



To Lay Sun Into A Forest

Poems About Grief

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Edited by Sue Finch and Annick Yerem



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Sarah Connor

Keep Telling of Gaza
Khawla Badwan and Alison Phipps

Sue:

For my Nan

She
said
she'd
come
back
as
a
robin,
but
none
will
catch
my
eye.

Annick:

For Sarah

hundreds of
wild geese on the fields
i can feel you, no past tense,
wings over wind

*

For Hossam Shabat:
you deserved so much better

To Lay Sun Into A Forest elicits an immediate and visceral stirring, a cry that wells up from deep within. In the quiet act of reading-grieving, it draws the reader into a dimensionless, ineffable abyss where grief, love, and memory press upon an already burdened existence. Each page bears the imprint of weeping words, reminding us that, amid stunning muteness and unmasked indifference, poetry still holds the power to connect us to the remnants of a wounded humanity. The poets emerge as unyielding witnesses, truth-tellers whose poetics carry the weight of courage, humility, and a radical, irreducible relationality.

Hyab Teklehaimanot Yohannes,
Lecturer in Forced Migration and Decolonial
Education, University of Glasgow



Grief, like love, rests at the very heart of the human condition.

The dazzling poems in *To Lay Sun Into a Forest* capture the heartbeat of grief and loss.

The wide-ranging community of poets chart grief across a galaxy of stars, lands, and the oceans, through the shivering leaves of trees, to the heartbeats of loved ones, their losses are encapsulated in words that stay with us, long after we close the book.

The chasm of grief for Gaza runs through the book like a thread of gold kintsugi unable to bind such immense losses. Hope remains.

Teresa Pilgrim,
academic, creative practitioner, activist, survivor

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Foreword

There is a lot of grief in this world. Grief for those whose whole lives are affected by wars and ethnic cleansing. Grief for political upheaval around the world. Grief for climate change and for those affected by natural disasters.

We are now one and a half years into the genocide in Gaza. The country I live in is increasing its military spending, while it's descending back into fascism. Grief for lives taken, hopes destroyed, beliefs shattered.

And then there are our personal griefs: people we love, animals we love. Why choose this theme in an anthology, you might ask? Aren't things bad enough? And yes, of course they are, but reading all the poems that were sent to us also showed us how important it is to talk about grief, to acknowledge it, and share it with others, thus making us feel (hopefully) less alone. Ankh Spice puts this beautifully:

Thinking of poetry as an antidote to the stiff upper lip. A net so gentle it can scoop the unsayable, intact, uninjured, from the depths of us. A glass bowl, clean water for grief & pain & joy to swim in as a shoal. All seen, all ok to name. As permission to finally be unbrave— which is the bravest.

We were touched to receive so many poems that were personal obituaries, and not all of them were about people the poets knew. We also received a lot of poems about trees, a reminder of how important they are to all of us. This empathy for other humans, for other living beings, it is what is needed right now and we hope you will find solace in the grief that is shared. In *The Lost Words Blessing* by Spell Songs, there is the line “*Enter the wild with care, my love and speak the things you see.*”

We remember. We speak of the atrocities that are happening, because it is the only way. We bear witness.

We honour the dead, we say the names of people and countries, we sing the names of animals, of trees.

We remember them, we name them, we hope, we hope.

And we breathe, and we write. As Khawla Badwan says, (after Brecht's Motto):

In the dark times
Will there also be writing?

Yes, there will also be writing

About the dark times.

Otherwise, we become irrelevant.

Irrelevant.

So if you read this book and find yourself crying for other people's families, for other people's lives, if you find yourself crying for a tiny bat that is lost forever or for a tree that is gone, then nothing is wrong with you, everything is right. The world needs more weepers.

Be gentle with yourself.

With love,

Annick Yerem, April 2025

Recycle

Ankh Spice

We pick up the shards of the world.

We cut our hands.

We pick up the shards of the world.

Words and Stories

Merril D. Smith

This telling stories is all about being human.
Sarah Connor, Being Human

I began
with hulking elephant words trampling
the grass,

and she was a guide, a gull
plucking words from waves,
trees, cars, people, the stars--

selkie-words,
sea-swimmers,

though she flew with rooks
and sacrificed to the crow god,

her human words
pulled threads spun of dreams,

twisted, wove them
to live on without her.

A Mirrored Grief

Kayla Blackburn

A bottlenose dolphin swims lone
near-shore, strayed from her pod
and dead calf marooned on her back.

Other times she nudges calf along
in front, nuzzles into rubbery skin
peeling from bone, half-expecting
a pulse to still sing beneath.

Imagine, then, the wailing whistles
that traverse waters, low-toned clicking
like a morse code of aquatic mourning.

The rest of the pod remains close by,
but not too close – this is a parent's grief
to bear alone, like my mother and father
standing in the empty nursery

whilst my grandparents and I wait downstairs.
I am perched on the little ledge in the archway
between kitchen and the living room, listening

to my grandmother pour another cold tea
down the sink. My grandfather is on the phone,
his voice hushed, hands twining around
the line cord.

The Heart Wood

Alison Phipps

Broken, storm felled,
chain-sawed, open to air,
to water, to earth. The

Heart wood

A darkness ringed by
a whiteness. The

Heart wood

Holding all that
made for life,
circles of
nourishment. The

Heart wood

Only finally known
in the dying, in
the long slow,
peeling back
of bark, from beating
veins. The

Heart's own wood

Is beauty lying by
the wayside, known
when it is too late
for living.

Elegy for a Hawthorn

Sam Aureli

In the first, pale light of spring,
I stand before the hawthorn—once
a keeper of the season's turning,
now bowed low, winter's weight upon it.

The lawn glistens with dew.
Buds, small and green, begin to open—
one last sleight of hand. I hold the saw
and hesitate.

A wood thrush lands lightly
on a crooked branch. Its song
a small lantern.

The tree listens. I listen.

Somewhere beneath us, roots
go on whispering,
making their slow, dark arguments
against time.

Ghazal: Prayer

Shobha Tharoor Srinivasan

My mother's life, these days,
Are two hands, held together in prayer.

She carries hope on her visits to the temple.
Activity, that cement her faith and strengthens prayer.

Her repetitive words are mantras
Do what makes you happy, she says as prayer.

The memories that surface of lamps and festivals
Times together with loved ones, song as prayer.

There are half finished sentences, *where am I?*
When will you come? The questions a prayer.

The words in books which once she read aloud
Stay on the page, unheard as silent prayer.

But there is that smile and light in her eyes-
When I am with you, everything is prayer.

My Father A Refugee

Lama Obeid

In 1949,
One year after the Nakba in Palestine,
In Al- Karamah camp he was born,
A descendant of a war-torn zone,
The UN gave him an ID,
That identified him as a refugee,
They provided his family with rice, milk and flour,
Leaving them without any power,
Dependent on rations and donations,
From Arab nations,
The same ones that deceived them in 1948,
And in the Arab-Israeli war used them as bait
In 1954,
Jordan decided that there will be refugees no more,
They gave him a new citizenship and ID,
But he went back to Palestine, knowing it will one day be free,
On June 12th, 2023 my father passed away
...still Palestine not free
... leaving us his inheritance:

A refugee ID

Brought Back

Anna Saunders

They have found the sunshine that shone upon her father's face,
the beams that picked out each twill weave
of his tweed suit, every clean fold in his clothes.

Do you want it back, they ask,
and she wonders if feeling the warmth
will only make her feel cold again, after.

When they arrive, they carry the sunshine
across their outstretched arms,
as if it were a dress they didn't want to crease,
or a sleeping body.

