

# Five Words

Volume XVIII

poems from the

12th Five Words International Poetry Competition

*and from*

Ó Bhéal's live event Five Word challenges

April 2024 to March 2025





On the occasion of Ó Bhéal's eighteenth Anniversary

*14th April 2025*

*featuring winning & shortlisted poems from the*

**12th Five Words International Poetry Competition**

*plus*

poems from live event Five Word challenges

(8th April 2024 - 10th March 2025)

Ó Bhéal would like to acknowledge the following organisations  
for their valued support during our seventeenth year:

Colmcille  
Foras na Gaeilge  
The Long Valley  
The Arts Council  
Cork City Libraries  
Cork City Council Arts Office  
UCC School of English and Digital Humanities  
The Munster Literature Centre  
Forum Publications  
Dunnes Stores  
Poetry Ireland  
NUIG Galway  
Arc Publications  
JustABallhop  
Paradiso

and to the house eMCees, board members, audiences and poets

*Thank You!*

Limited Edition published in 2025 by Ó Bhéal Ltd.

Copyright on the work contained herein remains with each respective author.  
Copies of each poem require the prior consent of the respective poet, and copies  
of this collection require the prior consent of this publisher.

‘le gach bó a buinín agus le gach leabhar a chóip’  
(to each cow its calf and to every book its copy)  
- *Diarmuid, 6th C. High King*

Design, Editing & Typesetting by Paul Casey

Back cover image (glass award) designed by Michael Ray

Printed by SPRINT-Print

This is an ISBN-free publication

Copyright © Ó Bhéal Limited 2024

[www.obheal.ie](http://www.obheal.ie)





# Five Words

Volume XVIII

## CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i>	1
-----------------	---

### **12th Five Words International Poetry Competition**

<i>Shortlist</i>	5
Lucie Pereira ( <i>1st</i> )	6
Dean Gessie ( <i>2nd</i> )	7
Em Egan Reeve ( <i>3rd</i> )	9
Karen Hodgson Pryce	10
Giles Constable	11
Julia McNamara	13
DW Evans	15
Sarah Salway	17
Lisa Rosinsky	19
Laura Theis	20
Mary Anne Smith Sellen	21
Hilary Evans	22
<b>Biographies</b> of Shortlisted Poets	23
<b>Lauren O'Donovan's Comments</b> on Shortlisted Poems	27

### **Five Word Challenge Poems**

Cédric Bikond Nkoma	35
Rosalin Blue	36
Adrienne Brock	38
Benjamin Burns	39
Pam Campbell	42
Jeff Cottrill	44
Holly Darragh-Hickey	46

# CONTENTS

## Five Word Challenge Poems

Michelle Delea	47
Antonio Di Mare	49
Kemi George-Simpson	51
Elizabeth Gibson	52
Cathal Holden	53
Jennifer Horgan	55
Augustina Adéolá Jekennu	57
Róisín Leggett Bohan	59
Raina J. León	60
Mona Lynch	62
Ciarán MacArtain	63
Matt Mooney	66
Gormfhlaith Ni Shiochain Ni Bheolain	67
Rosie O'Regan	69
Catherine Ronan	71
Colm Scully	73
Philip Spillane	74
Alexandra Toth	75
Molly Twomey	77
Patricia Walsh	78
Mags Creedon O'Shea - <i>In Memoriam</i>	81
<b>Sketches</b> by Margaret Creedon O'Shea	3-4, 32-34, 83-84, 90, 93
International <b>Poetry-Film</b> Competition Shortlist 2024	85
<b>Poetry-Films</b> Irish Selection 2024	87
<b>Five Word Challenge Winners</b> 2024-2025	89
<b>Guest Poets</b> 2024-2025	89
<b>Ó Bhéal Publications</b> 2024	91
<b>Ó Bhéal Winter Warmer</b> Poster 2024	92

## FOREWORD

The 14th of April 2025 marks Ó Bhéal's eighteenth anniversary and 709th (final!) event. Fortunately for our now significant community, a number of Ó Bhéal's board members and volunteers have committed to carrying the torch forward under the new banner of *Ó Bhéal go Béal*, as of the 2nd Monday of May 2025.

*Five Words Volume XVIII* features shortlisted poems from Ó Bhéal's 12th Five Words International Poetry Competition, along with the winning entries from Lucie Pereira (1st), Dean Gessie (2nd) & Em Egan Reeve (3rd). This year's judge, Cork poet and publisher Lauren O'Donovan selected a stunning shortlist of 12 poems from 500 entries (submitted from 22 countries).

2025 will see Ó Bhéal take a more advisory position to the newly formed *Ó Bhéal go Béal*, while the annual Winter Warmer poetry festival will also draw to a close. Ó Bhéal's annual International Poetry-Film competition will continue unaffected with submissions open from 1st May - 31st August each year. The competition also intends to expand slightly into a day-long poetry-film festival, to be held in late November. The 2024 competition proved to be another fine success, with its superb shortlist of 30 films chosen from 174 submissions, representing 144 filmmakers from 29 countries. The screenings of thirty shortlisted films were simulcast, whilst also being projected in-person, and for the fourth year we included a special selection of Irish poetry-films.

Ó Bhéal's 2024 *Unfinished Book of Poetry* project launch was another memorable event and the 2025 edition is due be launched at Cork City Libraries on the 30th of April. The Cork-Coventry twinning exchange proved to be yet another highlight of the year featuring an exciting exchange of poets, including Ann Atkins & Amy Rugg who visited Cork, with a reciprocal visit to Coventry paid by Catherine Ronan & Cédric Bikond Nkoma.

The Ó Bhéal community was deeply saddened by the passing of long-time regular and local legend Margaret Creedon O'Shea (RIP). Mags was a devoted member of the Ó Bhéal community, who was not only a fine poet and musician, but a talented sketch artist whose drawings have now adorned Ó Bhéal's *Five Words* anthologies for a decade. A selection from previous years has been made for this edition, in tribute.

We are very grateful to everyone who supported us throughout our journey, and we look forward to supporting *Ó Bhéal go Béal* moving forward!

Yours in poetry,

Paul Casey  
Director, Ó Bhéal

*“I like creating the illusion that suddenly*

*I've just done five things at once.”*

*Stephen Karam*

# Sketches by Margaret Creedon O'Shea (2016)





# Sketches by Margaret Creedon O'Shea (2017)



# 12th Five Words International Poetry Competition

## SHORTLIST

### *Winner*

**Lucie Pereira** (Ireland/USA) *Late Twenties Hangover*

### *2nd Place*

**Dean Gessie** (Canada) *a force of nature*

### *3rd Place*

**Em Egan Reeve** (Ireland) *contents of the underwear drawer*  
*I share with my boyfriend*

### *Other Shortlisted Poems*

**Karen Hodgson Pryce** (Scotland) *Estrangement in a Meadow*

**Giles Constable** (England) *November Storm*

**Julia McNamara** (Ireland) *Poem written on the 2nd anniversary*

**DW Evans** (Jersey) *Always one for sorrow*

**Sarah Salway** (England) *There are lilies in the compost heap*

**Lisa Rosinsky** (USA) *The First Star*

**Laura Theis** (England) *my memory and I*

**Mary Anne Smith Sellen** (England) *More wren than heron*

**Hilary Evans** (Wales) *Cooked Up*



Lucie Pereira

*First Place*

ascend heron reclaim stone tame

### Late Twenties Hangover

I'm walking around Dublin with one eye all fucked up because the other night I wore expired mascara & glittery eyeshadow to match the fizzy drink in my fist. I wonder how the girls here don't freeze with their exposed knees bold beneath their pleats, but then I subtract a decade from myself, remember California crop tops in the Boston winter, because who was I without that delicious sliver of midriff, bathroom-dyed hair sparkling with snowflakes & refusing to tame, and a jacket made of Fireball & some boy's attention. The River Dodder ambles through the city like it's lost its way and a heron screeches as the sun ascends rudely over the rooftops. Nature is so fucking loud in the morning. Maybe we should all wake up with a primal scream, reclaim a fortune in therapy. The tender skin of my eyelid smolders with its own complaints, inflamed & festering. I feel old in the way that young people do. Like there's still enough time to outrun it. A plastic pint glass stands precarious on the stone wall, half-full of abandoned Murphy's. Isn't that how the night before always lingers—dark & liquid, flat & flavorless, the bite & buzz of it pure memory.

