
tomorrow another season splinters on another earth,

soon our history is carved eloquently on the skies,
soon snow is falling over forests, parks and graves.

Peter Devonald

Train travel as recurrent dream sequence

There is always a moment when you come to,
find the seam of lucidity at the horizon.

This song cycle of fields; this muted blue
that carries within it its own lullabies.

And you – the reluctant somnambulist whose
own reflection you briefly see through.

Victoria Spires

The Colour Of Dying

Vultures hunch on bone-trees, watching
a string of cotton-mouthed
human beads stumble,
yellow-footed,
across the waterless earth.

An ever-fraying ribbon, perforated and
patched by broken rainbows,
they wind

through the rib-lined riverbed
where curling fish with tarnished sequins
once waned like dropped moons
then disappeared.

Long dead.
The raptors circle as mothers squat
like burnt crops in orange dust,
their barren-bellied babies as rutted
as ploughed troughs,

yet hope is still a greentipped shoot;

it pushes between the brown husks
which litter their journey
like sacks.

They trudge on, without choice,
carrying wrapped bundles —
cocooned little bodies,
arrowed silver by the sun,

gritty eyes scouring
the plain, waiting
for the earth to darken.

Helen Laycock

Dissociation

I see that window, its sill with dry sticks
in a vase between hot glass and curtain.
I swear to god, I could kiss crisp petals
back to life but, this time, remain in myself.
This has taken too long. I could conjure rules
for the not yet fake game we walked through,
a game well-rehearsed by other downcast actors
on shabby-chic streets, holding on to identities
unconsciously in the sun's glare.

What I thought it was, what it could be—
crisp-brown and vintage. Not yet breaking
or burning our shoes.

Matthew M.C. Smith

Magi

Star-bound, we followed,
coaxed camels as far as we could,
supped on stale bread,
our faces weathered

by devouring rain and ravenous sun,
for many miles we trod,
trekked slopes with panted breath,
submitting to unending blackness.

The last night was longest.
Clouded, our star was the only one shining,
its light snuffed to a pinhead,
then vanished.

We wandered, directionless,
the pale hands of exhaustion
tugging at our knees,
we bowed our heads like snowdrops -

all lost.
There, we would have stayed,
had it not been for the
streaking of nectarine

through purple, the burning of
rowanberry red and blush of rose,
the rioting of birdsong and wash of light
kissing our foreheads:

oh, how we wept
when dawn bloomed.

Leusa Lloyd

Fabritius 1654

after 'The Goldfinch', oil on panel

From its weathered, grey perch,
the goldfinch of my heart
has searched for spring
in a colourless world.

What use are wings
if the sky is an untasted painting?

These chains of duty
are begging to be broken.
Somewhere, my shadow rises
like a falcon in the desert,
a dream unfettered.

I feel its breath on my neck.

Saraswati Nagpal

Becoming a Galaxy

Whenever the night sky thunders,
a matchstick enters the poem,

its blaze is nothing within the wind
of daily life, but within the hot passion

of benzene, it's the end of your tamed tears
in the stables. A silver horse trots into

the poem, to spirit you away from the flames
of the groom approaching to cut your writing hand.

The horse takes you into the darkness
of the woods, where you find a newborn foal

dying to gallop on four legs. A horseshoe
constellation glistens in the poem now,

with which you adorn the scars on your fingers
right before you abandon the poem to give birth

to a new poem about becoming a galaxy of words.

Özge Lena

Woman/Swan

If this thing
 thrusting-beaked

could would listen

stop--

feathers do not disguise,

nor wingbeats
enfold, but crush

smothering
raw screams,

and the aching cry of moon-birds
circling

the broken
(that may yet be healed)

and you—
 blooded, bruised

pinioned, tide-synchronized,

adrift

in the sough
of ghost-whispers

you are not to blame,

you have survived.

Merril D. Smith

We follow the drove roads in late summer

when night finally comes
and the moon is new
starlight and satellites hang
like chandeliers above us
and already what we see
is history

the sky dances a reel
we know so well
and your eyes
your eyes as bright as any star
as you trace
the old drove roads

where shooting stars
follow the paths
our ancestors
walked across the heavens
crossing stone and stardust
them and us

we lie on our backs
in the heather
you take my hand
beside the old shieling
in the briefest night
and the world is fine

Andrew Williamson

Wetland

Dry is but the domain
of distant memory. One worn
woollen walking sock squelches,

then subsides. An easterly wind
scowls under nimbus eyebrows,
throws us a look

to chill us in our puddled footsteps
as we crest the floodwall.
The sulphurous sea froths,

disgorging its spumous wrath
against the dunes and groynes,
souring the sloughs

with its saltwater scorn.
Don't you see?
We are wretched now

and displaced – strangers still.
Didn't we delve, divert, develop –
drive like the very Devil?