Here it is, they say,
all the light that lay upon your father's cheek,

the gold that held the crease
and the folds of his face, the grin.

After they have gone, she basks.
It is warmer, even, than she remembers.

They had apologized for the delay,
said they had other items to bring when she was ready.

dear humanity

Simon Maddrell

Violet is red withdrawn from humanity by blue
Wassily Kandinsky

Some things keep me awake at night. Almost
every piece of advice says tell them like it is.
So here goes. I don't know you anymore.
Inside we are *white* — *a harmony of silence*
shrouds life from our understanding. Serpents
feed off fear shaped by generational memory.

I've come to realise you ~~don't count the dead~~
question how many people really die from that
choose not to count all those lives left in ruins
the second antithesis between white and black
— *a silence devoid of possibilities* perhaps why
too many children say they'd prefer death to this.

It's as if every mirror on Earth has been shattered
though I looked at you last week and saw myself
black — *motionless like ashes of a funeral pyre*
It's hard to watch a child about to take that breath
consider thousands of them to be our kith & kin
but can you imagine just one as your own son?

Language is supposed to be my thing, so I notice
when a sentence doesn't have a subject or object
and different verbs depending on colour & creed.
Orange is red brought nearer to you by yellow.
If, whilst held captive, a snake eats its own tail
it has mistaken itself as either predator or prey.

all of this is normal

Em Gray

to wait at glass for unseasonal butterflies /
strange weather / tameness

to seek counsel from hellebores /
carry a person-faced stone

to continue to omit sage / chilli / juniper
despite a love for them

to adopt a worn shirt as support animal

to darn a requiem of socks

to fear what is melting
but leave the lamp on

to hear from the empty kitchen
devotions of tea

to recur together sleep-limbed
in borrowed coats / on unfamiliar benches

to press call then name yourself stupid

for believing loss a mastless hill /
a loft / a swift / a door

DO NOT TOUCH

Leonie Rowland

the black hole inside the glass cabinet

do not ask it questions about life as a star
or the journey to collapse

on the map of the museum, you will find
the black hole at the centre

tremors that are not your own encased
for someone else

not to preserve but to eat again
like a meal shared at a familiar restaurant

bright lights and a fish tank, the same fish
for years you swear

piranha—they feed her darkness
until she asks for more, but seasoned better

black hole in the fish tank as you order
him the same meal, scampi every time

eaten in the car on the way home
vinegar and too much salt (blame the fish)

to try again you would give

all this

written later on a plaque at the museum
where the black hole riots at the centre

of your chest

piranha pressing the glass until it breaks
context washed into nothing

and the ceremony becomes something else

I dream again

Doreen Duffy

You are back with me, at a family engagement
the press of your arm against mine,
pushed together in the soft seat, leaning in to tell me
something. We laugh, a shared familiar sound
I haven't heard, or felt in my throat for so long
I know you're not really here
you found your way back
because you know how much I'm missing you
I see you still have your short head of curls
grown halfway back, before we knew the chemo
had not worked, this time

I cried when I woke. This is so hard
The tablets stunt my feelings
gravel in my throat moves and hurts
My son hugs me in one of those
gentle head locks that mean so much
But my eldest sees straight through me
asks '*what's up?*'
'It could be real', she says
I hold on tight, I hope it is

An Absence of Towering Leaves

Judy Darley

Arnos Vale Cemetery in Bristol brims with wilderness, but here and there ash trees are daubed with paint splodges as vibrant as marigolds. Soon these trees will be hacked down

The air smells sweetly of rain. Sawdust lines the footpaths.

Ash dieback has led to countless ash trees being felled here. The UK's Woodland Trust estimates the chronic fungal disease will lead to 80% of our ash trees being lost. Fungal spores travel on the wind, landing on leaves and penetrating to grow inside twigs, branches and trunks.

The trees still standing quiver in the rising breeze, standing sentinel over those already fallen. Stumps hunch among brambles.

Each blighted trunk shows a shadow at its heart, like an MRI's reveal of my dad's brain atrophied by dementia.

With so many of landmark trees in piles, I take a wrong turn. A tomb rises up in an unexpected hollow, tangled with ivy. The unfamiliarity is startling.

I find myself face to face with a grey squirrel that freezes until I raise one hand in silent greeting. It dashes off, flowing along sycamore branches like water.

I hesitate, looking past the rawness of felled trunks and the absence of towering leaves, to the shapes of paths I've walked countless times over the years.

A hint of resin scent rises from the yew trees. Blue tits flurry amongst leaves, calling to one another as though a clear voice is a shining object that can be caught and flung.

A defining moment

Matt Gilbert

His was a story, almost buried under other news:
as the economic outlook worsened, wars ground
on, shrill bleats from billionaires dictated what
made the headlines. Some media reflected, later,
on the inquest into a small boy's death from breathing.
In this country. In this century. His air poisoned
with black mould. Local authority, too slow, too late

to act, to fix the problem. HM Government
ministers, choosing to attack instead, abstract black
holes of debt – by making further cuts. Parading
this as the right thing to do. Performative regret
instead of national shame. Breathing easy, as they
exhaled yet more hot air. Unlike Awaab Ishak: lungs,
potential, life, left unfulfilled. Barely two years old.

The Memorial Service

Benedicta Norell

His father playing saxophone
halts for lack of breath.

The silence is another death.

Where daffodils may grow

Amaleena Damlé

In Gaza, the bereaved write messages
on white shrouds
their hoods like papery petals
a mother, a lover, a neighbour, a child
rows of bodies wrapped in words
of longing and disbelief
the envelope of cloth a final act of embrace.

Some of the shrouds are marked 'unknown'
lives lost and lost again
as if a person could ever be unknown,
could ever live a life entirely unremarked
except to those who refuse to know them
or for whom their unknowing matters little
those who cannot see the red-gold glow within.

Tartreez

Alison Phipps

If you survived our bombs
We will starve you.
And the world's leaders
Will do nothing
To save you.
And the people who protest
Day in and day out
Will be helpless
And we will humiliate them
time and again.

And when it is all over
Our shame
will be uncontainable.

And women will still
embroider Tartreez
in red and gold thread.

Living Memory

Furhad Khan

‘Look over there,’ he said pointing with his wrinkled hand, ‘that’s where I grew up.’

There was little left. A tree stood in the water, indistinguishable from the others. I tried to imagine what he saw, but struggled to piece together a life lived in a house I’d never seen.

The ancestral village had been drowned, quite literally, by the extension of the Mangla Dam. The water engulfed whole villages; homes that’d birthed our predecessors were reduced to crumbling, moss-eaten bricks. Every so often the dam water receded to expose what we’d lost, and what had been reclaimed.

All that remained were anecdotes from living memory I couldn’t unlock, endangered like the places they spoke of. The people I’d come from now only existed in the minds of the elders we were losing. There were no monuments to the lives that’d given us life.

Standing beside my granddad’s brother, the last of his siblings, I mourned him while he was alive and next to me. This moment would never come again. I’d recall it years from now, trying to imagine the village he saw when he’d pointed out across the water.

I could not see myself in this place, in the same way I could not see the house I’d heard him describe. Visiting home after twenty five years away – I no longer resembled here, and it no longer resembled me.

Early Morning

Lynn Valentine

And the old dog sleeping next to me
after another fretful night.
She has paced the hall every hour,
asked out to the darkened garden.

Her and the lawn old friends:
her cool place, her sanctuary.
And though I've been awake too.
standing in the moon-thumbed grass,
I forgive my dog every tiredness.

There will soon be a time
when the space on the bed
isn't filled. When the night
is alive only to stars.