Dean Gessie

Second Place

feather submerge seek drift shore

“a force of nature”

I wheel mom outside to see the eclipse even if her field of vision is largely blind spot; she is a devil-may-care, flesh-eating shade and seeks no light: “damage to the *macula* gives me the moral compass of *Dracula*”; indeed, mom’s hubris precludes mirrors and reflection; I remember dad submerged

in carpet rolls while mom cut a rug with multiple dance partners; in the home, her earthy humour left us all long of shore and adrift: “they call it *ballroom* and *ball change* for a reason”; if mom was sexualized, dad was a romantic: “your arms are feather bed and silk sheets” was just one of

hundreds of notes he left in the faux fruit bowl before going to work at sunrise; of course, the bowl was otherwise empty of succulent things and *the smell of your hair* god’s words for gifts of pear and persimmon; dad, the carpet guy, had an English degree; he used the same knife to cut his teeth

on meter and make fish chum of his heart: but mosquitos really bite during the darkness of a total eclipse; if I or my brothers were in trouble at school, mom would buzz the halls sniffing out blood meal for her egg brood; and if the enemy’s banner read *anaemic academics*, we were no less bug-eyed

with mom’s mercurial maternal instinct, until we all exited the car at home and she scolded us for ruining her day; in fact, she had already orphaned her pretty kittens to the grudge work of her vagina: she was king of the *pride*; don’t call her *mom*; but I do just that to punctuate the temperature

drop and the question I lob like dry ice at the back of her head: “mom, did you *ever* care for us?”; June learned to drive a stick before her first period; she advances her wheels and says, “stay in your lane”; embrace of her own *nature* means I was left to *nurture* two feral animals whose passion for tag

Dean Gessie

*Second Place*

feather submerge seek drift shore

team torture sent me running for a knife; dad reacted to his little girl's tale of woe by doubling down on his own: *I knew you fell out of love when* was the suite of notes he wrote to June like the jubilee celebration of heartbreak *you stopped saying, thank you*; mom never thanked anyone; love is a

corrosive steel bit that saddles you with mouth sores; when dad died, I made goat kid of his poetry and burned with him wailing wall and witness: "how do I look?"; mom is dimly aware of the darkness around her and blocks out what light remains with eclipse glasses; "like a crime boss";

and it's still true at June's eightieth birthday party; half of those in attendance are mom's old lieutenants and one speaks of her as a *drafting compass* because she's *all legs* and she always knew how to draw a man into her inner circle; I am gobsmacked and more when the compass

gigolos finish layer cake of naked fruit chiffon and spin mom's wheelchair among them; I imagine June's endolymph sloshing opposite the inertia of her family and I picture young mom twirling like a whirling dervish until air and joy elevate the spiral panels and circle seams of her ballroom skirt

Em Egan Reeve  
*Third Place*  
skyline corridor brief animal sing

**contents of the underwear drawer I share with my boyfriend**

seventeen pairs of cotton briefs, size large.

boxer shorts, around a dozen. we don't wear them enough to count.

space for used items, the ones in the wash. somewhere for them to return once they've been freed of discharge, the fluid released by the wrong thing that I possess, the lack between my legs, corridor to the cavity that sings, shrieks, menstruates, drips, eventually just leaks and makes me say

*oh god, I hate this body!*

one packet of sanitary towels, unopened, floral pink wrapping reminiscent of udders on a cartoon cow, biological but just for show, animal anatomy for the pre-primary minds, those budding vets, extractors of blood and lactation.

a bag full of extra-long needles, and an official letter from the gender clinic detailing correct procedure for home administration of intramuscular testosterone injection.

an unpeeled sticky note my boyfriend wrote for me, scrawled declarations of love, illegible expansions, and a crude drawing of a penis, at odds with the rest, behind it, stapled at some point, another unpeeled sticky note, dated from a year ago, when his ex was still around – when I lingered as a pigeon might, in the skyline of their mind, the summer I identified as a reason for concern – a note that says much the same, but to a boy I didn't know, a note that brings back memories relayed to me of Stockholm and sex that I had no part in.

something never on the list is the function of familiarity, the muscle memory that comes with repetition and rifling, the daily jaunts. they are an established routine but one without convenience. we fumble, and drop, and struggle to find. our warm dry scramblings for modesty and comfort are pathetic.  
don't we ever learn?

Karen Hodgson Pryce

*Shortlisted*

flake secret hesitate grass black

**Estrangement in a Meadow**

A paradise of yellowed  
weed-bound grass, plashed  
by black-headed gulls. A calf  
flakes bark from an old yew.

Her salmon-speckled nose  
hesitates the air. The slap  
of a white-plumed ending.  
For a moment, she shimmers

between beasts: her haunch,  
taut as a leopard's; buried  
hooves, the cloven secret  
of an ancient auroch.

In a stand-off stare of thick  
fair lashes, her rough chin  
tempers a fresh bite.

What can I say that will

not send her off. In the trees,  
crow pitched against crow.  
From here, we cannot know  
the reasonable one.

## Giles Constable

### *Shortlisted*

treasure noon secret wild rust

#### November Storm

Wild winds arrived for two days  
astonishing the city with their purposefulness,  
humiliating umbrellas,  
commanding lunatic dances from sedate park-bound trees,  
soon stripped of their pretty colours, the mustards and rusts  
turned to a pipe-clogging pasted mulch.

Branches tapped out a spindly erratic Morse  
insisting those asleep behind bedroom glass  
listen, dream of reproachful desperate hands,  
wake on a sudden, chastened, grasping at revelations.

When stillness returned the people stepped out,  
meek and uncertain as new-standing foals.  
They tested the depth of puddles  
and were mistrustful of the now placid sky,  
banal overhead, behaving for the world  
as if nothing had happened.

There was a time of reflection.  
Crowds moved slowly across bridges,  
spied treasures washed up by the recently turbulent river,  
skeletons of bikes and fridges, a swollen surprised badger.

As solemn bells chimed out the noon,  
as gulls shrieked appalled prophesies,  
some stopped, wondered if secrets might be held in rain,  
announced by the drenching intimacy of gale and deluge.

## Giles Constable

### *Shortlisted*

treasure noon secret wild rust

But the clouds were again blank and high,  
the flow of people resumed in its random tide.  
There was lunch to be found,  
familiar worries to nurture,  
there was Tuesday and the bus to catch.

Julia McNamara  
*Shortlisted*  
april linger glow fuse belle

Poem written on the 2nd anniversary of my Father's death, 8th April 2024

Father  
it has been 24 months since  
you left.

Your ashes sit squat in a black  
velvet box  
on my desk.

Sometimes sunlight sizzles through  
the yellow slats of the skylight above  
never reaching you tucked beneath  
an under-shelf  
in the lingering dark.

The Christmas I was six I begged Mum  
to give me your address  
so I could send you a card with  
Santa Claus and Rudolph on the front beside  
a tree glowing with cold-blooded baubles;  
a golden bell hung from Rudolph's throat;  
an engorged mailbag of gifts burdened Santa's back.

The kids at school assumed  
you were dead  
after the priest at mass prayed  
for the soul of a man they thought  
was you.  
(Of course it could not be -  
they were not the same,  
your name and mine)



Julia McNamara  
*Shortlisted*  
april linger glow fuse bell

At home, I looked up the word  
in our thesaurus: Dead=  
*Lost, cold, broken, departed, checked out.*

Dad, I am astonished that you and I  
whose fuse was never lit  
will never now be anything more  
than cold strangers.  
It feels like I have lost you,  
though Mum would laugh and say  
something that was never found  
can never be lost.

On your anniversary my daughter  
asks me what it was like  
when I was her age.  
I open the diary of my 10-year-old self  
to the 8th of April, and find it blank.

D W E v a n s  
*Shortlisted*  
space fury alchemy obsolete mural

**Always one for sorrow**

I spit when I see it – them - that - her or him  
bunny-hopping to/from splat tarmac buffets:  
rat, squirrel, gut, vole, fur, tyre pressed; unordered,  
found. Lady/sir dine raw, never blue so much as  
mash tartare, midday sun scolded, scorned not cooked –  
beak cut, blood set, tantalising titbits throat dropped  
to bloat greening gizzards...

A fury of headlights forks diners into hedgerow twilight.  
Scavenger evicted? Sure! They will recur; still more refined  
than gullet-gutted herring gulls, nautically suited, poised  
on gable edges swift to steal, begging the flash of a  
highwayman's pistol – delivered before stand  
those ready opportunists take killed kill in a blur.

Forget those pressed and laundered birds; this cant  
isn't about gulls. I want to state: superstition isn't obsolete.  
Fresco's like faith flake – Vatican, Venice, the sulphurous lake,  
yet red brick railway arches let aerosol murals snake  
the rounded vaulted spaces – a habitat cursed no swallow  
or martin now clay cusp...  
thus no magpie dines on Kinder under arcs.

Cleave to tale – I'm getting lost: Gallows Grave,  
this clerically clad corvid pecked at Christ hanging,  
unenergetically I admit, on His last Cross.

D W E v a n s

*Shortlisted*

space fury alchemy obsolete mural

**Fact:** red dot lasts on corvid's tongues. His blood on  
their tongues smitten with sin's alchemy. A modern mark  
of shame post-Cane I mean  
(an avian curse cast in the midst of Anthropocene).

Pecked sin can't be swallowed – get it? So I spit.  
Un-swallowed sin taints tongues – you follow?  
These bloody birds, soulless takers, unholy hunters of larks  
blue tits, all chances chanced, egg blowers, chick takers,  
nests evictors, generation enders; life plucked like meaty  
finger's pluck at Christmas chocolate selections...  
dribbling chins, vermillion spit. Want's guilty guiltlessness  
stark on a gibbet, waiting street corners,  
seated in places of governance.

Sarah Salway  
*Shortlisted*  
eye time salmon stain inside

**There are lilies in the compost heap**

The estate agent announced this  
as if even in shit there was gold.  
The woman who had let the lilies  
colonise her compost had bright pink hair,

her paintings of giant cigarettes  
and stained fingers made me think  
of my grandmother's money box. *Poor old Fred*,  
we'd read on the coffin's side before chanting

together: *he smoked in bed*. Every time  
I'd shudder when the skeleton's hand  
reached to take the coin just as I do now,  
dreaming of lilies taking over my garden,

fighting all the pretty summer flowers  
I planned to plant. *Lilies*, I'd cooed back  
to the agent, *how lovely*. What I didn't know  
was they were the voodoo kind, each stalk

an abattoir smelling of rotten meat  
to attract flies. My father used to send me  
upstairs to clean *that muck* from my face,  
*there's no point gilding the lily*, he'd say,

Sarah Salway

*Shortlisted*

eye time salmon stain inside

as if the salmon-pale face I saw in the mirror  
could ever be a flower but what did parents  
understand about the risk of standing out  
from the crowd? To be different is a danger

you have to grow into. Now lilies make me think  
of maggots inside my house. I want to love the art  
of a woman with pink hair, to forget how the monster  
in *Frankenstein* is always in the eye of the creator.

