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Judged by Gwyneth Lewis

Shortlisted Poems



a *national* competition to discover
the very best *international* poetry

Shortlisted Poems

presented in alphabetical order

| | |
|---|----|
| <i>An archaeologist digs up a family of four</i> Rae Howells..... | 3 |
| <i>Bipolar</i> David Walrond..... | 5 |
| <i>Clara the Rhinoceros</i> Stephanie Green..... | 6 |
| <i>First Steps in Fishguard</i> Guinevere Clark..... | 8 |
| <i>How to Take Up Writing Again</i> Jonathan Greenhouse..... | 10 |
| <i>Its for Tea</i> Frances Roberts-Reilly..... | 12 |
| <i>In, Over, Through, Off</i> Iris Anne Lewis..... | 13 |
| <i>Liberty</i> Gill Gregory..... | 14 |
| <i>Marshfield</i> Kit Griffiths..... | 15 |
| <i>Minna Wolff's Hair</i> Anna Kisby..... | 16 |
| <i>The Magician's Assistant</i> Kathy Miles..... | 18 |
| <i>The receipt from the pound-shop speaks</i> Lesley Curwen..... | 20 |
| <i>Translations of Grief</i> Kathryn Bevis..... | 21 |

RAE HOWELLS

An archaeologist digs up a family of four

You only had to pull back the dark blanket to find them.
Medieval, you think. The spine's flex
once unearthed not unlike the shape
your eldest curls her way into sleep,

fists to her cheeks, feet slotted together,
metatarsals to arch. Lifting its curve from
the wrinkled earth, you can easily imagine the
smallest mandible pressed into your collarbone

the way your youngest girl's jawbone does when you
carry her, sleeping, from your bed to hers, the
water weight of her slack body surrendered
along your shoulders' strength. You wonder

what took them. Scattered phalanges spread out on stones,
light as her fingers across violin strings.
Untucked from soil, the butterfly of the woman's pelvis
reminds you of the spectacular moment of birth, when

you watched your wife's hips splay impossibly
and then your daughter's compact form emerge,
the tiny face screwed up in temper,
every bone in your wife's miraculous body

altered, bent and remade from its form yet still
somehow unharmed. And there, at the grave's edge,
the largest skeleton, heavy-boned, helpless now,
shanks, ribs, the signs of wear and tear

on vertebrae, patella, calcaneus:
a father standing guard,
bearing the familiar marks on his bones
of his heart's best work.



Rae Howells is a poet, journalist and lavender farmer. She has won the Rialto and Welsh poetry competitions and featured in journals including *Magma*, *The Rialto*, *Poetry Wales*, *New Welsh Review*, and *Poetry Ireland*. Her co-authored pamphlet *Bloom & Bones* (Hedgehog) and her collection *The Language of Bees* (Parthian) are out now.



@raehowells



@Poet_Rae

DAVID WALROND*Bipolar*

All yesterday you were in charge. On top of words.
Just better than them. What ripostes. Crowd pleasing quips.
You put words in their place. They hurried when you called.
They stood in lines . They jumped when you said 'read my lips'.

Today is different. Words talk back, behind their hands,
smirk at those dirty truths about you, hard to hear,
use dialect they know you barely understand,
now that they smell, behind preposterous threats, such fear.

David Walrond has lived in Cornwall for the last 20 years and recently retired from working in further education. He won the Llanishen Comprehensive School Eisteddfod Poetry Prize in 1973 under a pseudonym. Shortly after that, he took a break from writing which lasted several decades but he has returned to it recently and was First Award Winner of Wales Poetry Award 2021.



STEPHANIE GREEN

Clara the Rhinoceros

Inspired by the Indian rhinoceros toured by Douwemont Van der Meer throughout Europe in the 18th century and the painting *La Mostra del Rinoceronte* by Pietro detto Longhi, 1751 (Ca'Rezzonico, Venice).

Orphaned pet, two-months old,
squeaking and squealing at the Nabob's table,
a tiny black horn sprouting
on top of your nose, a unicorn in armour:

Saucer-slurper, short-sighted snuffler,
licker of titbits from ladies' fingers
sucking with your delicate prehensile lips.
So adorable – your eyelashes and ear-fringes.