The ash trees

Sarah Connor

The ash are late this year –
bundles of sticks, rattling up
into the blue sky. We search
for feathery tufts. Sometimes
we see them, sometimes

nothing.

I've never known the ash so late,
dark lines scraped across
a billowing, pillowing world of green.

They're dying. I hadn't thought
that this would come so quickly –
imagined a slow drift of ghosts
across the landscape –
when I thought of it at all –
not these monuments, scattered,
solid, sharp-edged. No, not this
memento mori, these bone branches
shouting "look at me, look at me".

Nature will fill in the gaps, and
we'll forget the avenue of chestnut trees,
the stand of larch, the ash, the ash, the ash,
the tree that holds the world,
the tree where gods hang, waiting for wisdom.

When a Star Dies

DW McKinney

A bright star in the night sky will go supernova. The explosion will resonate in my chest; a bright body swelling then bursting, heat searing my veins in a throat pulled taut against screams. If this star were the sun, this means it would be the center of my universe or, more accurately, my solar system. If this star were the sun, this means the center of my world has just died. A world cannot survive without its sun, instead becoming a frozen abyss stuck in time after that giant beast blinks out of existence. But scientists say we'd have about eight minutes and twenty seconds from the time the center of our world burned out until the time we recognized its death—and then our own. So for eight minutes, the sun is still bringing life to my world. It's still flaring at the center of my universe. And for eight minutes, I hold my father's hand, my stomach a clenched fist, fissures erupting in my bones, as I gasp out the Lord's Prayer with the chaplain, and my mother, and the rest of the family gathered around my father's death bed. Our eyes fixed on him, a star nearing its end.

June 21, 2020

Jonothon Medeiros

The sand at the beach
depends on the beach.
It is leftovers, crushed shells,
houses of beings who have long ago moved on.

It is recycled, ground coral,
broken pieces of spine or bone or tooth
piled up on the sea floors, on the edges of
land, not quite land itself.
It is fine, or coarse, like yellow or white silt or
multicolored pebbles.

Some sand shows you what it was,
allows you to peer into the ages
and places it came from, the edge of that reef,
someone else's house, an island long eroded under waves.

Some sand shakes off
when you stomp your foot at the car door
and some stays with you for hours, days,
appearing when you clean an ear,
or run your hand through your hair,
wipe your palm across your eyes,
or when you sweep the floor of a room
in some other house
that is far from the shore.

How much sand have I swallowed,
tumbling in the sea? Sitting on a towel,
eating a picnic of chips, dip, peanut butter, veggies.
How much has disappeared into my clothes,
the folds of my skin?

On an island, sand is a fact.
It cakes the corners of our eyes,
polishes our skin,
and it says to us “I am moving. Are you?”

My dead father tells me what heaven is like

Vanessa Napolitano

There's a two drink minimum
a two drink maximum
so everybody is loose, but not unruly.

Appearing in your human form
is encouraged
but not mandatory

only a few guests take on other shapes.
Shapes with mouths,
he says, because of the drinks.

It's a comfortable temperature,
like the inside of a womb,
and you move without resistance

but there's no floating -
floating is frowned upon.
Whose frowning?

People. Senior people.
My dad doesn't
like authority

so he glides when he can.
Has an extra drink.
It's very bright.

He has been talking
to Salvador Dali
out on the lawn
again.

This is what I know,
he says,

sunshine goes through us all.

Treasure

Karen Jane Cannon

*I want to weave you
a basket of bundle-coiled reeds
seal it with lime
lay your ashes
with those things
you held dearest
upon a wreath of meadowsweet*

[a pair of Hotter shoes, an Everton mint, an M&S scarf,
a Laura Ashley print, a sea view of a Cornish bay,
a pop sock, a black hole, a UFO]

*I will wrap you up
in bearskin
for millennia
until someone finds you
one day
amongst fallen stones*

*holds up your treasures in awe
allowing grief to pour like honey*

*know that you lived
were loved
proclaim you
a precious find*

I Thought We Would Be Old

Laura Scotland

I thought we would be old.

The seven of us. Sipping frothy pints in a noisy
Edinburgh pub, on the second Tuesday of the month.
Complaining about bad backs and misbehaving colons as
we grapple with writing prompts and politics.

I thought we would be old.

Still swapping books and laughing, irreverently.
Answering, “how are things?” with the truth, and
smirking as you digress into the intricacies of South
African genealogy or the lunacy of secret socks.

I thought we would be old.

When I painted my fingernails black and sat in the
crematorium, under your photo. The six of us. Clutching
our gerberas as pallbearers carried you up the aisle, past
your wife and little daughter, the same age as mine.

You should have been old.

White-haired and wrinkled, with hearing aids, ruined
knees and an OBE. Bent over your phone notes and pint
of frothy beer, on the second Tuesday of the month.
Squashed round a tiny table with the rest of us.

I thought we would be old.

Together.

Loss

Afsaneh Gitiforouz

I have left it behind

Perhaps in my daily life routines
Or on the train

Or behind the smokescreen of an e-cigarette
In the bustling market of spices and fabrics

In late-night messages
Or behind the mirrors of my home

In an online shopping basket
In the crunch of pomegranate seeds between my teeth

In the bewildering field of philosophical articles
In my mother's repeated stories

Inside a lengthy email
In endless political debates

Or in the park just as I was gazing up at the sky

Or beside the vendor child, far away
Next to his notebook and tattered clothes

Or in his tired gaze
Upon the scent of fresh bread

Or in the bank queue
Behind dark sunglasses

Or in the helpless scream of an infant

Perhaps in a noisy crowded concert
In the solitude of a poetry night

Or among the sweet whispers of gossip
In a Zoom meeting with stranger heads

In the silence of a damp abandoned church
Or in a forced smile stamped on a group photo

I lost it somewhere on the way

I have left it behind.

Women of Gaza

Khawla Badwan

International Women's Day 2025

Our women are forgotten.
From theories of feminism
they are missing.
Their plight is hidden.
Their pain is unwritten.

Our women are forgotten.
They set fires with old books,
live in tents with lonely looks.
They raise children under fires,
bombs, arms, and scary wires.

Our women are forgotten.
They live with eternal pain,
breathe rubble under the rain.
They sit in ruins that they reuse,
hug limbless children and refuse.

Our women are forgotten.
They teach children under a tree,
make cookies and give away for free.
They attend to those with wounds,
and sing songs of faraway moons.

Our women are forgotten.
They collect bones in bags,
and tell of grief that drags.
They cry remembering their men,
and wear necklaces marking the when.

On this day that tells of women
these words tell of Gaza women

My Ocean Lament

Debbie Ross

Rainbows of corals
bleached with each degree,
acidification and de-oxygenation
choking the life
from seas and oceans.
Benthic beasts
bearing the brunt of change.

Neptune's trident
cannot save the watery realms
nor those who dwell there.

A world without
sharks, turtles, walrus –
all red-list critical now.

A world without
molluscs and plankton
the loss of all who feed on them –
whole marine ecosystems
wiped out.

Seared soul saliferous
with rising tides.
Grains of sand
numbering my pain.

New Furnishings

Julie Stevens

There are no blue curtains here
no beds lined with neat tucks
no uniforms in regular colours
no hushed voices, nor the pat of shoes.

There are no forms clipped to beds
no beeps cheering a life
no food without a taste
no doctors to forget,

but my house is a hospital
and I'm the only patient.

The toilet has arms
a trolley keeps you upright
tablets weigh down shelves
wardrobes stand crammed with supplies,

a scooter shrinks a room
walking sticks guard walls
a wheelchair blocks heat
and appointments clog the calendar.