We could not be content
with our blessings. Now
grace is slipping away from us

like sand from collapsing
coastlines, rainwater rilling
through faintly reaching fingers.

John Adlam

The starlings

come and go
as they please. Each year

clumping a murmuration, magnetic
wings pulling North and South.

They know nothing
of safe and legal routes, only the softness

of a sprawling sky, the candour
of water, each other's

fragile bodies
an armour.

Ella B. Winters

Returning To Woolacombe With My Now Adult Son

Late dusk clouds
slink low as factory fumes,
we walk over the soft edge
of a genuflecting surf
and oblivious to its politely left
ribboned calling-cards.
Sky punches
with the heft of fresh stars
and stupored, we both conspire
to upend Time:
not really knowing where or when we are.

Behind us,
on the quivering hill houses glint,
freshly netted.

Julian Cason

Where have all the blue skies gone

There's a terrible river scouring the town. The water is unknowable, frothing and brown as if a million cappuccinos escaped from cafés lining the streets.

Cameras pan to a mangled wreck of cars. I hug a cushion for comfort, think of the couple here who drowned driving under a bridge in a flooded street nearby. But Valencia is something else; my mind grapples with what lies beneath.

Jenny Robb

Radix Perrenis

Create forests for wandering,
for wondering,
for healing,
not for wood carved into coffins.

Drop seeds, not bombs,
allow rivers of blossom and emerald to flow
rather than artillery grey rubble dust
of death.

In long troughs plant bulbs—
hyacinth, crocus, snowdrop, tulip,
rather than fallen lives.

Melt rocket casings, bullet casings, mortar casings,
alchemise destruction to repair.
Build / build / build.

Create forests.

Drop seeds.

Plant bulbs.

Repair.

Rebuild.

Finally, frame an atlas where everybody belongs.

Paul Short

Biographies

Risbi Dastidar's fourth collection of poetry is Cherry Blossom at Nightbreak (Nine Arches Press, 2026). His third collection, Neptune's Projects (Nine Arches Press, 2023), was longlisted for the Laurel Prize, and a poem from it was included in The Forward Book of Poetry 2024. He is chair of Wasafiri, the magazine of international contemporary writing, and a trustee of the Wordsworth Trust.

Samantha Terrell is the editor of SHINE international poetry series. Her collections have been published by indie presses throughout the US & UK, and her work has been widely anthologized, recently in haus-a-rest, iamb poetry, Torch & Tinder, and others. Terrell and her family reside in Upstate New York.

Jenni Thorne is a poet from the Black Country. She loves to explore the space between how life appears and how it is felt, and the contradictions we all carry. She shares her writing and thoughts on Bluesky @jenthorne.bsky.social.

Victoria Spire's work has been widely published. In 2025 she came Third in the Rialto Nature & Place competition and won the Alpine Fellowship Poetry Prize, and she was recently a finalist in the Mslexia Women's Poetry competition 2026.

Andrew Williamson is a writer and poet. From Aotearoa New Zealand, he now lives in the Isle of Skye. He has written three collections of poetry and a novel. His poems have been published widely in Aotearoa, the US and UK.

Merril D. Smith is a Pushcart and Best of the Net nominated poet. Her full-length poetry collection, River Ghosts (Nightingale & Sparrow Press) was Black Bough Poetry's December 2022 Book of the Month. Her new collection is Held Inside the Folds of Time (Jane's Studio Press, 2025).

Sue Finch is the author of Magnifying Glass, Welcome to the Museum of a Life, and Vortex Over Wave. She loves the coast, peculiar things, and the scent of ice-cream freezers.

Paul Connolly's poems have appeared in many magazines including Agenda, Poetry Salzburg, Stand, Manchester Review, Chiron, Scintilla, and takabé. Third place in the Magna Carta competition, he was shortlisted for the Bridport and Charles Causley prizes and has Forward Prize and Best of the Net nominations for 2026.