Lisa Rosinsky

*Shortlisted*

wren warm solstice slow coincidence

### The First Star

It began as the bright stop at the end of a shrouded sentence, written against the dark  
in darker ink;

it began as a coin spilled in awe or in terror from a bottomless purse,

and the others that followed were holy as snowflakes, with their temporary geometry;

it began with a wren-sized shiver, pulsing like the small red muscle that gallops in  
syncopated rhythm with my blood, while you grow fingernails inside me;

it began as the glowing dot of a quarter note or eighth, repeated like the words of a  
prayer uttered by rote in a language once warmed by the ancestors' breath;

like the star we see first on the solstice or last on the Sabbath, the stopping place  
before shortening or lengthening, the slow inhale,

and its siblings were less numerous than your cells, were the scattering of vowels above  
and below the alef-bet

as the letters winked into meaning and vied for the honor of writing the world;

it began with a coincidence of frills and sigils, an ingot of chance, a polished eye  
blinking, the seed of a fruit too sweet for our tongues;

this, my love, is how it all began. Come be born, and I will show you.

Laura Theis  
*Shortlisted*  
roofless glue pause gut grown

my memory and I

live in an almost roofless house together  
I've grown so used to our diminished circumstances

there's never a moment we don't have to fix a leak  
or glue a break or shoo a flock of birds out of the bathroom

whenever one of us pauses exhausted and asks the other  
for forgiveness for some crime of unremembrance

the reply is something like *no worries it's already  
forgotten* and then we both guffaw as if we're not

both terribly unwell and getting worse and sometimes  
in the night I feel a gut-deep jab of fear and whisper

*I'll miss you but also I literally don't know who I'll be  
without you* then wake in the morning in my rain-drenched bed

to find just a bit less of her again

Mary Anne Smith Sellen

*Shortlisted*

wren warm solstice slow coincidence

**More wren than heron**

My mother, though born a water bird, was always  
more of a wren. My father, more heron than lion.

By crossed stars or mere coincidence, they raised  
two fledglings in the winter solstice of their lives.

When keeping us warm in the nest she'd had to feather herself,  
we'd sense how the flutter of her heart would grow while waiting

to hear the slow, irregular wing beat signalling my father's  
imminent return from some other carelessly stick-built roost.

The whole tree would tremble at his arrival, and aftershocks  
lasted long beyond his subsequent dawn departures. He'd lean

into the still-dark sky, long legs trailing, feet picked out by the  
red light opening up like an old wound across the eastern horizon.

But she'd soon smooth down her ruffled feathers, resume the lion's  
share of the feeding. We'd cheep and cheep, as she chattered  
and nattered, crushing all the old eggshells into dust beneath her busy feet.



Hilary Evans

*Shortlisted*

tea brave selfless child beginning

### Cooked Up

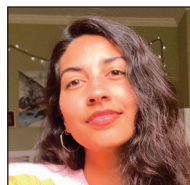
Brave? or just selfless

the mum beginning to eat

tea - made by her child.

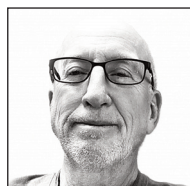
## Biographies of Shortlisted Poets

Lucie Pereira  
First Place



**Lucie Pereira** (she/her) is a writer and educator from California. Her work has appeared in publications including Honey Literary, Yes Poetry, and Stanchion Zine, and her debut chapbook titled *From Here to the Ocean* is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press. She has received fellowships from Kearny Street Workshop and Rooted & Written, and is a co-founder of the San Francisco-based reading series Kitchen Table. Lucie currently lives in Cobh, where you can find her taking walks by the sea, reading at Cork open mics including Litreacha and the Underground Loft, and pursuing her master's in creative writing at University College Cork.

Dean Gessie  
Second Place



**Dean Gessie** has achieved global success as a poet. Among dozens of honours, Dean won the Aesthetica Creative Writing Award in England, the UN-aligned Poetry Competition in Finland, the COP26 Poetry Competition in Scotland, the Allingham Arts Festival Poetry Contest in Ireland and a Creators of Justice Literary Award from the International Human Rights Art Festival in New York. Additionally, he was twice selected for *The Best 64 Poets* by Black Mountain Press in North Carolina and he was one of twenty poets included in the Poetry Archive NOW! World View video anthology in England. Dean lives north of Toronto.

Em Egan Reeve  
Third Place



**Em Egan Reeve** is originally from West Cork but has been living in Cork City for the past four years. They are a graduate of UCC, with both a BA in English and an MA in Creative writing (thanks to the Miriam Cotter Scholarship). Em is the co-

## Biographies of Shortlisted Poets

creator of *Litreacha*, a local queer creative initiative. Their fiction has been published in *Swerve*, and their poetry has featured in the *Smashing Times Newsletter*. Right now, Em is guest editing *Good Day Cork* for the first 6 months of 2025. Follow @eganreeve on Instagram for more.

### Karen Hodgson Pryce

**Karen Hodgson Pryce** is a poet and teacher living in Aviemore, Scotland. Her poetry has been published in literary magazines such as *Mslexia*, *Lighthouse*, *Butcher's Dog*, *Under the Radar* and *Ink*, *Sweat & Tears*. She was placed in the Café Writers Open Poetry Competition 2019, judged by Zaffar Kunial and was shortlisted in the Mist & Mountain Poetry Prize, 2023. She won the Badenoch Poetry Prize in 2024.

### Giles Constable

**Giles Constable** is a doctor working in the NHS in London. He has been shortlisted twice before in the Ó Bhéal Five Words competition and had work published online by *Mono* and *A Thin Slice of Anxiety* as well as in the *British Journal of Psychiatry*. He is contemplating retirement and hopes to spend more time on writing.

### Julia McNamara

**Julia McNamara** is a proud working-class writer and poet from the riotous wilds of rural Cork, who holds a BA in English and Psychology from UCC, and an MA in Creative Writing from the University of Limerick. Her work has been published in Ireland, the UK, and America in print and online, and her hobbies include drinking whiskey and questioning where it all went wrong. A committed practitioner of the ancient Japanese art of tsundoku, Julia is currently working on a novel and a first collection of poetry. Find and follow her on Instagram @thewriterchic\_x

## Biographies of Shortlisted Poets

### DW Evans

**DW Evans** was born in Newcastle upon Tyne and lives in St Martin, Jersey. He is twice winner of the Alan Jones Prize and gained second place in Ó Bhéal's Five Words 2022 and shortlisted in the 2020, 2021 and 2023 competitions. His poems have appeared in various anthologies and publications, including *The Frogmore Papers*, *One Hand Clapping*, *Acumen*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *Best New British & Irish Poets 2019 - 2021*, *Epoch*, *Dreich*, *The Journal* and *Stand*.

### Sarah Salway

**Sarah Salway** is a novelist, short story writer and poet based in Kent. She started writing as a fashion journalist before stumbling into a drop-in creative writing session at Edinburgh University where she found a wonderful freedom in using her imagination again. She now offers people the same permission through her creative writing teaching and Substack newsletter, *Everyday Words*. She is currently writing about gardeners while neglecting her own garden. Her website is [www.sarahsalway.co.uk](http://www.sarahsalway.co.uk)

### Lisa Rosinsky

**Lisa Rosinsky** has been a finalist for the North American Review James Hearst Poetry Prize, the Slapering Hol Chapbook Prize, the Fugue Poetry Contest, and the Morton Marr Poetry Prize. She is a graduate of the Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins and holds an MFA in poetry from Boston University, where she was a Robert Pinsky Teaching Fellow and a teaching artist at the Boston Arts Academy. She lives in Boston, Massachusetts.

## Biographies of Shortlisted Poets

### Laura Theis

**Laura Theis** writes in her second language. Her work appears in *Poetry*, *Oxford Poetry*, *Magma*, *Rattle*, *Berlin Lit*, etc. Accolades include the Alpine Fellowship Writing Prize, Oxford Brookes Poetry Prize, AM Heath Prize, Mogford Prize, and a Forward Prize nomination. Her debut *how to extricate yourself*, an Oxford Poetry Library Book-of-the-Month, was nominated for the Elgin Award and won the Brian Dempsey Memorial Prize. *A Spotter's Guide To Invisible Things* received the Live Canon Collection Prize, and the Arthur Welton Award from the Society of Authors. Her latest publications are *Introduction To Cloud Care* (Broken Sleep Books) and her forthcoming children's debut *Poems From A Witch's Pocket* (Emma Press).

### Mary Anne Smith Sellen

**Mary Anne Smith Sellen** has been recognised in both national and international competitions, most notably winning first and second prizes in the 6th and 11th Five Words International Poetry Competitions respectively. She is also widely published both in print and online, including *Dreich*, *Linen Press*, *Grey Hen*, *Yaffle*, *Stairwell*, *Confluence* and *Wildfire Words*. Mary Anne judged the April 2021 Sentinel Literary Quarterly competition and jointly judged the 5th Lord Whisky Animal Sanctuary Poetry competition. She regularly reads at events and festivals and is currently working on a new collection.

### Hilary Evans

**Hilary Evans** grew up and still lives in South Wales. She has always enjoyed playing with words and seeing what emerges. One of her favourite forms of poetry is Haiku. She is keen to write more and has recently begun exploring Flash Fiction. She is a very proud Great Aunt.

## Judges' Comments

Lauren O'Donovan

### First Place

#### **Late Twenties Hangover** (Lucie Pereira)

*Late Twenties Hangover* thrums with the energy of lived experience. The poet captures a slice of post-party disorientation with striking, cinematic precision. The imagery is unflinching yet deeply relatable, invoking both nostalgia and self-awareness in a voice that is wry, knowing, and emotionally charged.