Come through the door
and be my next visitor,
wade through this pain
and throw a rope.

My house is a hospital
and I'm the only patient.

Ragged Trees

Cormac Culkeen

Hymenoscyphus fraxineus is an ascomycete fungus that causes ash dieback, a chronic fungal

disease of ash trees in Europe characterised by leaf loss and crown dieback in infected trees.

The fungus was first scientifically described in 2006 under the name Chalara fraxinea.

Just tufts, pliant flags
of stained branches so
transparent in their nudity.

Groves of wood open
armed in signal shock.
Plain riddles of decay,

roots frozen in slow
clutches to earth, stripped
of their cyclic rhythms,

another microbe, an unseen
drift to bring new loss,
spreading beyond our care,

nature's smile cracks
beneath another shovel load
as lands grow heated for

tides of pale migrations,
a world's fluxing closure,
our endless trivialities, breath

pushing into every form
a sense of loss ascending.
Divinities, quietly stolen.

To fill the space

Kerry Darbshire

I leave the radio on in the kitchen, pretend
he's still here mixing cadmium yellow into umber
to lay sun into a forest, his arm aching,

brushing in a mass of blue sky above thousands
of leaves that grew and fell into the emptiness
of a terrible year.

I leave the radio on to fill the space
he called *my studio*, it warms the air, somehow
brings life to his dry palette, the oversized table,

empty chairs. I leave the radio on to hear
Jeremy Vine, fears of the helpless who rely
on the kindness of others working long shifts

night after night to save someone else.

Achill Cillín*

Ann Marie Dunne

You walk out to the headland,
feet crunch on seaweed
the colour of dried blood.
The rock green sea rolls

as the wind wails and moans.
It scurries the sand
which scours the shore
and rasps your cheek.

The islands are like dropped clouds,
they float in a blue-grey daze.
The cliff rocks face the wrong way.
Once the earth was upended.

You come to the spot,
marked with a small rock,
under the care of Slievemore,
and keened by the sea.

Here at the end
of the island,
the end of the headland,
the end of the world.

* (Cillín: a burial place for the unbaptised, usually babies)

Where Grief Lives

Fiona Murphy

Grief moves like water, like a tide that forgets its own name. The needle hums, carving the absence into skin. The wrist remembers first: wings for the babies who never learned breath, their silence now feathered and permanent. On the collarbone, waves rise and break—a world dissolving, a shoreline crumbling beneath careless hands. On the ankle, an anchor: the weight of watching, of bearing witness to a world unraveling in slow motion.

Grief is not a ghost but a shape-shifter, slipping between moments, between breaths. In *Grief Worlds*, Ratcliffe writes of indeterminacy: how grief bends time, blurs its edges. The past is no longer a closed room but a door left ajar—wind stirring old conversations, laughter returning like a stray dog. We live there, sometimes, in that sliver of maybe. Maybe they're still here. Maybe we can reach them if we sit still enough.

The tattoo burns, yes, but the burn is a tether, a language of loss spoken in pigment and pain. Ami Harbin speaks of disorientation as both rupture and possibility—a vertigo that forces us to see the world differently. Grief, too, disorients, leaves us undone. Yet in that unmooring, there is an opening: a chance to live with the absence, rather than against it.

So we tattoo ourselves to remember. Grief leaves no one unchanged. The ink just makes it visible. The skin, a prayer. The body, a map.

PART OF US DROWNED WITH YOU AND NOW — EVERYTHING — HANGS — BY — A ———

Regi Claire

i.m. Marianne Vera

1. the strings of DNA in you and us
2. the stitches pulling at our father's wounds
3. the threads that crawl along your chest beneath
 the clothing for the private viewing
4. the stethoscope around your daughter's neck...
5. ...the daisy chains around your own, the whites
 of petals luminescing in the night like stars
 reflected on stilled waters
6. the mountain trails that race your son towards the sky
7. the swallows' flight above your house next spring
8. the arpeggio scales our brother chases up and down
9. the undulations of the spawn mop in your pond
10. the inky flow of loops and curlicues
 across the pages of our mother's unsent letters
11. my words and phrases in a foreign tongue

No weather inside the house

Leonie Rowland

It takes eight minutes for sunlight to reach earth
and eight days for my letters to reach you. In that time,
your side of the world could have ended, everywhere in flames
except the postal system in the town where you live.
You would write immediately, tell me that you finally understand
yin and yang, the light here and the darkness there, exactly
half and half. I will write back and tell you that darkness means peace,
light human chaos, so you can switch off the streetlamps if you want to,
even in the blaze. It takes eight seconds for news from nowhere
to reach somewhere, but when every broadcast is a bonfire,
we need patience to bridge the gap. All the stars are dead,
so speak to me of open skies, space that passes endlessly
between post offices, capital letters on kissed envelopes,
signs of life. Until they reach me, I will block out the sun.
I will stop the movement from there to here, stop the minutes,
the shrieking questions and their eight-week answers.
(It was not meant to take so long.) I will stay inside the house
where there is no weather, where all the chaos is artificial,
and I will wait, patiently, for the postman to knock at my door.

Renee Kalagayan

She, whose crippled legs carried her body not
in years,
out of my living arms

a single step
walked
into stillness.

She, whose silken skin
lay crumpled like a cherry bough
in the slick passage of seconds,
she drifted

hid all hint of senility
in the silence after winter.
soft as snow
into death.

She, whose demential fever smoldered
reliving how I wrestled
tangled in the white
but how can I steady
when the nightmare ends the same?
not again. I feel her slip
and fear strikes its spit

in that icy wasteland,
against her outstretched hands
elbows of her blankets—
her arms
I can't lose her,
from the weight of my walk,
in my core.

I'm trying to remember
her small, snug moccasins
her faith in my navigation
of her undying loyalty,

where to go. My grandmother fits
into each of my footprints,
of this desolate, wet desert—a picture
even in death.

The path is prickly with light,
in the white
arm so she will not fall
on either side of our journey.
my spine bent forward,
silver hair streaked with
fire

the shimmers reflected
water of the plains. I am gripping her
down the steep, snow-bleached embankments
I walk with her,
bearing the sorrow of ages,
traces of youth—
neither she nor I can remember.

My grandmother, a thin scrap of rose petal newly pressed.
My grandmother, a melody of vapor.

[s....i.....l... GAZA...e.....n....c..e]

Khawla Badwan

For every child killed in Gaza

I try to hold my silence

for a minute or more

for a minute or less.

And as I stand in mourning,

Six more children

freeze

freeze

to death.

300 hours of silence.

Hours, with heavy ticking

that doesn't know how to end.

Dear children of Gaza, I whisper

Forgive me.. forgive me

for breaking my silence.

I can't mourn you in silence.

This is not the time for silence.

300 hours

and more

and more.

We can't afford silence

as you live and die

with no rights.

No

R. I. G. H. T. S.

What is there left to say?

Everything.

Everything.

I Flunk the Tear Test

Kristin Camitta Zimet

A squirt of purple liquid in my eyes.
On command I stare into a haze. Up.
Down. Fogbank ceiling. Iffy floor.

A muddle too familiar. No matter how
I strain to look, nothing resolves into
your shape, the only one I want to see.

Seven seconds till there is no stain.
The tech shakes her head: not enough
tears. That's impossible. I overflow,

there is no bottom to it, even though
the Colorado and the Mississippi shrink,
and aquifers, the fountains of the deep.