Sarah O'Grady's work appears in various small press including Butcher's Dog, The Madrigal, Black Bough & Broken Spine. A pamphlet was short-listed by Black Bough in 2024 and another shortlisted by Hedgehog Press 2025. Winner Winged Moon Competition 2025, Short-listed Ironbridge Competition 2025.

Sarah Raybould is a poet from the Peak District. She has written and performed a commission for English Touring Opera, has various recent and upcoming publications with Black Bough, After..., The Page Gallery, The Fig Tree, and was featured in the National Poetry Library showcase in November 2025.

Rachel Turney, Ed.D. (she/her) is an educator and artist located in Denver. Her poems, research articles, reviews, and drawings can be found in a variety of publications. Rachel is passionate about immigrant rights, teacher support, and empowering other artists. She is a Writers' Hour prize winner and Best of the Net nominee. Her photography appears on a few magazine covers. Rachel runs the popular online reading series Poetry (in Brief). She is on staff at Bare Back Magazine with her monthly column Friday Night in the Suburbs. She reads for The Los Angeles Review. Website: turneytalks.com Instagram: @turneytalks Bluesky: rachelturney

Özge Lena is an internationally published poet. She recently presented her poetic approach "Catapoetics" at the International Conference on Poetry Studies, University of London. Her work has received Pushcart Prize and BOTN nominations and been shortlisted for the Oxford Brookes International Poetry Competition, The Plough Poetry Prize, and other awards.

Julian Cason lives in Cardiff. Nominated for a Forward Prize, Two Pushcart Awards and Best Of The Net (Twice). Publications include Black Bough (Silver Branch Poet), East Ridge Review (Featured Poet), Winged Moon, Frogmore Papers, Dreich, Dream Catcher. Contributing poet to multiple anthologies. Found on X @hool415 and BlueSky @hool415.bsky.social.

Rhona Greene is an award-nominated Dublin writer who recently guest sub-edited The Storms Journal V. Publications include Black Bough Poetry's Silver Branch series and iamb.uk wave nineteen. Find Rhona on X/Instagram: rhona_greene or Bluesky @rbonagreene.bsky.social.

Leia Butler is the editor of Full House Literary. Her poetry can be found in Streetcake Magazine, Acropolis Journal, Roi Fainéant Press, Permeable Barrier, Atrium, Aswirl, and Fawn Press. She has poetry collections published with Broken Sleep Books and Stanchion. Her latest poetry collection was published by Steel Incisors in March 2025.

Ian Tattum retired and lives on the Isle of Purbeck. His poems have been published by Black Bough Poetry, Spelt and Starbeck Orion, and his essays by Landlines for Nature, The Clearing, and the Church Times. He is a Fellow of the Linnean Society.

Laura Cooney is a writer from Edinburgh with a chapbook Motherbunnet, out now. Nominated for a BOTN award in 2024 and 2025 she is the co-EIC of Frazzled Lit, when not writing she'll be with her daughters, as close to the sea as possible. There will be ice-cream!

Susan Richardson is the author of three collections of poetry and has had work published in numerous journals and anthologies. She also hosts the literary podcasts, A Thousand Shades of Green and Story Sessions, and writes the blog, Stories from the Edge of Blindness.

Rob Galpin works in nature restoration and lives and gardens in Wallsend, North Tyneside. He has not previously been published.

Roger David Smith is originally from Caithness, in the far north of Scotland, but currently lives in the south of France, where he works as a teacher. He has had poems and short stories featured in various literary magazines and websites including *Cutting Teeth*, *Prosetrics*, *Nerve*, *Nomad*, *The Starbeck Orion*, *The Candyman's Trumpet*, *Fevers of the Mind*, *Minted*, *Haus-A-Rest*, *Suburban Witchcraft*, *Urban75* and others.

Helen Laycock, winner of Black Bough Poetry's Chapbook contest and shortlisted of *The Broken Spine's* Chapbook competition, has nominations for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. Widely published, she has recently been showcased at iamb and celebrated in a 'Silver Branch' feature with Black Bough.