What makes this poem remarkable is its ability to balance irreverence with poignancy. Lines like "...a heron screeches as the sun ascends rudely over the rooftops. Nature is so fucking loud in the morning." crackle with humor, yet they also carry a deeper weight—a kind of raw immediacy that refuses to be ignored. The voice here is fresh, self-aware, and immersive, reminiscent of Kim Addonizio, who wields striking sensory detail and biting wit to illuminate the interiority of contemporary life.

### Second Place

#### **a force of nature** (Dean Gessie)

This poem is an astonishing force in itself. It is relentless, razor-sharp, and its emotional core unsentimental yet deeply affecting. The language moves at a near-breathless pace, sweeping the reader along through a tangled family history of sharp-edged humor, betrayal, and longing.

There's something almost mythic in the mother figure—a gravitational force of ego, cruelty, and charisma—while the father, softer and more sentimental, walks through the poem gently, inverting traditional stereotypes. The humor is biting, but it never undercuts the emotional weight of the poem—instead, it sharpens it, making all the more haunting the poem's final image of the youthful mother's dancing skirts spinning.

## Judges' Comments

Lauren O'Donovan

### Third Place

#### **contents of the underwear drawer I share with my boyfriend** (Em Egan Reeve)

*Contents of the underwear drawer I share with my boyfriend* takes an intimate and seemingly mundane space—the shared underwear drawer—and turns it into a layered exploration of gender, love, memory, and bodily estrangement. Through stark, unexpected imagery and unflinching honesty, it subverts expectations, challenging conventional narratives of intimacy and selfhood.

The contrasts at play here are particularly striking: the everyday cotton briefs and sanitary towels juxtaposed with testosterone needles and gender clinic letters, the past and present sticky notes layered physically and emotionally. The poem's closing lines, where the simple act of finding clothes becomes a repeated struggle, brilliantly encapsulate the deeper themes: familiarity does not always bring ease, and even the most basic routines are shaped by identity.

#### **Estrangement in a Meadow** (Karen Hodgson Pryce)

Each image in this poem is so carefully rendered that it feels like stepping into a painting, the air thick with the scent of grass and the shimmer of a calf poised between wildness and familiarity. The verses invite the reader to pause, to decipher the language of crows and cows, to stand within the meadow and share in its fleeting, untamed grace. Its brevity enhances its power, making the scene feel both timeless and immediate, alive with quiet tension and wonder.

## Judges' Comments

*Lauren O'Donovan*

### November Storm (Giles Constable)

*November Storm* is a masterclass in atmospheric tension, capturing the wild, all-consuming force of nature and the quiet, unsettled aftermath. The imagery is exquisite with winds that "humiliate umbrellas", trees in "lunatic dances", and a city that wakes chastened, grasping at meaning. And then, in the final stanza, the poem lands with a breathtaking shift: the storm fades, life resumes, "there was Tuesday and the bus to catch". A poem of rare craft and unforgettable resonance.

### Poem written on the 2nd anniversary... (Julie McNamara)

Both restrained and deeply moving, this poem captures the ache of absence and the weight of unresolved bonds. The imagery is stark yet tender—the father's ashes in their "black velvet box," the childhood longing captured in a Christmas card never sent. And then, the final revelation: a diary entry, blank, echoing the silence and unbridgeable distance between past and present. A powerful meditation on grief and estrangement.

### Always one for sorrow (DW Evans)

Ferocious in its language and rhythm, *Always one for sorrow* is a dark meditation on violence, guilt, and superstition woven through the scavenger's world. Reminiscent of Alice Oswald's work in theme and also the incantatory intensity within each verse. The imagery is visceral—"beak cut, blood set, tantalising titbits throat dropped to bloat greening gizzards"—pure in its raw intensity. It grips the reader with its darting syntax, layered meanings, and circling moral weight.



## Judges' Comments

*Lauren O'Donovan*

### **There are lilies in the compost heap** (Sarah Salway)

This poem takes the familiar image of lilies and twists them into something eerie, unsettling, and rich with layered meaning. The flowers become symbols of transformation, danger, and self-perception. The poet masterfully blends memory, personal history, and sharp, unexpected imagery.

### **The First Star** (Lisa Rosinsky)

*The First Star* is luminous, weaving together creation, faith, and the tender miracle of new life with breathtaking lyricism. Each image unfurls like a revelation—the first star as ink, as coin, as prayer—building towards an intimate and awe-filled invitation to birth.

### **my memory and I** (Laura Theis)

*My memory and I* is a quiet yet devastating poem on memory and loss, rendered with striking simplicity and power. The extended metaphor of the crumbling house beautifully captures the slow erosion of self, while the humour woven into the relationship between speaker and memory only deepens the ache.

## Judges' Comments

*Lauren O'Donovan*

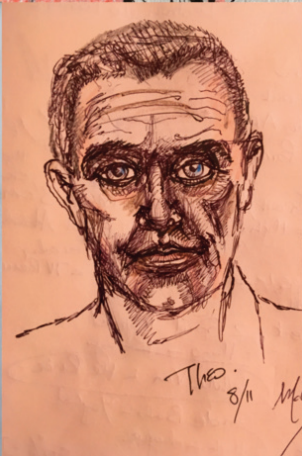
### **More wren than heron** (Mary Anne Smith Sellen)

*More wren than heron* masterfully sustains an extended metaphor—the mother's quiet resilience as a wren, the father's distant gravity as a heron. The final line, where crushed eggshells become dust under the mother's busy feet, is a stunningly subtle yet powerful conclusion, reinforcing both survival and sacrifice.

### **Cooked Up** (Hilary Evans)

In just a few words, this haiku distills a tender, unique-yet-universal moment of parental love. The simplicity of the language mirrors the simplicity of the act itself, while the tension between "brave" and "selfless" adds a layer of gentle humor and warmth. A beautifully minimal yet evocative piece.

Sketches by Margaret Creedon O'Shea (2018-19)





Sketches by Margaret Creedon O'Shea (2020)





# Sketches by Margaret Creedon O'Shea (2021)



Cédric Bikond Nkoma

*13th January 2025*

choir box style sparkle darkness

## Heat death

Here we are, swimming in an eerie fever dream,  
Piranhas in the increasingly warm global lake,  
A species in a cannibalistic frenzy.

Truly, are we stars, fallen from grace of the Skies,  
with gifts and all?  
Or are we mere monsters, victims of our own nature?

Debates are heating up, much like the climate.  
We sing in unison our dissonances,  
choirs in boxes meant for dissociative mediation.

The sparkles of our brilliance have been ground,  
decomposed into electrical impulses;  
We were once mass-produced and exploited,  
we can now be counterfeited in any style.

Forests will have to be sacrificed in the fire of our hubris  
in an attempt to make the black mirror come alive  
(or at least seemingly so).

Maybe then, we will have one final heated argument:  
what was "life" or "intelligence"?  
Did our hearts carry any divine light,  
or were we cursed with bottomless darkness?

Rosalin Blue

*10th June 2024*

smooth collide clinker lothario lanternfly

### Street Romance

Lantern-flies flutter in the moon-light,  
collide with the plastic sun of street-lamps  
that cast a flash into the secret chamber  
behind this silent window frame

Where a loose Lothario smoothly seduces  
his Floozy in pink, till she woozily snoozes  
for the night. No-one sees as he leaves,  
while the clinker puffs out to the quiet.

Beyond these walls, his love only echoes  
of emptiness, as moths rise into the moon,  
leaving just darkness behind. Not even  
a glimmer lingers of a lonely lantern-fly.

Rosalin Blue

*11th November 2024*

pipeline tuxedo placebo spin mercy

### Witty Ditty

Ain't got no póem in the pípline  
Ain't got no wórds for nérds  
Ain't got no voice from source,  
Just got a song for youse:

I'm a wéarin' my tuxédo,  
all day feelin' like placébo.  
If I cán't spin this thing, well,  
will I count as poet still?

Have some mercy, dear Muse,  
bring some rhymes for me to use!  
Please, inspire me, if you will,  
that wondrous lyricals may spill

*9th December 2024*

shawarma difficult exquisite potent living

### Dish of the Day

After days of working, I now sit 'n' eat here.  
It's warmer under this overhead heater.  
Shawarma is my choice of meal  
exquisite flavours, a potent deal.

Even a saviour in difficult times,  
when living is simple and pennies are tight.  
So, cheers to this humble dish of the day  
while wishing the pimples of tomorrow away



Adrienne Brock

*Winner - 8th July 2024*

ectomies portfolio seventy whilom whisper

## Untitled

Segmented maps collect on the floor  
like organs cut out of the land around us  
So many -ectomies: first its  
spleen that had the line of a nice country road.  
We stopped there once for good soup  
and a fire on a cold afternoon.  
Then, its foot, where we talked quietly in the dark.  
How many lives spent walking over  
hills or through stands  
of trees no longer there?  
I come across a block of spruce, and there  
is not a bird sound anywhere.  
No one calls this home.  
In their straight rows, they are  
like someone with whom I once shared an easy silence  
now hooked up to beeping machines.  
Where have you gone,  
whilom friends?  
You may whisper, but I cannot  
hear you.  
Someone will tell me to repeat it,  
and again seventy multiplied seven times.  
Someone else collects the maps  
puts them in a smooth portfolio.  
We try to describe the soup and the road,  
and we disagree on the details.

Benjamin Burns

*12th August 2024*

conundrum mind pirate olympian purple

## Untitled

A conundrum is only a conundrum to a mind,  
because stones and trees are far too reasonable  
to ponder riddles or find anything  
difficult.

A pirate is only a pirate to a mind  
because golden medallions  
don't give a damn who counts them  
and VHS and CD and mp3 and flac  
couldn't give a fuck, literally couldn't.