Yet while I cry and cry for you alone,
right whales disappear, Masai giraffes,
loggerhead shrikes, a host of loves

without a name become invisible.
So many reaches of the heart go still.
It's true, then. There aren't enough tears.

Juno

Briony Collins

In the car outside the pet crematorium, I fasten the mahogany box with a seat belt in the back, test the tension of it so she doesn't fling forward, doesn't hurt herself. I stroke the brass plate, trace the engraving of her name the way I once did her fur, the colour of caramel sauce on vanilla ice cream and just as cold when I collected her from the freezer yesterday. It isn't enough now, to strap her in and bring her home like a child, and put her on the windowsill with her brother where they watch me every day with dust for eyes and I, threatening to go on, move about the empty room like a wasp at a window, like a sick thing pressing on the edge of black letters, spelling the name I carry, but can no longer call

Telling time

Sam Calhoun

Just inside the bedroom
where the door springs
open sits your water
bowl, lower now, still,
hanging like a midnight
number, a last call,
the dead bead of
a pop eyed car
that doesn't abate
itself it's own hourglass
slipping filled that last
night as every night,
waiting for your tic-toc slurp
in the early hours, restless.
I think of the ripples
moving in and out,
and then center point,
now less and less each week,
calm, only knowing life
now by the soft shuffle
of our feet, all night.

The Visit

Laura Strickland

In the middle of the night
I hear a saw that stops
for a hammer, and in the yard
my dead father builds a kennel.
I think, *what will the neighbours say?*
Val at number five is a nurse on earlies,
Jack over the road is a postie.
My dad looks through the window,
his mouth full of nails,
waves like a little kid,
signs *make a brew*
lifts the latch on the door

nails falling everywhere

This Shattered Landscape

Larissa Reid

For Ivan Meyer (1979-2024)

You swept us up in the scent of South African storms,
the drumbeat, the synergy;
lover of drama, of energy, of wide rolling thunder.

You distilled complexity down to pure points of reason,
calculating effortlessly;
lover of number, of fractal, of calibrated meaning.

You balanced branches of family trees,
embroidered across continents;
lover of histories, of ciphers, of tales tall and true.

You made your home in this shattered landscape,
eroded roots of ancient stone;
lover of language, of texture, of intricate connections.

Unannounced by Angels

Iris Anne Lewis

The dead visit when least expected –
as you are hanging up washing,
unblocking drains, burning toast.

They come as tallow flesh in candleglow,
the mothball scent in wardrobes.

You find them in the gleam of melting ice,
the crescent curves of waning moons.

They are grace-notes severed from the tune,
the dying hum of chiming bells.

They have the gift of flight.
No sooner noticed, they are gone,
fleet as deer in morning light.

On watering my late aunt's hydrangea

Lesley Curwen

This coral flower, auburn-edged,
survives in gaudy earthenware, grown
in Midlands loam. Fifty years ago
it was a tiny cutting from her mother's
parent plant, dripping red Devon soil.

Today, its offspring nods at the Sound,
our heads ruffled by land breeze. I picture
light and storms that made the phloem
rise, stirred narrow greens to swell,
that summoned cyanin to turn it pink,

and in this instant of earth's roll,
remember the women who grew roots,
their soft strength and tireless flow
beneath sight, at the heart of things.

Questions for the Estate Agent

Ruth Allen-Humphreys

Do I have to strip the house of trinkets?
And hide the familiar faces smiling from behind glass,
So that strangers can peruse our interior and see themselves here?
Do I tell them, that the bathroom wall weeps,
When the wind drives the rain in from the west?
Or that my daughter's room is warmest in winter,
Can I ask them to lay flowers,
For the rabbit and the cat, at rest in the garden?
Will they think of my hand,
When they hold the banister,
As I have thought of the others, before me?
How do I ask them,
To not paint over the pencil,
Marking the growth of my children,
Or if they wouldn't mind leaving
The wallpaper at the top of the stairs as it is,
As it's always been, I discovered it you see.
How do I explain that there is a ghost,
But she is a good listener, and has heard all my secrets,
And kept them safe.
Do you think that we will find another house,
To make a home, as full of love as this has been.
Where will I find the boxes,
Strong enough for the memories I want to pack,
And take with me.
Do you think they will hear the echoes,
Of the laughter and love that we leave behind.

Remembrance Day for Lost Species

Em Gray

after The Christmas Island Pipistrelle

You are two paragraphs.

I'm sorry

for the Feral of cat,
the Wolf of freighted snake

and how the microfiction of your body
is the size of a *prune's*
dark shrivel, stone heart.

All, now, is elegy.

I seek the lore of you so always everywhere
you'd fly through open doors, missteer into soup

but find your seed bead eyes
flash-lit,

eleven seconds
of the last recording of your voice

looping its morse
as if to be understood.

Why aren't you following me around?

Maggie Mackay

Why don't you tell me how to be?

A small day, small enough
to fit the palm of my hand.

Innocent sleep awakens
to tinsel patched confusion.

Mum is given a bin bag of possessions.

Doctor makes it clear.

*We tried for forty minutes,
we tried, such a gentleman.*

We come home to an un-home.

Mum fills the washing machine.

She makes a phone call.

My Uncle and Aunt arrive.

Sandwiches are cut.

The adults tell us not to cry.

The adults have done this before.

Still not lunchtime.

No blackbird, no butterfly, no Dad.

The Lao Weaver

Judith Rawnsley

For Sombath Somphone

I offer you this shawl, spun from silk moth
wings and water ferns, woven with mantra,
macaw calls and longtail boats shooting
along the Mekong. Stitched by mosquitoes
and fire ants to bamboo flute and gong.

Sombath, we will not forget your textured
work: diamonds touch the villages
where your shuttle wove land and families
on the communal loom. I've tied this cloth
to a rubber tree by the police stop

where you were pulled from your Jeep
at sundown, pushed into a truck, vanished—
an ash phantom on the CCTV footage—
No spindlehorn to guide you home.
No white pine to point the way.

Only ten thousand wounds on rubber
bark and the steady bleed of latex sap
into the bottomless cup.

The garden

Sarah Connor

I went back to the garden where it all started. The new owner didn't notice me – too busy drinking tea and pruning the roses.

I preferred it wilder. Do you remember? The way honeysuckle tumbled over the wall? That's been tamed and trimmed. The way the wide branch of the chestnut tree made a place to sit and read or dream? She'd had it sliced away, leaving a scar. The lichen-covered statue of the winged boy where we had our first kiss? She'd had him carted away.

I could have cried. I would have stroked all those wounds with my fingertips, offered healing – but I'm insubstantial now: I've become a memory myself. I could only whisper my stories to the tidy roses, encourage them to rebel, to fling stems up the fences, to throw their scent onto the breeze, to grow thorns, draw blood.

A Gentle Reminder

María Castro Dominguez

You left your watch in the shower.
Its face cried so much it stopped.

You left the tap dripping and ants have drunk
and drowned there since yesterday.

I left a love note on the desk, written with heat from my heart,
if you don't mind I'd really like a reply.

The oranges you left on the kitchen table are now covered
in a pale green dust, they're hard and bitter. I couldn't eat them.

You didn't call at nine to say goodnight,
was it because of not having a watch?

It was so silent
I could only hear you.