But once an adolescent, you lost your charm.
You'd outgrown yourself, dragging
your own warty skin like a tramp
wearing all her coats at once.

Bath-time was lily-pond Armageddon.
Your swivelling bulk too big for drawing-rooms,
porcelain-smasher, clock-toppler:
a cacophony of percussive smithereens,

zithery shivers and xylophone crescendos
of glass and marble drum-rolls,
and your pant-squeak, honk-bleat, roar-shriek,
ears and tail erect in shock.

Fortune-maker, wild card, the joker in the pack.
So your Grand Tour of Europe began:
gentle giant, three-toed ungulate,
Clara the Rhinoceros and her Potent Horn.

A sensation!

Bouffant wigs à la rhinocéros all the rage.
Beer-quaffing and pip-spitting your delight.
Oh, the joy of oranges at Versailles!

Now here, in the capital of exotics, Venezia,
Carnival revellers crave the new:
bulge-eyed ostriches, neck-gyrating giraffes,
and you, the ultimate Rococo grotesque.

Jaded pleasure-seekers, Venetians know
that below the grandeur of the Palazzo Ducale
lie dungeons of sighs. They too
want to shiver at the whiff of the damned.

But you, inscrutable as an idol, wreathed
in tobacco smoke, ignore the crowds:
Bautas, muzzles raised like wolves,
and the black Morettas, mirrors to your dark.

You turn your back on them, refuse to budge,
only a skin-twitch to whip-flicks.
Your verdict a turban-like turd of splendour
and stench, laced with orange-sweet urine.

Stephanie Green's pamphlets are *Glass Works* (Cat's Pyjamas Publications, 2005), shortlisted for the Callum McDonald Award and *Flout* (HappenStance, 2015). *Berlin Umbrella*, a poetry/sound walk, appeared in Berlin, 2018, and *StAnza*, 2020. *Rewilding*, her latest poetry/sound walk, is part of the Orkney Nature Festival, May 2023. She co-curates PoetryLit online, is a Dance critic and lives in Edinburgh.



GUINEVERE CLARK

First Steps in Fishguard

Your arms outstretch.
The world is a tight rope.

Gulls lodge in the rocks to watch.

We are in the highest cliff street,
hidden from heat. The last breaths
of one phase preparing to pass.

Your eyes lock on my face.
I am the target – low, alluring,
a nursery rhyme
 moon,
 beckoning you

through the silver-spun
dust of this rented room.

Muscles judder,
 incongruous, still
you pause on the edge
of the Persian rug.

Summer wind –
claps the cottage gate shut.

You launch – scuttling as prey
into that safe collapse,
clasp of my limbs,

the jigsaw of us, more in love
the more we are alone in this,

twisted together like addicts.



Guinevere Clark holds a PhD in Creative Writing from Swansea University, exploring motherhood, sexuality, and place. Her first poetry collection is *Fresh Fruit and Screams*, (Bluechrome). She's Highly Commended with Hammond House (2022), and *Ambit* (2020), appears in *Magma*, *A3*, *Minerva Rising*, *Culture Matters*, and *Atlanta Review*. She teaches poetry at The Taliesin Arts Centre and for a writers development project. She is part of the George Barker family.



@guinevere_baubo



@guinevere_clark_poetry



Poetry by Guinevere Clark



www.guinevereclark.com

JONATHAN GREENHAUSE

How to Take Up Writing Again

Lift up the pen. Raise it above your head
'til a sparrow snatches it.

Follow.

Sprint when necessary, not stopping to breathe.
Climb to its nest,
waiting for the bird to accept your presence.

Observe.

Take turns brooding, careful
to not monopolize time. Remember:
You're a guest here.

When hatchlings appear, don't be surprised
if they prefer you
over their natural mother. Don't gloat.

Now teach them to fly.

Upon falling, you'll break your spine.
Recovery will take time.

One of the fledglings will land at your bedside
clutching your pen in its beak:

Write.