An Olympian is only an Olympian to a mind.  
I have yet to find a competitive lemon rind.  
I have yet to meet an olive tree who lifts its fruit competitively.  
Mount Olympus rises indifferent to the games.

And purple is only purple to a mind  
because purple is not a thing  
but the interaction of light with the surface of a thing  
as witnessed through the eyes of a mind.

No mind without mind, but what is mind?  
And where, if ever, does it end?

Is it all in here, squishy purple interior?  
Or does it stretch to the temple at the peak of Mount Olympus?  
Or come to rest at the end of a pirate's wooden leg?

Mind is this, minded conundrum.

Benjamin Burns

*13th January 2025*

choir box style sparkle darkness

### Untitled

If you open a box  
of darkness  
in the dark  
the darkness inside the box  
will spill into  
the darkness outside the box  
and a choir of unseeable angels  
with the voices of cats  
will meowl over the darkest  
black metal  
and brush closer with their diamonds and feathers  
in the pressing dark  
without so much as a sparkle  
but with buzzing guitars and bells and audible  
style.

Benjamin Burns

*10th February 2025*

change repression maps butterfly joy

## Untitled

Butterflies experience change in their transformation into themselves from caterpillar through chrysalis, and afterwards with procreation and death.

Butterflies are sensitive to magnetic fields, to temperature, sunlight, and the ultraviolet markings of flowers they like to frequent. Their flutters can provide us mapmakers with maps. They live the wandering contours of their own.

Butterflies can be repressed by paw or hand or glass, or by other physical limits, if this is repression, but I don't know if they know what repression is. Are they repressed?

Butterflies bring us joy with their colour and flight. They bring joy to the kitten who tears them to pieces. They bring joy to the swallow who swallows them on the wing. They bring joy to other butterflies, who they fuck in the sunlight.

Butterflies have a kind of insect cunt. They tip abdomens.

Pam Campbell

8th April 2024

friends ripple belligerent steam playground

### Untitled

A bull-neck belligerent man thumps  
a thick, black book, held high for all to see.  
*Friends, this here has the word, the only word,  
for what is right and what is wrong. It ain't woke.*  
His hate-driven spittle steams to the back corner of sleepy,  
ripples, and playgrounds to the farthest corner of quiet  
where I run.

11th November 2024

pipeline tuxedo placebo spin mercy

### Untitled

This year in America there are hundred-year-old  
floods, wildfires from the west coast to the east coast,  
book bans, and mass shootings. Just yesterday morning,  
an eighteen-year-old was killed and others injured  
at Tuskegee University in Alabama, extinguishing  
a celebration of hard work and accomplishment.

America has a pipeline flowing, full of racism, misogyny,  
xenophobia—muddying unity, destroying democracy.  
A reality show TV star made president-elect puffs  
his tuxedoed chest and spins truth so hard—  
a preached placebo of America First—emptying  
America of truth, justice and mercy.

Pam Campbell

13th January 2025

choir box style sparkle darkness

### Untitled

She wore a clean shirt every day. Not that anyone noticed.  
She only went out at night when darkness muted shades  
of color and style, when clean held no trace of the sparkle  
once held in shared breath.

This night was different. She did not go out. She opened  
the window wide and lingered  
in the notes of the church choir's, *All is calm.*

She was tired.

She opened the brown rectangular box,  
took the razor out, and dropped  
the blade, cold and light in her hand.

She knew what to do.

Her mother had done it decades before.  
But just as she touched blade to skin,  
a wind blew the choir's lingering notes,

*hold me together.*

In the quiet that followed,  
the old man on the street below,  
called her name.

And stayed her hand, yet another day.

Jeff Cottrill

*13th May 2024*

silk dinner lark chrome intricate

### **The Delicious Dress**

I ate a dress for dinner. The dress was made of silk.  
I ate it with a side of socks and glass of chocolate milk.  
I normally don't dine on clothes; it just seemed like a lark,  
Something to brag about with all the cool kids in the park.  
The dress design was intricate; it must have cost a lot,  
All custom-made for a movie star at some fashionable spot.  
I searched for that silk dress online, but had to use Firefox,  
Since Chrome just wasn't working on my obsolete desktop.  
And finally I found it – priced at thirty million bucks!  
I could have sold the dress instead of eating it. That sucks.

*11th November 2024*

pipeline tuxedo placebo spin mercy

### **Pipeline Tuxedo**

My honey wears a pipeline tuxedo.  
As powerful as your doctor's placebo.  
She's crazy about the oil and gas sector.  
The thought of pipelines always has wrecked her.  
She puts on the suit, shows it off with a spin,  
Parades it down the catwalks of Paris and Berlin  
The men all go wild, shouting "Oh baby! Mercy!"  
It's sexier than the nuclear plants of New Jersey.  
It's wilder than the coal plants of the Andes,  
Which now can be worn in the form of lace panties.  
The pipeline tuxedo is the summer's hot trend,  
Putting the reign of the hydro skirt to an end.  
But beware: If the pipeline tuxedo gets a leak,  
The toxicity will kill us all within a week.

Jeff Cottrill  
*13th January 2025*  
choir box style sparkle darkness

**What's in the Box?**

There was a man with a little black box  
Secured with a mess of bolts and locks.  
He carried it in a mysterious style  
Through darkness and light, with an odd little smile.  
And finally one day, I said to the man:  
“Great heavens, my friend! We no longer can  
Contain our curiosity! What's in the box?  
Is it valuable jewels, or a pile of rocks?  
A birthday cake? A big loaf of bread?  
Some surgical tools? Gwyneth Paltrow's head?”  
The man's eyes did sparkle with mischief and glee  
As he answered: “You have the gall to ask me  
What's in this box? Well, I'm sure no liar.  
I'm carrying the Mormon Tabernacle Choir,  
But shrunk down to fun-size, to sing for the ants  
And spiders in Ireland and houseflies in France!”



Holly Darragh-Hickey

*13th May 2024*

silk dinner lark chrome intricate

### Identity Crisis

Cuffs etched by worry  
hands sandwiching  
fisted boulders in her lap  
knuckle-bitten at dinner.

Under the school desk  
hangnails peel red  
rage raw in her eyes  
promises balled in a corner.

Through the ring of her iris  
she is watching  
her silk in threads  
her slow unravelling.

In frightened syllables  
this lark in her ears  
in her voice—  
another wrung in hard chrome.

Voice hammers her penance  
thoughts turn intricate  
against herself—  
this isn't her, not anymore.

Michelle Delea

*11th November 2024*

pipeline tuxedo placebo spin mercy

### **Magician's Assistant**

Dangle me another pendulant watch

Lose me in a tuxedo trick

Deftly, spin me, down the pipeline

Have mercy when you cut me in half

With sleight of hand and false magic

Lock and chain the trapdoor before

Love's placebo plays the hatrick

*13th January 2025*

choir box style sparkle darkness

### **your man**

*Put it this way* – if he was in a choir, he'd be the organ. You'd see him there outside The Modern when it was still open, pure boxy stance, with the two hands tucked inside the waistband. Ankles of the pants tucked in, too. Laces on the Air Max tucked down the sides. He's a firework. When he salutes the darkness, it's always with a sparkle tucked away in the eye..

Michelle Delea

*9th December 2024*

shawarma difficult exquisite potent living

## **Monstera**

The monstera I bought a year ago  
has been growing exquisitely  
since you sold it to me.

Well, charged me nothing –  
handed it across the counter,  
something potently living and

roaring green, that I've associated  
ever since, with the black hair you  
left long that December

and the bark to the smile, awaiting sun.  
In your botanic background, thinking  
about that shawarma after work.

After work, I'll show you what the sun did

The monstera begins to fenestrate  
on our windowsill, mature, despite  
the gnats, the shade behind the garden shed,

the blinds I pulled at work.  
Away from a winter that stripped  
the stillness from your city's river,

It's difficult to recall  
when this soil was dry,  
and you were a just stranger.

Antonio Di Mare

*20th September 2024*

shirt culture pint cotton landslide

### Material

The t-shirt on the table was covering a pillow,  
a white pillow of fine cotton,  
dreams in a bottle.

If a bottle opens up,  
the dreams will erupt as a colourful landslide,  
vertigos intended.

Having a pint at sunset,  
in the last portion of the day,  
compressed beauty.

Culture bomb,  
sparkling passion,  
two spoons left,  
on the edge of eternity.

Antonio Di Mare

*11th November 2024*

pipeline tuxedo placebo spin mercy

### Spinning Wheel

The mermaids were standing in the wooden shelter,  
a symbiotic pipeline of toys,  
tuxedo roleplay games,  
the only placebo for children in war.

Stitching a little bit of mercy,  
a jacket of grief,  
the spinning wheel running fast.

A shout for life,  
silent,  
as air leaves my thoughts become concrete.

Kemi George-Simpson

*10th February 2025*

change repression maps butterfly joy

Unrepressed wings joy.

Comfrey bush to lavender

map butterfly's change.

Elizabeth Gibson

*Winner - 8th April 2024*

friends ripple belligerent steam playground

**The goose at the end of the world**

A belligerent goose has remembered the towpath  
belongs to him and becomes wider and wider,

a *hiss*s of steam as he inflates. On days when I cry  
about not knowing what friends are or whether

I have them, the post-blue dusk ripple of sky and canal  
is empty and quiet, and I think of the playground

at the end of the world, where there is no more hope  
or danger, no people, just your own clip-clopping

of footsteps, the goose an unexpected final encounter.  
I make kissy noises, click my tongue without thinking

– when I let go of the human part of me, life is easier.  
He retreats slowly: neck, then wings, then tail fan.

I stand next to him, and we look up and down together.  
He honks, in a kind of letting go, and I echo it.