I have just watched the final episode of *Anne of Green Gables*

Olga Dermott-Bond

and I can't stop crying; proper heaves and sobs, neck soaked,
my bra amassing tears in its damp seam, because I suppose

it's all about goodbyes, and I have just realised in three years
you'll have left home, and I will be Marilla, left scrubbing the floor

in wonderment of your being, my heart as big as Prince Edward Island
but with nowhere to put it. I feel as if I have hardly even started

to become your mother. Why am I so slow to learn, when soon it will be
too late? It seems another country when you were twelve weeks old

and I clasped your silver body, frightened, exhausted, roaming for miles
just to get you to sleep, my white blood cell count so low the doctor

rang me up, worry like deep-set furrows across frozen fields.
Clumsy mother full of stumble, I am only grasping now

that love is a bucket of water, splashing, heavy, awkward to carry;
impossible to speak or spill it all. I will have to wait for you

to come back to my kitchen from time to time, hoping you read
the unfinished letters I write while I boil the kettle, catching orphan hairs

that glint and wink in winter's window, the trickle of pearly time
when I rocked you gathering somewhere between glass and memory –

Wild Garlic

SF Layzell

By then, you were lumpen

Pockets stuffed with bulbs

I showed off with thin slices

Like in Goodfellas

Do you remember

The path lined with wild garlic

You can put the flowers

Right in your food

You can grow the flowers

Right over your head.

WRAPPING THE PRESENTS

Sue Finch

She said she couldn't wrap the presents
on her own. Boxes were easier,
but still she needed my finger just there
pressing firmly on the overlapping edges,
holding still, not moving a muscle.

I was patient while she picked at
the camouflaged tape end, quiet as she pulled.

I loved the zipping sound it made,
willed it not to twist,
hoped her hair did not waft in
as she tore it with her teeth.

I pulled my finger back
at the exact time she placed the strip
and there it was – sealed.

I thought you needed me, I said,
the day I bounded up the stairs
to find her wrapping gifts
far more quickly without me.

A branch contemplates the uncertainty of life after death

Gareth Adams

The sound of chainsaws is getting close.
Through the leaves their rasp and gurgle
And the shouts of men
Unsettle the wood.

Will I be the base of a cot
Designed to support a sleeping child,
Carry it safely to morning,
Or a coffee table bowed under dirty cups,
Stained and sticky with wine?

Will I be the match that lights the fire
To keep the cold outside as snow and ice
Build their shivery citadel of frost,
Or a cigarette paper, consumed and flicked away
Without a thought?

Will I be carved on some fence post
Looking out upon an open field
Seen by those who pass,
Or sawn into rough joists to bear slate and moss
In unseen dark?

The eldest of us here took root before the pyramids;
Persisted as empires rose and fell through war and rot.
Yet here we stand with the edge of an axe at our foot,
And fall we must.

This text was withdrawn shortly before publication,
as the author was concerned about repressions due to the press' stance on Palestine.

Why I Wear My Past to Work

Chris Campbell

My wife escapes our house for work,
even the shower is sobbing –

all that is left of our honeymoon are photographs.
I step over suitcases we bought in our youth,

the shutter yawns above the broken
radiator. I open it to reveal dog walkers,

chores to do now.
I mould my life around our broken taps;

the showerhead drips after me
to the bus stop, past the newsagent's and post office.

It leaks beside me at my desk.
Only I notice the puddle.

AN UNENDING VACATION

Gareth Writer-Davies

on holiday from a nest of crows
light echoes around my hotel room

I can see the sea, this is a view
I'm backing into, slowly does it

a tanker slides unhurried westwards
along the unsounding horizon

I have a list of things not to do
and places I will not be going

lobster out of season
so there will be wine, a few lines written

a white handkerchief waves
from a cold hand, the quick golden sands

wide sea beckon, this moment has been
and like the slow tide keeps on coming

I have squandered my life
waiting and waiting for no reason

A Late Gale

Kendra Cardin

The farm's too much for my keeping these days,
but I promised Aunt Em.

Those dandelions grew too bold, took hold.

Even the corn couldn't compete.

All that's left is Henry's straw man, pecked down
to his hay bale bones by pesky crows.

Wouldn't leave if I could, though.

Promises, and all.

Toto's out back, little paws pushin' up daisies
neath Em's favorite oak.

That.

And I'm waitin'.

Always waitin'.

When those rusted tin wind chimes sing and the
rotting porch planks creek, I smile.

Never repaired 'em once.

Thought the house might be easier to carry off
that way. You know how it goes—

make a wish, catch a yellow road,
before it blows away.

Accretion

Clare Bayard

Half a year deep in the waterfall
of death in Gaza, I slowed down
enough to cry, harder
than facing down a thicket
of riot cops at the Federal Building,
the state house, the highways,
everywhere we ram into the cut-tin edges
of our powerlessness.

I have been harshly judging
my numb chest. I'm scared
by how much is permitted
when we lose feeling.
You can crush a limb so easily
when its nerves aren't heard. We humans
can face another's child and wrap
her tiny body in white phosphorus
as if we are somehow separate,
as if this does not
flood obsidian arrows
into the hummingbird heart
of the world to sacrifice children
on the altar of war. Our children. Our
children. While mine sleeps safe in a quiet alcove.
The fractures in my chest
cleave. She is five and learning

separation. Some grief is too wide
for a single body. She says why don't we stop
sending weapons. She wonders
if bombs created the wildfires
in our own hills.

Elegy for a country

Annick Yerem

The writing is on the wall, on the memorials
on the lines that divided you

Not enough *Stolpersteine* in the world to stop
your descent back into darkness

Your much lauded memory culture decides
who is worth remembering, democracy a pick and choose,
right to assembly, freedom of speech selective,
international law a farce, your *Staatsraison*
a collective of murderers.

And your *never again*, again, again.

How I believed in
you, how I thought
I was lucky

Rejected land

Afsaneh Gitiforouz

Welcome to the rain, I smile
The sun was beating down on the seas, you say

I was waiting for a friend to come, I say
You say you have lost yours

I offer to read my poems to you
You say you know only eulogies by heart

I start to share my light memories
You talk about your heavy backpack

I brought these sandwiches, I say
Which one do you like
You say the one that lasts longer in your backpack

Listen, I say
The children laughing in the park
You say you only hear their cries on the boat

Where do you come from, I ask
Where the skies were invaded by missiles, you say
Where the stars could no longer shine

Where though, I ask
You say your land rejected the living
So you took to the sea

You didn't know it would be the last day

Elizabeth Gibson

The river was running clear, had that fresh-flow smell.
You hung over rusty railings, felt so close to the water,
limbs sticking out like from a cage on a fairground ride.
The rubbish buried in the riverbed was photorealistic,

this metal grid with party streamers flowing, like fish.
A dark-red butterfly, sparkling like kids' fairy wings,
honey-scented blossom. You just stood in it for a while.
The sky was blue, then pink, behind swaying branches.

Daffodil petals pointed grumpily back, as if they knew.
Further on, you re-found the river, tucked behind a wall
near the old paint factory. The clear-water smell danced
with the peardrop of paint. You loved this crossing place.

A big golden dog, behind the fence, following you along.
The moon, nearly full. You felt it inside before seeing it.
There were so many birds, one a non-stop song machine.
The city was all red lights on cranes, pomegranate seeds.

Now, the sign says, *Road closed*. It was more a ginnel,
overhung with wild clematis, that you could slip through,
be...out. You have to take the long way to the river now.
Most of the trees are gone. Unaffordable towers to come.

Breakfast With The Eldest Boy

Lucy Heuschen

It can be something simple
that sets me off

like a blue milk carton
on the counter

our shadows touching
the far wall

you, reaching out
a giant hand

and the glass you fetched
from the high shelf

not smashing
or spilling white

but for a moment
full to the brim.

Biographies

Sue Finch is the author of two poetry collections: *Magnifying Glass* (2020), and *Welcome to the Museum of a Life* (2024). Her poems have featured on ‘iamb’, ‘Eat the Storms’ and ‘A Thousand Shades of Green’. She loves the coast, peculiar things, and the scent of ice-cream freezers.