Gill Barr's debut collection *A Wide River Divides Us* was published by Cinnamon Press in 2025. Her poetry film of the same name was short-listed for Cork's Obbeal International Poetry Film Competition and selected for screening at the Vienna International Festival in April 2026. Gill holds an MA in Creative Writing from Queen's University and has received an award for her poetry from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

Lensa Lloyd's poetry and short stories have been published in *Propel Magazine*, *Ink Sweat & Tears*, *Bracken*, *Anthropocene*, *Green Ink Poetry*, *Moon Water*, *Tiny Wren Lit*, *Black Bough Poetry*, *Wee Sparrow Press* and more. Follow her on X: @lloydensa and Instagram: @lensalloyd

Ella B. Winters (she/they) is a social worker, researcher, and writer, living on the South-East coast of England. Her poetry often explores themes of identity, memory and belonging, has been nominated for the Forward prize and is twice nominated for the Pushcart prize. She is an associate editor at *Shadow & Sax*. Instagram: @ella.b.winters

Saraswati Nagpal is a Forward Prize-nominated Indian poet, writer of myth & fantasy, and classical dancer. She is Co-Editor at *The Winged Moon literary Substack*, and is published in *The Atlantic*, *Atlanta Review*, *Acropolis*, *Dust*, *S.A.N.D.*, and others, besides international anthologies. She has been nominated for four Best of the Net and a Pushcart Prize for her poems. Her debut poetry collection is *Drench Me in Silver* (Black Bough, 2025).

Kate Vanhinsbergh is a poet from Manchester, UK. She has poems published or forthcoming in *Iamb*, *Black Bough*, *Ink Sweat & Tears*, *Anomaly*, *We Hyperfocus*, *After...* and others. She holds a Masters in Creative Writing from Keele University and can be found on Instagram @kate.vanhinsbergh or X @katenanbergh.

Carmella de Keyser is a prize-winning British poet, known for explorations of identity, and the liminal spaces of human experience. Founder of the Harlow Circle of Poetry Stanzas, judge for the Harlow Poetry Open, she has two published chapbooks and two forthcoming, from Hedgehog Press, Alien Buddha Press and Parlyaree Press.

Rebecca Leek is an author, musician, and prize-winning poet. She produces the poetry podcast, *The Ditty Bag*, and performs regularly in the East of England.

Glenn Barker is a South Yorkshire poet and reviewer, drawn to capturing the discordant spirit of our existence, landscape and morality. He writes in a rich and immersive imagery, a dance of language on our interpretations of reality, the ambiguities of the human condition, and the dynamics of contemporary life.

Chris Campbell lives in Oxford. His second full collection, *'Why I Wear My Past to Work'*, is published by Parlyaree Press (2025). His mini-pamphlet is due in 2026 (*Atomic Bohemian*). His poems appear in *The Rialto*, *Magma*, *Prole*. Chris was Highly Commended in the 2024 Cobb International Poetry Competition.

Vanessa Napolitano is a Word Up North New Northern Poet 2025. She has published three pamphlets including *'Various Magics'*. Her work can be found in *Interpreter's House*, *Clarion*, and *Stanchion*. She writes on themes of grief, nature and everyday magic.

Matt Gilbert is from Bristol, but currently gets his fill of urban hills in South East London. His work has appeared in various publications, including recently: *Abridged*, *Full House Literary*, *The Madrid Review* and *The Rialto*. His debut collection *'Street Sailing'* came out with Black Bough Poetry in 2023.

S Reeson [she/they] is a bisexual, multidisciplinary artist and mentor, published by The Poetry Society and Bloomsbury/OneWorld, with work in nearly 30 independent literary magazines and anthologies since 2018 (most recently *Ink, Sweat and Tears*), plus a pamphlet debut, *'Flammable Solid'* in 2022.

Sreelekha Chatterjee is a poet from New Delhi, India. Widely published in more than forty journals, magazines, and anthologies globally across twelve countries, her poems have appeared in *Madras Courier*, *Setu*, *Verse-Virtual*, *Timber Ghost Press*, *Oreanaug Mountain Poetry Journal*, *The Wise Owl*, *Ghudsavar Literary Magazine*, *Black Bough Poetry*, among others. Facebook: [facebook.com/sreelekha.chatterjee.1/](https://www.facebook.com/sreelekha.chatterjee.1/), X (formerly Twitter): @sreelekha001, Instagram @sreelekha2023, Bluesky: @sreelekha2024