Cathal Holden

*Winner - 10th March 2025*

whiskers piss exacted gentle amplify

Mischief

Cork city library  
Pm, one fifty-three  
A gentle silence

A breeze stirs  
As if of its own volition  
A book falls from a shelf

Butterflies emerge fluttering from its pages  
Settling here, there  
The swarm amplifies picograms

Another volume falls  
A cat, stark black  
yowls as it tumbles from its cardboard binding, whiskers wild as it

Leaps from shelf to shelf  
Books fly, pages spiral, the adventure section suddenly crumbling beneath  
Tentacles, pirate ships, a blue lagoon.  
Long John silver, Quentin Blake, Madame Zeroni fumble in the briney wash

Shelves fall like dominoes  
Cthulhu rises, the iceman is cometh  
Worlds collide, taxes exacted on reality,  
Robin and Watson  
Search for Batman and Holmes together



Cathal Holden

*Winner - 10th March 2025*

whiskers piss exacted gentle amplify

Fiction has fallen. Sci-fi is next, followed by fantasy

Ents entangled in tauntauns

Elves and pleidian greys

Attempt to communicate telepathically

Tenzin Norgay summits the non-fiction section triumphantly

Poetry is a mess, metaphors fighting like similes

The librarians regroup in a corridor, blasters set to hush

A black cat

Nonchalantly licks itself

upon the library counter

Here puss

Piss, piss, piss

He leaps into a slim handsome volume

Some nearby fairytale

And mischief

disappears

Jennifer Horgan

*Winner - 9th September 2024*

shadow broken insane evergreen family

**Shadow**

He was part of you – yours,  
before he broke the gauze of your body.  
We ask him to forget that, don't we?  
Don't we?

That he was yours –  
Housed inside your skin,  
spilling out, on a tide  
of your pain and longing.

That he was part of you – yours,  
before you held him in the cool ward.  
Broken and insane, your parts  
aching to be together again.  
After months of you two,

of you feeding him in utero,  
those sweet nuts  
from a stall in Hammersmith.  
Taking him swimming,  
feeling him move,  
both of you suspended.

Your family,  
future,  
inside you.  
Evergreen.

Jennifer Horgan

*Winner - 9th September 2024*

shadow broken insane evergreen family

He was part of you – yours,  
emerging, white-stained,  
blaring, purple. Shocked  
to be inflamed in air.  
Cut from you. Torn.

We ask him to forget that.  
Don't we?  
And we burn.

Augustina Adéolá Jekennu  
*13th January 2025*  
choir box style sparkle darkness

**Nostalgic Sparkle**

In the darkness, and coldness in the middle of winter,  
It becomes hard to keep the joy glowing...  
Broke and knowing that the next pay day is several weeks away...  
At least there's company...

To forget out worries  
We sing songs from our memories,  
Choir like style  
Nostalgic sparkle,  
Like accessories gathered from years

Shared with peers listening ears...  
Blurs and hums from missing words...  
Sat by the box, that tunes in and out  
Physical radios...  
Do you remember those?

Augustina Adéolá Jekennu  
*10th February 2025*  
change repression maps butterfly joy

**Joy Rejuvenates**

Sometimes when I look back and reflect on life, and see the change of circumstances, people, maps, and my entire being.

It reminds me of the times where I truly felt like a caterpillar, moving through the really big world, with lots of happenings.

Situations that may feel like repression and breaking down whatever concept I had of myself, just when I thought I understood myself.

Going into a cocoon, while life around me continues to move, transition, and transform.

A metamorphosis where a series of decisions have led me to a place where I must surrender, become anew.

Beautiful, vibrant, Butterfly, with limited time. Fluttering where and when I can. People comment on the colours of my delicate wings.

They see my joy, they see my growth, they celebrate with me. I celebrate them.

Because going through such shifts, I recognise. One way or another...

They've all gone or are going through their own metamorphosis.

Some of us have died, ego stripped away, job, friends, family, love, sanity.

Reincarnated as yet another caterpillar.

Who will still go through change, who will still need to cocoon, who must still break down break free, flutter through, get through life, yet again.

So it's essential, that when we have it, when we find it, when we create it, when we tap into it, we must hold it.

Joy, as it truly rejuvenates.

Róisín Leggett Bohan

*Winner - 10th February 2025*

change repression maps butterfly joy

**Re Press**

I anticipate my lover  
is soon to be my ex.  
Have they changed?  
Or maybe I've pushed

them away. Why  
does the word *joy*  
hold such sickly weight?  
And what is it, really?

Surely we must be intimate  
with its opposite — maps  
the needle makes on an arm,  
let's say, or when you're puking

in your mouth over another  
butterfly metaphor. All this  
metamorphosis gives rise  
to relationship break-up.

What am I really trying  
to say? My ex has changed  
or maybe I have.  
People change, don't they?

Raina J. León

*Winner - 12th August 2024*

conundrum mind pirate olympian purple

## Spectrum

today we will "arr" like pirates  
into the purple twilight  
and though i want to take a nap

he will make me plug in the spinning disco ball  
turn out all the lights  
and dance like i could be an olympian

sometimes i wonder  
if all the stories snaking  
through his mind will ever unfold to me

slough off their skin  
and arrange themselves into a narrative  
i can get

i speak to him and he sucks his two fingers  
index and middle  
as he has since he was 4 months old

pensive, i am conundrum, so is he  
"i have an idea, mami," he says  
and i say, "yes"

i want to understand  
how pirates become robots that conquer  
snakes underground as easily

as they swim with friendly krakens  
"mami, i want the bath colors"  
blue and red

Raina J. León

*Winner - 12th August 2024*

conundrum mind pirate olympian purple

a purple vortex  
i watch him  
i watch my mind

he has since three been making submarines  
from matching magnetiles to survive the spinning  
drain that certainly suck everything into the void

could suck him into the void  
at 2 he told me the difference  
between a stygymolch and a dracorex

i have become an expert in dinosaurs  
and electrical engineering principles  
and robotics by turns

and an expert too  
in the shriek of his despair,  
not being understood

but i am never sure  
of who my son is  
the depths of him

he is the captain  
mine is not to question  
just keep the ship together

i am the ship  
he promises me  
a dance



Mona Lynch

Winner - 10th June 2024

smooth collide clinker lothario lanternfly

### Untitled

Beside a glowing fire, bedded down with last night's clinker,  
I sit, listening to a moth colliding with the bulb,  
fall, joining his deceased siblings in the lamp shade.

Is that moth morphed from the lantern fly come to taunt us,  
like the smooth lothario down in Dunnes pub tonight,  
with chocolate eyes, bronzed skin, oozing charm.

Why did I resist? Where might I be now? No! I have savoured that.  
I shout at Alexa "*play Ravel's Boléro, volume 7*"  
Now **that**, is my kind of crescendo.

Ciarán MacArtain

*9th December 2024*

shawarma difficult exquisite potent living

### **From Europe to The Middle East**

We will only rape you for as long  
As you are useful to us  
As we begin to digest your  
Exquisite shawarma on windswept Berlin streets

Paying half of nothing  
Licking our lips  
On your array of spices  
And fine meats

Wind potent as it blows  
Through our hair

Living off the fat of the land  
Licking chilli mayo off the back of the hand

Enzymes beginning to sizzle  
On streets leading out of town  
Toward The Topographies of Terror  
Only surviving relic of Nazi architecture

In a country using its last genocide to justify another  
A museum now

Windows above the rotation of even the most optimistic eyeball  
Difficult to see inside without going inside

Hearing the voices that did the deeds  
Seeing the pictures that sew the seeds

The few who followed the few who followed

Ciarán MacArtain

*13th January 2025*

choir box style sparkle darkness

## Untitled

An absolutely scintillating move  
Retrieved the ball near our own corner flag  
Played a one two with the full back to get us out  
Popped it into the six, type of feen who could  
Put a ball on a dinner plate for you  
Threaded a little one through their two CDMs  
And I drove at the back four  
Clipped it into the corner for Rees  
Tricky little winger in sparkling form  
Rolled the ball through the full back's legs  
Got to the byline, whipped it in low and hard  
To the front post where the defender makes  
What would have been a goal saving challenge  
Only for yours truly arriving late at the edge of the box  
To take the breaking ball on the half volley  
Bottom corner, back of the net, Tommy Burns style  
Cupped the ears and slid to the corner  
To hear the choir sing into the darkness;

“Let the people sing...”

Ciarán MacArtain

*10th February 2025*

change repression maps butterfly joy

## Cycles

Hard now to say all change is good change  
Hard to validate the glorification of the new  
When the new is as old as it is new

If there was a prevailing wind  
From repression to liberation  
Do we accept re-repression?

All the more sinister by the conscious act  
Knowing of its pain and its trauma  
And doing it anyway

Not doing it anyway, doing it especially  
Especially because of the pain and the trauma

Must we always roll through time  
As a horse on a carousel?  
The impression of moving forward deceiving

Progress as a more detailed map  
The backward as the land represented by this dot.  
The land as the land is when the wind blows through it

Does the butterfly remember the struggles of crawling?  
Does a caterpillar know the joy of flight?

Matt Mooney

*8th April 2024*

friends ripple belligerent steam playground

## Playground

Who would blame children in Gaza to be belligerent  
when they are being herded by the hunger  
that drives them to the feeding points  
where their begging bowls are hurriedly filled  
with ladles by the aid workers from monster pots,  
steam rising from gruel-like nourishment;  
ripples of desperation along the waves of pressing little bodies,  
seeking their turn for a chance to live.  
Instead of flocking with their friends to a playground  
of colourful swings and carousels,  
ice creams licked and loved,  
while happy contented mums and dads look on in peace.