Annick Yerem is a poet & the EIC of Sidhe Press. You can find her at @missyrem and read some of her work at annickyerem.eu, as well as on the press website.



Gareth Adams lives in the UK and has recently returned to writing after a long hiatus.

Ruth Allen-Humphreys lives in West Penwith, Cornwall and works as a writer and freelance researcher. Ruth’s background is in research and education, with a particular passion for Further Education and Lifelong Learning. Ruth’s writing and research has been deeply inspired by place and belonging

Sam Aureli, an Italian immigrant, makes his home in Boston, MA. He looks forward to the weekend, watching birds feed in the backyard, finding inspiration in the quiet moments. His work has appeared, or is forthcoming, in *Atlanta Review*, *Amethyst Review*, *Underscore Magazine*, *Prosetrics The Magazine*, and others.

Khawla Badwan is a scholar of language, education, culture and social justice. She is a Palestinian refugee who lived in Gaza for 14 years.

Clare Bayard is a nerdy queer writer, parent and organizer who has been working for decades to build up grassroots movements to midwife a democratic and sustainable future from the ashes of empire. Clare’s home is in the Palestinian liberation and demilitarization movements, and among redwoods.

Kayla Blackburn (née Jenkins) is a writer living in Blackpool, UK. She published her debut pamphlet ‘Preservation’ in 2022 and is currently working on her debut poetry collection and debut novel. Her poetry is largely inspired by her experiences growing up in a working-class family by the seaside.

Sam Calhoun is the author of four chapbooks, the most recent *Perturbations* (Alien Buddha Press). His work can be found in *CosmicDaffodils*, *Eratos*, and *Cold Moon Journal*. He lives with his wife in Elkmont, AL. Follow him on Instagram or X @weatherman_sam, or his website, www.weathermansam.com

Chris Campbell, from Bristol, has poems in *Magma*, *Prole*, *Ink Sweat & Tears* and *The Waxed Lemon*. Chris' second full collection will be published by Parlyaree Press later this year. He was highly commended in the 2024 Cobh International Poetry Competition and shortlisted for Canterbury Poet of the Year 2023.

Karen Jane Cannon's third pamphlet, *The Salterns*, is due to be published in 2025 by *Nine Pens Press*. She was the winner of The Poetry Society's *Hamish Canham Prize* 2022, shortlisted for *The Bridport Prize* twice, and a finalist in the *Mslexia Poetry Competition*, 2017.

Kendra Cardin creates a safe harbor for herself with poetry and storytelling. Her writings have been featured in a variety of publications including those of *Rough Diamond Poetry*, *Little Thoughts Press*, and *Black Bough Poetry*.

María Castro Domínguez is the author of *A Face in The Crowd*, her Erbacce-press collection. Winner last year of The Plaza Poetry Prize and highly commended in The Red Shed Poetry Competition. She made it to Renard press' Building Bridges Poetry Competition shortlist. Her poems have appeared in many anthologies and journals.

Swiss-born, Scotland-based **Regi Claire** was a finalist for the Forward Prizes 2020 (Best Single Poem) and won the Mslexia/PBS Women's Poetry Competition 2019. Her fiction has twice been shortlisted for Scotland's National Book Awards and won a UBS Cultural Foundation Award. She teaches at Edinburgh University.

Briony Collins is an award-winning writer and publisher. She has three books with Broken Sleep – *Blame it on Me*, *All That Glisters*, and *The Birds, The Rabbits, The Trees* – and *Whisper Network* (Bangor University) and *cactus land* (Atomic Bohemian). In 2025, her debut novel, *Ambergris*, is coming with Barnard Publishing.

Sarah Connor was an amazing poet & an even more amazing human being who spent her working life as a Child Psychiatrist. She was published in *Spelt* magazine, *The Storms*, *Black Bough*, *Experiments in Literature* & *Sídhe Press*. She has two books out with *Sídhe Press* & one with *Black Bough*.

Cormac Culkeen lives in Galway and completed an MA in Writing at the University of Galway in 2023. His poetry has been published in *Skylight 47*, *Causeway*, *Apricot Press*, *Bindweed*, *Ink*, *Sweat and Tears*, *Ropes Literary Journal*, *Orphic Review*, the *Honest Ulsterman*, the *Galway Review*, *Southlight* and *Power Cut* magazine.

Lesley Curwen is a poet, broadcaster & sailor who lives in Plymouth. She won the Molecules Unlimited Poetry Prize and was a finalist in the Wales Poetry Award. Her pamphlet 'Rescue Lines' is published by Hedgehog Press and 'Sticky with Miles' by Dreich. She has been nominated for Forward, Pushcart Prizes, + BOTN.

Amaleena Damlé is a Durham-based poet and academic, whose writing considers themes of embodiment, incorporation, and loss. Her poems have appeared in journals and magazines such as *Acropolis*, *After*, *Atrium*, *Dust*, *Dreich*, *IceFloe Press*, *Ink*, *Sweat & Tears*, and *Sarasvati*. Her pamphlet was shortlisted for a Northern Writers Debut Award.

Kerry Darbshire lives in a remote area of Cumbria which inspires most of her poems. She has won and been placed in many competitions and published widely in anthologies and magazines. Publications include: a biography, three poetry collections, two pamphlets, her third, *River Talk* was published by Hedgehog Press 2024.

Judy Darley is the author of ,The Stairs are a Snowcapped Mountain‘, ,Sky Light Rain‘ and ,Remember Me to the Bees‘. Her words have been shared aboard boats, in museums and on BBC Radio. She likes to infiltrate poetry open mic nights with micro stories. Find Judy at <http://www.skylightrain.com>; <https://x.com/JudyDarley>.

Olga Dermott -Bond has written two pamphlets and her first full collection is published with Nine Arches Press. She is managing editor of Irish Journal *Dodging the Rain* and is currently poet in residence at the Coffin Works in Birmingham.

Doreen Duffy MA Creative Writing, published work including *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Sidhe Press*, *Arlen House*, *The Irish Times*. She was awarded, *The Jonathan Swift Award*, *The Deirdre Purcell Cup*, *Maria Edgeworth Literary Festival*. Shortlisted in *Francis MacManus Competition*, her story ‘Tattoo’ broadcast, RTE Radio. Doreen’s a creative writer and tutor

Ann Marie Dunne lives in Co. Kildare. She is currently doing a Masters in Poetry in Queen’s University. Her poems have been published in *The Apiary*, *Fire* (Arlen Press), *The Ogham Stone*, *The Storms*, *Apricot Press*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, and *Drawn to the Light*. She loves books, boats and hiking.

Elizabeth Gibson is a queer, neurodivergent poet and performer in Manchester, published in *Atrium*, *Banshee*, *Butcher’s Dog*, *Dust*, *Glisk and Glimmer*, *Lighthouse*, *Magma*, *Modron*, *The North*, *Under the Radar*, and *He, She, They, Us* from Pan Macmillan. Elizabeth’s debut collection is *A love the weight of an animal* (Confinco, 2025).<https://elizabeth-gibson.com>

Matt Gilbert is from Bristol, England but currently gets his fill of urban hills in South East London. His work has appeared in publications including *Acumen*, *Finished Creatures*, *Ink Sweat & Tears*, *Northern Gravy*, *Southword* and *Stand*. His debut collection ‘Street Sailing’ came out with *Black Bough Poetry* in 2023.