Donna Faulkner is Free-spirited and unconventional, she came to the business of writing later in life. She lives in Rangiora, New Zealand. Her work has been published in *The Bayon Review*, *300 Days of Sun*, *Tukabē: Hua/Manu*, *Tarot Poetry NZ*, *Windward Review*, *Havik*, *New Myths*, and others. Her first poetry collection, *'In Silver Majesty'*, was published by erbacce press, UK, 2024. <https://www.erbacce-press.co.uk/donna-faulkner> Instagram: @lady_lilith_poet X@nee_miller. Website: <https://linktr.ee/donnafaulkner>

John Adlam lives in Brixton, South London. He is Trustee of the Survivors' Poetry collective and member of the Hill Poets Stanzas of the Poetry Society. His poems have been/will be published in *Iamb (Wave 27)*, *After...*, *Madrid Review*, *Full House Literary*, *Snow lit rev*, *Atrium*, *South*, *Asylum*, and *The Broken Spine*.

Regine Ebner is a teacher and poet from Tucson, Arizona. Her debut full poetry collection, *Mountains that See in the Dark*, was published by Black Bough Poems in 2025. Her pamphlet, *Oxidized Pennies*, was published by Alien Buddha Press (2022). The unique Sonoran Desert is often her muse.

Anthony J Parker is a working-class writer and teacher from Manchester. Since 2010, he has shared writing online and self-published books including *'Finding Hope in the Beehive'* to raise money for *Mind and Mustard Tree*. His interests include travel, history and science fiction. Twitter/X - @antJP01 Instagram - @ant_the_poetic_prince

Finn Cassidy (he/him/his) is an Irish poet, living in the French-Alps. His poems have featured in a variety of international poetry journals and anthologies. He is currently completing his first full poetry collection: *Notions of Starkology-Codology*. For all things poetry-related, you can contact Finn at fcassidy@email.com and on X @FinianCassidy

Sandra Beth Levy is a retired psychologist who passionately practiced the healing art of psychotherapy for over forty years and is now pursuing immersion in creative writing. She has published widely in numerous USA and international literary journals and anthologies. Her debut chapbook is scheduled for pre-sale with *Finishing Line Press* fall 2026.

GP Hyde was born on Merseyside and now lives in Grimsby. He studied art at Goldsmith's and at the Royal Academy Schools. His fiction has been extensively published by *Pure Slush*. His poetry has been published by *Broken Spine*, *Black Bough*, *Hedgehog*, *Underbelly*, *Written Off*, *the Dark Poets* and *voidspacezine*.

Rachel Burrows' writing features in *Northern Gravy*, *Motherhood Uncensored*, *Tiny Wren*, *Write Out Loud's Echoes*, *The Dawntreader*, *The Candyman's Trumpet*, *Underbelly Press*, *Dust*, BBC Upload and upcoming anthologies from *The Broken Spine* and *Hedgehog Presses*. She has been nominated for *The Pushcart* and *Best Small Fictions Prize*.

Tim Green is a London-based teacher and writer who has loved all things literary from an early age. His prose work appears in *Frazzled Lit*, Issue 4, and he's a regular contributor of poetry to *Top Tweet Tuesday* as @teemgrin.

Carolyn Thomas is from the Neath Valley in South Wales but now lives on Tyneside with a misanthropic cat. Her poetry has been published by *Anthropocene*, *Black Bough*, *Dreich*, *Red Poets*, *The Candyman's Trumpet*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *These Pages Sing*, *Yaffle*, *Molecules Unlimited*, and *Fragmented Voices*. Carolyn has also featured on *The Broken Spine's* Podcast.

Born in 1961, in Reading, Francis H Powell currently lives in Moret sur Loing, France writing both prose and poetry. He's had four books published as well as poems published in anthologies, for both adults and children. He's done poetry readings for *Paris Lit* up as well as other events.

Matthew M. C. Smith is a Welsh writer who is *Forward Prize*, *Pushcart* and *Best of the Net* nominated. He won the *RS Thomas poetry prize* at *Gwyl Cybi* in 2018. Matthew is the author of *The Keeper of Aeons* and *'Paviland: Ice and Fire'*. He edits *Black Bough* poetry.

Paul Rapley's recent verse has been published by *Blue Unicorn*, *The Broken Spine*, *Felix*, and in his radical novel, *My Glorious Journey* by *Mithridates the Magnificent*. He's written guides to *Jane Eyre* and attacked *Much Ado's Don Pedro* & *Count Claudio*. Of late, Paul's been hanging his hat not far from the River Thames. Website: mygloriousjourney.co.uk

Joshua Walker is a poet and writer whose work has appeared in *Potomac Review*, *Southern Florida Poetry Journal*, and *Solarpunk Magazine*. He is a *Pushcart Prize* nominee and *Best Microfiction* nominee, exploring raw human emotion, memory, and the tension between darkness and vulnerability.