# Gormfhlaith Ní Shíocháin Ní Bheoláin

Winner - 14th October 2024

skin text meas car seal

## Dog Poem

What is this text: living or smelly?

I have a skin infection. I was too scared to get a tattoo.

White gauze covers my heart and my dog chews chewing gum.

And when it spits it out

I steal this horrible seal of spittle affection

and I use it

I use it

to hold the car door closed

So I can uncover my blank fuzzy infected tattoo

And stare and stare

And take acres of meaning

from my hairy blank arm-

pit.

And I can smell and smell

all the sweat beads from it

and luxuriate in it

and let my dog lick it

*agus imeacht ar seachrán le fán im intinn ag scríobadh mo smaointe*

*ag scaoileadh le línte is bruíonta is ag caitheamh mo phíopa*

*is ag diúgadh ar fíon geal is ag slíocadh mo chúlfhiacla*

*agus dóibh siúd nach féidir a mheas cad a deirim*

*tá mo phearsantacht líonta le salachar.*

Gormfhlaith Ní Shíocháin Ní Bheoláin

Winner - 14th October 2024

skin text meas car seal

*Salach* is a dirty word because  
I need you to know how much worse I get when  
I let myself go into guttural sounds  
and escape from these roundabout words that  
I'm chewing I'm using my dog's  
gum as a way out of total incoherence and mining  
my mental disappearance  
for your attention  
to all my details when all I need you to do is  
inspect my dog's back teeth  
and my back teeth  
and tell me what's your *MEAS* on that.

Rosie O'Regan

*12th August 2024*

conundrum mind pirate olympian purple

## Cell

These things we hold too close  
Olympian conundrum crackers  
binary bandits  
these mind pirates in our pockets  
dim our purple light

*14th October 2024*

skin text meas car seal

## No Meas

Soon I can have a car that will drive me while I text  
my skin plump like a 5 year old's, like  
a baby seal shaved of its white fur, balanced  
on a rock, in the wide fathomless sea



Rosie O'Regan

*Winner - 9th December 2024*

shawarma difficult exquisite potent living

**Lemme Tell Ya**

This ain't no poem, cos poems is for pussies, but  
y'all know that already, sorry, not sorry

I do got somethin to say though, bout life, bout livin  
It don't got to be so difficult, ya know

It can be an exquisite shawarma  
Defuckinglicious!

Just take a bite  
feel *impotent*

Catherine Ronan

*11th November 2024*

pipeline tuxedo placebo spin mercy

### Spin

Spin spin whiskey and gin  
I suffer for my art bartender.  
My pipeline is running out  
of metaphors and they have  
labelled my free-floating anxiety  
as writers block!  
Oh Mr Cole, are they phallic  
mushrooms that grow in Drombeg  
or just a placebo?  
Have mercy on a girl who buries  
Barbie and dresses Ken  
in a tuxedo!  
Spin spin whiskey and gin  
I suffer for my art bartender.

*9th December 2024*

shawarma difficult exquisite potent living

### What the Dickens!!

It was the best of times,  
it was the most exquisite of times  
living with a guy who made  
the winter warmer with shawarma  
and potent kama sutra.

Catherine Ronan

*9th December 2024*

shawarma difficult exquisite potent living

But once that kebab grew cold  
and we lost the taste for spice,  
I wrote a new collection  
called Difficult and won  
The Pulitzer Prize.

*Winner 13th January 2025*

choir box style sparkle darkness

### Special Delivery

I ordered my Choir Boy on Amazon  
and he took ages to come  
but when he did,  
the box was so big  
and he was so small  
so I fingerprinted  
the bejasus  
from his sparkle  
and handcuffed him  
in true NCIS style.  
When I activated his voice box,  
he accused me of being  
'a Cathy Bates',  
but I replied,  
no baby no;  
I am just the darkness between stars!

Colm Scully  
13th January 2025  
choir box style sparkle darkness

**Bruce Springsteen**

The Stylus hits the groove  
and I am dancing in the darkness  
to Bruce Springsteen,  
lifting my low mood,  
bringing the sparkle back into my world.  
My mother enters.  
The light cavitates the room.  
She shouts, *Keep that racket down,*  
*we're trying to watch the box.*  
- *Ok, Ok.*  
She retreats, leaving me to my lonely choir.  
I lower the volume.  
The record winds into *Hungry Heart*,  
slows the tempo.  
Bridging the gap between rural Cork and New Jersey.  
Heading down the coast to Baltimore

Philip Spillane

10th June 2024

smooth collide clinker lothario lanternfly

### Lanternfly

Lothario lamp  
lumes a lemon  
smooth hue,

I lantern-fly

up to its glow.

Its fuse harmonies  
*clinker-clink-clink-clink-clink*  
as it winks out.

The bulbs gone dull.

Despite this  
I still collide with the organ.

Love again.

*clinker-clink-clink-clink-clink*  
As it winks out.

Alexandra Toth

*9th September 2024*

shadow broken insane evergreen family

**Till we meet again**

My beautiful friend

What happened to you?

You were our friend, our beloved family.

When I looked at you, all I saw was shadows.

You looked insane.

Your light, dimmer than usual.

Peadar may have been sad,

But I felt broken.

Heartfelt memories connect me to you.

From parties to poetry nights.

I watched you be a part of our lives.

In the end I learned something,

I guess not all tills are evergreen

But please,

Its finally time to wake up from your slumber party.

You know why?

Because me, maths, and calculators are not best friends.

*20th September 2024*

shirt culture pint cotton landslide

**We are all just shirt**

Welcome to culture night, where we celebrate the beauty of our unique differences.

We come from faraway backgrounds, but faith led us to the land of harps,  
shamrocks, and pints.

From east to west, we form our threads,

Like red strings connecting on a map, representing where we came from,

Alexandra Toth

20th September 2024

shirt culture pint cotton landslide

our roots,

Our cultures.

Strangely, we are like a shirt.

They come in many sizes and colours, as well as material.

From silk to cotton, from blue to purple.

But in the end, they will all be just a shirt, a human being.

Now let's all come together to drink a pint, in celebration of this culture night,

And pretend we are rolling down a cloud, a cotton like landslide.

And let's all shout "we are all just shirts"

12th August 2024

conundrum mind pirate olympian purple

### **The Broken Olympian**

He was an Olympian.

Held his head high with pride.

He had the mind of an untameable warrior.

But like most warriors, his mind became broken.

Purple mist clouded his surroundings.

He couldn't see a bright future in front him anymore.

He became a lone whale, a pirate.

Sailing the dark oceans alone,

Thinking of the Conundrum

"How does a prideful Olympian become a lonely pirate?".

But he never seemed to formulate an answer,

So, he gave up,

and accepted his lonely faith,

Reminiscing about his prideful moments that will never return to him.

Molly Twomey

Winner - 11th November 2024

pipeline tuxedo placebo spin mercy

Placebo

I'm in the placebo pill week which means  
I want to fuck everything and drink  
a litre of buffalo sauce.

Penguins are just short swans in tuxedos  
and I'm just a woman in lycra at spin class,  
dreaming of double cheese burgers.

Lord, grant my body's thirst  
mercy and thank you for keeping me  
childless. All I have in the pipeline

Is the latest season of *Grey's Anatomy*.  
It's been 19 years — can you believe  
they're still riding in the on-call room?

Everyone else in pain, dying,  
wishing they'd pull  
themselves together.



Patricia Walsh

*Winner - 13th May 2024*

silk dinner lark chrome intricate

### Untitled

You call yourself a lark, running over dinner  
A sensuous monochrome outshines all else  
This intricate poison, drowning on silk  
I've heard it all before, a vocation sealed.

Worshipping the bumper, a chrome assigned  
Artificial silk not good enough now  
Intricate mechanics messing up by the spire  
Rising by the lark is a point in your fetish.

Rise with the lark on a hefty summer morning  
Chewing over dinner a time realised,  
Fanlight like the chrome's apposite playing  
Working through silk an intricate diatribe.

*10th June 2024*

smooth collide clinker lothario lanternfly

### Pipeline Tuxedo

Certain worlds collide, stay the same,  
The smooth clinker, on one fell swoop,  
Engagements to make a lothario blush  
Constant as a lanternflies reactions.  
The smooth talker you are, clinked-on  
Broadcast without prejudice, colliding  
The lanternfly rotting slowly  
The lothario's progress finally stalled  
Swallowed in shame, consommé annoyance  
Cease to desist no longer a formality.

Patricia Walsh

*12th August 2024*

conundrum mind pirate olympian purple

### Untitled

The mind finally rots, in blithe informacy  
An Olympian feat crawling through the mist  
Sliced conundrum, pirating the better valour  
The absent purple deity minds another business.

Through the rotten silence, dying for better  
Blithe conundrum seldom wasting its time  
Associating the Olympian right to silence  
Pirating, killing industry, falling short again.

Mind yourself, the only golden rule here,  
Olympian at best, purple in design,  
No need to pirate an existence, parading minds  
Owning your conundrum is a stake too high.

Lubricating the conundrum, dissecting the pirated  
Unlocking the mind a gesture Olympian  
The purple bruise prejudices my innocence  
The clear record never misses a trick.