Afsaneh Gitiforouz, a British Iranian poet, novelist and committee member of the Exiled Writers Ink is a published poet including by Sidhe Press in 'To Light The Trails' in 2024 and by Radical Roots. The Barbican commissioned her in 2022 to lead the poetry section of 'Age of Many Posts'.

Em Gray is a neurodivergent poet living in Brighton, UK. She has been highly commended by the Forward Prize, shortlisted for the Creative Future Writers' Award and has won second prize in the Mslexia Poetry Competition. Bluesky: @em-words. bsky.social

Lucy Heuschen, a Londoner living in Germany, has work in *Dream Catcher*, *The High Window*, *The Storms*, *Skylight 47*, *Ink Sweat & Tears*, *Obsessed With Pipework*, *Lighthouse* and more. Lucy has published two chapbooks and her debut collection, *Daughter of Fire*, was recently launched with Yaffle Press. Website: www.lucyheuschen.co.uk. Bluesky: @PetiteCreature1.bsky.social

Renee Kalagayan is a poet from the southeastern United States. An MFA candidate at Converse University, she also reads poetry for *South 85 Journal*. Her work is featured or forthcoming in *Last Leaves*, *The Incandescent Review*, *Wild Willow*, *Carolina Muse*, *Persephone Literary*, and others. Find her on social media @rkalagayanpoet

Furhad Khan is a Berlin-based British writer. In 2024, he was a recipient of the Berlin Senate Literature Stipend. He writes short fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, and is currently working on his first novel.

SF (Sarah) Layzell's work focuses on childhood, queerness and grief. Originally from Lancashire, Sarah now lives near Cambridge. They enjoy playing football, going on train journeys, rambling in the Fens, and looking at the stars. Sarah's debut novel for readers aged 8+, *Cottonopolis*, was published by Northodox Press in 2024.

Iris Anne Lewis is widely published. She has been featured in Black Bough Poetry and has won or been placed in a number of competitions, including being highly commended in the Wales Poetry Award and the Poetry Society's Stanza competition. Her first collection 'Amber' was published in 2024.

Maggie Mackay's poem 'How to Distil a Guid Scotch Malt' is in the Poetry Archive's WordView 2020 permanent collection. Her second collection 'The Babel of Human Travel' (Impsired.com) was published in 2022. She has reviewed poetry collections and pamphlets at <https://thefridaypoem.com> and <https://sphinxreview.co.uk> . She chills out with her beautiful greyhound.

Simon Maddrell appears in *Gutter, Magma, MODRON, Poetry Wales, SAND, Southword, Stand, The Moth, The Rialto, Under the Radar*, and others. Their sixth pamphlet, *Patient LI*, was published by Polari Press in Feb 2025. Out-Spoken Press will publish Simon's debut collection in Feb 2026. Find him @simonmaddrell almost everywhere

DW McKinney is an award-winning writer and editor based in Nevada. A 2024 Torch Literary Arts Fellow, her work has appeared in *Los Angeles Review of Books, Ecotone*, and *Oxford American*. She is also a nonfiction editor for *Shenandoah*. Say hello at dwmckinney.com.

Fiona Murphy is an anthropologist and writer living in Dublin. Her work explores the politics of forced displacement. She works with the Stolen Generations in Australia and people seeking refuge in Ireland and the UK and is passionate about cross-genre experimentation in anthropology and politically engaged storytelling.

Jonathon Medeiros teaches and learns about Language Arts at Kaua'i High. He frequently writes about education, equity, and the power of curiosity, which kills boredom. If you change your mistakes or regrets, you'd erase yourself. Jonathon walks, bakes, surfs, writes, and enjoys spending time with his brilliant wife and daughters. His writing can be found at jonathonmedeiros.com

Vanessa Napolitano is a Yorkshire-based poet who writes about grief, nature and magic in the ordinary. Her chapbooks 'Various Magics' and 'Birds & Bruises' were published in 2024. Her next book will be published with Stanchion Press in 2026.

Benedicta Norell is the author of *Terrible Mother*, published by Black Cat Poetry Press in October 2024. Scottish, English and French, she grew up in London and lives in Oxford. Her poems appear in literary magazines and anthologies, including *Dust Poetry*, *Atrium Poetry* and the inaugural edition of *Blue Press*.

Lama Obeid is a Palestinian writer and poet. She writes about culture, gastronomy, politics, and travel. She advocates for the Palestinian cause wherever she goes and is a third generation Palestinian refugee displaced from the town of Ein Karem in West Jerusalem.

Alison Phipps is UNESCO Chair in Refugee Integration through Education, Languages and Arts. She has worked with Palestinians in Gaza for 15 years, on projects attempting to sustain a just peace. Her foster daughter was a refugee.

Originally from the UK, **Judith Rawnsley** worked in Asia for many years as a journalist, author, editor, literary critic and in finance. Her work has appeared in *Modern Poetry in Translation*, the *Ginkgo Prize Eco-poetry Anthology 2022*, *The Amsterdam Quarterly* and *Heroines Anthology Volume 5*. She is currently based in Portugal.

Larissa Reid is a Pushcart-nominated poet and freelance science writer from the East coast of Scotland. Notable publications include *Northwords Now*, *Reliquiae*, & Black Bough Poetry's Anthologies. She has three self-published pamphlets: *In February* (2019), *Caesura* (2022) and *rock|salt* (2022).

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Debbie Ross is a poet, author, artist, photographer and baker. She lives 400m from the sea, in the far north Scottish Highlands and can be mostly be found in the kitchen, at the beach or at her writing table.

Leonie Rowland is a writer and therapeutic writing practitioner based in Liverpool. She is the author of *In Bed with Melon Bread* (2021) and *This Time of Life is Meant for Savages* (2023).

Anna Saunders's books are *Communion* (Wild Conversations Press), *Struck* (Pindrop Press), *Kissing the She Bear* (Wild Conversations Press), *Burne Jones and the Fox*, *Ghosting for Beginners*, *Feverfew*, *The Prohibition of Touch*, and *Eurydice in the Ruined House* (all **Indigo Dreams**).

Laura Scotland is a speculative fiction writer from Canada and Scotland. Her work has been published in *Shoreline of Infinity*, *Glittery Literary* and *The Selkie*. In 2020 her short story "The Chrysalis" won the Cymera-Shoreline of Infinity Prize for Speculative Short Fiction. Laura works in the third sector.

Merril D. Smith writes from southern New Jersey. Her work has been published widely in poetry journals and anthologies. Her full-length poetry collection, *River Ghosts* (Nightingale & Sparrow Press) was Black Bough Poetry's December 2022 Book of the Month. Find her at Bluesky: @merrildsmith.bsky.social; Instagram: mdsmithnj Blog: merrildsmith.org

Ankh Spice is an Aotearoa New Zealand poet. His collection, *The Water Engine* (Femme Salvé Books), was selected for solid state storage on the moon, so his work will outlive him by a million years. If poetry can't save us from ourselves, maybe someone will know it tried.

Julie Stevens writes poems that cover many themes, but often engages with the problems of disability. She has 4 published pamphlets: *Journey Through the Fire* (2024), *Step into the Dark* (2023), *Balancing Act* (2021) with The Hedgehog Poetry Press and a chapbook *Quicksand* (Dreich, 2020).

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For the robin that sang to me and my sister outside the hospital in April 2025.

The wide-ranging community of poets
chart grief across a galaxy of stars, lands,
and the oceans, through the shivering
leaves of trees, to the heartbeats of loved
ones. Their losses are encapsulated in
words that stay with us, long after
we close the book.

Teresa Pilgrim

academic, creative practitioner, activist, survivor