Ellie Rees is an award-winning writer who writes across many genres including poetry, creative nonfiction and memoir. Her work is widely published in various journals. Ellie won the *Broken Spine's* inaugural *Chapbook Competition* in 2023 with her second collection, *Modest Raptures*. Ellie's work appears regularly online for *Top Tweet Tuesday* and she is a *Pushcart Prize* nominated poet (twice). She has a PhD in *Creative Writing* from *Swansea University*.

Jenevieve Carlyn lives in New England, where a river meets the sea. Her poems have recently appeared in *Black Bough Poetry's* winter anthology, *The Broken Spine's Rites & Trials* anthology, *The Madrid Review*, *Humana Obscura*, and *The Nutmeg Anthology of Connecticut Poems*. Look for her on *Blueskey* & *Substack* @coastalpoet.

Stephen Paul Wren is a chemist-poet and poet-chemist who has had several books of poems published. His work has also appeared in places such as *Tears in the Fence*, *14* magazine, and *Obsessed with Pipework*. Stephen is the founder of the poetry collective called *Molecules Unlimited*.

Michael DuBon is a first-generation US citizen of Guatemalan descent. His poetry has appeared in *The Meadow*, *The Museum of Americana*, *Shine Poetry Quarterly*, and others, and his creative nonfiction has appeared in *The Plentitudes*, *Heartwood*, and *Under the Gum Tree*. He is an English Professor at *Everett Community College*.

John Chmura lives and writes in the Pine Barrens of Ocean County, New Jersey, USA. John performs regularly at *The Last Stand Open Mic* in *Tuckerton Seaport* and other venues in southern New Jersey. John's poetry and haiku have recently been selected by *The Winged Moon*, *Soup Can Magazine*, *Trash Panda*, *Presence Haiku Journal*, and *The Solitary Daisy*.

Francesca L Rolle is a poet living in Clevedon, UK. Francesca grew up in London before studying *Human Geography* at *Sheffield University*. With a lifelong interest in poetry and reading she likes to explore how life's experiences weave into her words on the page.

Dawn McLachlan is based in rural Scotland and writes poetry for both adults and children. Dawn's poetry appears in the anthologies, *Gods and Monsters*, *Heroes and Villains* - (illustrated by *Chris Riddell*), *Cosy Poems*, and *Space – A Royal Observatory Greenwich Poetry Book*. All published by *Macmillan*. She is the lead judge of the *Brian Nisbet Poetry award*.

C. Oulens is an emerging poet. Winner of "Poe-It Like Poe 2025" poetry contest, her works are published in *The Broken Spine*, *The Starbeck Orion*, *The Candyman's Trumpet*, *Pan Haiku Review*, *Poetry Pea*, etc. Her poetry engages with radical questions on individual and society, suffused with sentience, wit and satire.

Peter Devonald is a *Forward Prize*, *Pushcart Prize*, twice *BotN* and *Children's Bafta* nominee, winner *Broken Spine Readers' Choice Award 2025*, *Loft Books Best Poem 2024*, *Waltham Forest*, *FofHCS*, two *HoH's*, runner-up *Shelley Memorial* and *N2tS 2024*, highly commended *Bermondsey and Beyond*, *Poetry Café*, *Hippocrates* and *Passionfruit Review*. Peter is widely-published/ anthologised. <https://linktr.ee/pdevonald>

*Jenny Robb was a social worker and then manager in both children's and mental health services. Since retirement she's been published widely in magazines and anthologies. She has two poetry collections published by Yaffle Press, *The Doll's Hospital*, (2022), and *Hear the World Explode*, (2024). She lives in Liverpool.*

Paul Short is a Forward prize, Best of the Net and multiple Pushcart-nominated poet from Newcastle upon Tyne. He has been widely published, with work featuring on BBC Upload, Eat The Storms and A Thousand Shades of Green Podcast and in publications from Full House Literary, Black Bough Poetry, The Winged Moon, Dust Poetry, Hedgehog Poetry, Broken Spine Arts, Dark Poets Club, The Starbeck Orion and more. He is editor of The Book Bag and Open Mic bost. He also facilitates the Write Here, Right Now Poetry Group.