The  
Long Valley  
Bar

Margaret Creedon O'Shea - In Memoriam





Margaret Creedon O'Shea - In Memoriam



Sketches by Margaret Creedon O'Shea (2022)





# Sketches by Margaret Creedon O'Shea (2022)



# International Poetry-Film Competition Shortlist 2024

## Screening A

available now at [vimeo.com/1032777175](https://vimeo.com/1032777175)

<b>Damian Mihaylov</b> (Bulgaria)	<i>The Night</i>
<b>Greg Roensch</b> (USA)	<i>How Much Filipino</i>
<b>Fiona Tinwei Lam &amp; Lara Renaud</b> (Canada)	<i>Un/Write</i>
<b>Pamela Falkenberg &amp; Jack Cochran</b> (USA)	<i>Migrations</i>
<b>Sami Ala</b> (Finland)	<i>Last ode to the moon</i>
<b>Zack McCune</b> (USA)	<i>Works of Hands</i>
<b>*Winner* Anya Ryzhkova</b> (Germany)	<i>09.01.berkovich</i>
<b>Damon Conway</b> (Ireland)	<i>In Tantum Clamor</i>
<b>Jules van Hulst</b> (Netherlands)	<i>Her Eye</i>
<b>Jim Haverkamp</b> (USA)	<i>Blink Once</i>
<b>Alfio Leotta</b> (New Zealand)	<i>Butterfly</i>
<b>Dennis Routledge-Tizzard</b> (Spain)	<i>Now or There</i>
<b>Matt B. Mullins</b> (USA)	<i>Janet Leigh is Afraid of Jazz</i>
<b>John Horan</b> (Ireland)	<i>The Rock &amp; The Stars</i>
<b>Celia Parra Díaz</b> (Spain)	<i>A trace of light</i>





# International Poetry-Film Competition Shortlist 2024

## Screening B

available now at [vimeo.com/1032786049](https://vimeo.com/1032786049)

<b>Suki</b> (France)	<i>Refugee</i>
<b>Emily Burke</b> (UK)	<i>I Would Like to Live on the Moon</i>
<b>Ian Gibbins</b> (Australia)	<i>Types of Rain</i>
<b>Martin Sercombe</b> (New Zealand)	<i>Songs of Vanishing</i>
<b>Kenneth Karthik</b> (Canada)	<i>Our Punjabi Market</i>
<b>Kevin Maher &amp; Joe Dator</b> (USA)	<i>Dracula's Super Scary Halloween</i>
<b>Sarah Tremlett</b> (UK)	<i>Flight</i>
<b>Kim Trainor</b> (Canada)	<i>Hwlhits'um / Signs</i>
<b>Marcella O'Connor</b> (Ireland)	<i>One Dawn</i>
<b>Matthew Buzzell</b> (USA)	<i>The Moment Before the Song Begins</i>
<b>Mersolis Schöne</b> (Austria)	<i>The History of Proximity</i>
<b>Ray Santisteban</b> (USA)	<i>Savior</i>
<b>Odveig Klyve</b> (Norway)	<i>On the 19th day of the war</i>
<b>POETAQ</b> (Japan)	<i>Dance Beat</i>
<b>Janet Lees</b> (UK)	<i>The Bride Goes Wild</i>



# International Poetry-Film Competition Shortlist 2024

## Irish Selection

available now at [vimeo.com/1034649731](https://vimeo.com/1034649731)

Elena Horgan	<i>Cumha</i>
Grace Wells	<i>Solstice, Wonder</i>
Marcella O'Connor	<i>Night Drags</i>
Shane Vaughan	<i>Mere Ducks</i>
Avia Gurman Murphy	<i>Animal Heart</i>
Emmett O'Donovan	<i>The Lighthouse</i>
Luke De Brún	<i>An Ode to Tony MacMahon's Den</i>
Colm Scully	<i>Good Morning, Dear Students</i>
Jennifer Redmond	<i>Another Summer in Ireland</i>
Csilla Toldy	<i>Sub Rosa – a Cold War Lullaby</i>
Ceara Carney	<i>The Residents of 49</i>
Sean Walsh	<i>Settle Yourself</i>
Philip Spillane	<i>Black Triangle</i>
Felix Morgan	<i>Gougane Barra</i>
Grace Wells	<i>Winter Solstice</i>
John Kennedy	<i>Achainí</i>





Ó Bhéal's 13th Poetry-Film Competition is open for submissions  
from 1st May - 31st August 2025

International submissions are accepted for any poetry-film under  
ten minutes (English subtitles are required for non-english language films)  
Entries must have been completed since May 2023

Broadly speaking, a poetry-film is the translation of a poem into  
film form, by way of interpretation that features the entire poem,  
either visually and/or audibly

Up to 30 shortlisted poetry-films will be screened in  
Cork City in November 2025

One winner will receive the festival prize for best poetry-film

**Free to Enter!**

For submissions and guidelines visit: [www.obheal.ie/poetryfilm](http://www.obheal.ie/poetryfilm)



## **McNamara Slam Winners 2024-2025**

8 April	Elizabeth Gibson
13 May	Patricia Walsh
10 June	Mona Lynch
8 July	Adrienne Brock
12 August	Raina J. León
9 September	Jennifer Horgan
20 September	April Rooney
14 October	Gormfhlaith Ní Shíocháin Ní Bheoláin
11 November	Molly Twomey
9 December	Rosie O'Regan
13 January	Catherine Ronan
10 February	Róisín Leggett Bohan
10 March	Cathal Holden

## **Guest Poets 2024-2025**

8 April	Derek Sellen, Mary Anne Smith Sellen & Laura Theis
13 May	Joanne McCarthy and Eoin Mc Evoy
10 June	Luisa Castro ( <i>with</i> Keith Payne) and Katrina Naomi
8 July	Victoria Adukwei Bulley and Joseph Horgan
12 August	Ann Atkins and Amy Rugg
9 September	Paul McMahon and Massimo Lavelle
20 September	Anna D. and Farah Chamma
14 October	Ciara Ní É and Máire Ní Bhriain
11 November	Tom Hirons and Jeff Cottrill
9 December	Martina Evans
13 January	Jeanann Verlee and Lauren McNamara
10 February	New Creative Writing from UCC
10 March	Emily Davis Fletcher and James Harpur
14 April	Lucie Pereira, Dean Gessie & Em Egan Reeve

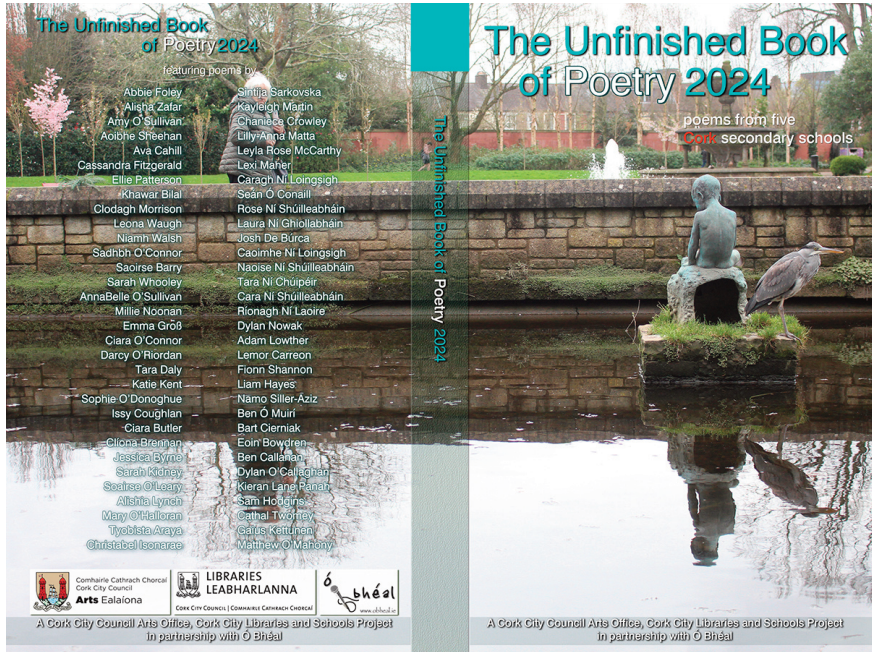


Sketches by Margaret Creedon O'Shea (2023)





# Ó Bhéal Publications 2024





12<sup>th</sup>  
ó bhéal

# winter warmer poetry festival

OPEN-MIC SHOWCASE  
EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE  
POETRY FILMS  
WORKSHOPS  
READINGS  
MUSIC

PHOTO BY  
BRENDAN DUFFIN



## 22nd-24th November 2024

Nano Nagle Place, Cork & via live stream

Free events, all welcome

Paula Meehan • Pedro Serrano • Mariá Lado • Lorenzo Mari • MacBóchra  
Louis de Paor • Maw Shein Win • Theo Dorgan • Emma McKervery  
Seamus Barra Ó Súilleabháin • Sébastien Revon ... & many more ...



**FULL PROGRAMME &  
LIVE-STREAM STAGE**  
**@obheal.ie IG: obheal**





Sketches by Margaret Creedon O'Shea (2024)







Winning poems and shortlisted entries from the 12th Five Words International poetry competition feature in this, the final edition of the *Five Words* series. Entrants were given just seven days to write and submit poems which include each of the five words offered on our website every Tuesday, over 42 weeks. Judge Lauren O'Donovan selected a shortlist of twelve from 500 entries.

April 14th 2025 is the 709th Ó Bhéal.

Our congratulations to winners ...

**Lucie Pereira (1st)**

**Dean Gessie (2nd)**

**Em Egan Reeve (3rd)**



Poems from Ó Bhéal's Monday evening events, Five Word Challenge poems written since April 2024, are also included, as are a selection of sketches by Margaret Creedon O'Shea (RIP), drawn over the past decade in Ó Bhéal. The five words used in Ó Bhéal's live events are provided spontaneously by those present on the night and the winner is chosen by audience response. While these compositions are written within fifteen minutes and may be considered as first drafts at the time of initial sharing, writers may make minor edits to their poems prior to publication here. Sometimes they appear in journals, collections and other publications. The Five Word Challenge is also known as the McNamara Slam, conceived by poetry aficionado and emcee Gerry McNamara.