Jonathan Greenhouse's first poetry collection, *Cupping Our Palms* (Meadowlark Press, 2022), was the winner of the 2022 Birdy Poetry Prize, and his poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Fish Anthology*, *The Ginkgo Prize for Eco-poetry*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *The Rialto*, and *The Poetry Society* website.



www.jonathangreenhouse.com

FRANCES ROBERTS-REILLY

Ils for Tea

The yog burns low after dark
The waning moon is hushed.
'Kushti light for catching Ils,' said Dadus,
Time to jal and catch some Ils

'Get me a ball of wool, ducks
Empty out the worm pail'
He threads the worms on the wool
'Them ils grabs on and don't let go.'

While the kam still sleeps, he returns
Them ils writhing in his sack.
Puts 'em in bucket and shoves
them under the bed.

All night long them ils they sloshed.
'Ils loves the dark,' he said.
Me mam takes 'em, whacks and
kills 'em right there on the pov.

Me Dadus nails them ils on a tree, stripping
off them skins with pliers.
Then he soaks them in salt water
'Gets rid of the mokadi, muddy taste,' he said.

Them ils we fried in butter on the yog
in a big black iron pot with a big handle over it.
We didn't wait for the hobben to finish.
We used to stick a fork in any cooked piece.
We wolfed them down.

Kushti bit of scan.

I love all these memories.
I'd forgot ils.

Yog – campfire
Dadus – dad, father
Ils – eels
Kushti – good
Jal – leave, go
Kam – sun
Pov – earth, ground
Mokadi – Taint
Hobin – cooking
Scran – food



Frances Roberts Reilly is a Romani writer, poet and filmmaker of mixed-heritage Welsh Gypsy-English, a direct descendant of Abram Wood. She has published numerous short stories, articles and poems. Her book is *Parramisha: A Romani Poetry Collection* (Cinnamon Press 2020). Frances is producer of Watershed Writers on Midtown Radio KW. She lives in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada. Her poem is dedicated Harry (Turpin) Wood, Welsh Rom rabbit catcher and fisherman.



@francescsr



@francesr66

IRIS ANNE LEWIS

In, Over, Through, Off

Always, when the men are away
at sea, and wind plays havoc
with waves, she picks up her knitting,
hears the ghostly chant
of her mother.

In, Over, Through, Off

All girls learn to knit, she said,
it's what we women do.
Taught her how to weave
needles in and out of yarn,
repeating her instructions
In, Over, Through, Off
until her fingers were fluent with wool.

It's calming to knit, her mother said,
in times of tempest and turmoil.
as needles clicked away the wintry hours.

In, Over, Through, Off

Gales and hail clamour
at doors and windows,
smoke from the chimney
billows through the room.

She pictures the pitch and yaw
of the trawler, picks up her knitting,
sets grim fingers to work.

In, Over, Through, Off

Iris Anne Lewis is originally from Wales and is widely published. She has featured in Black Bough Poetry's *Silver Branch Series*, won 1st prize in Gloucestershire Poetry Society competition and has been invited several times to read at the Cheltenham Literary Festival. In 2018 she founded Wordbrew, a Cirencester-based group of poets.

 @IrisAnneLewis



GILL GREGORY

Liberty

One small golden dragon
sat upon the spire

of a cathedral.

She was speared through
the mouth

and a small girl was gently
pulling it out –



Gill Gregory is the author of 4 books, including *In Slow Woods* (poetry) (Rufus Books, 2011). Sequences of poems appear in *The High Window* (2023) and *Stand Magazine* (2023). 'On The Departure Platform' (podcast relating to Thomas Hardy's poetry) is online with Poetry Exchange (2022).

KIT GRIFFITHS

Marshfield

I found the toadstools under our bed
enchanting - Mum said, "Try not to breathe too deep?"

I found her passed out on the new living room floor - I darted
 for the phone, dialled nine-nine- she sprang up like Uma Thurman
 "Very good, BUT you should've checked my mouth
 for chewing gum, in case I choked."

Before we'd finished unpacking, I snuck on the 007 cd - we
 drop-rolled doorway to doorway, clutching loaded bananas.

This was the summer we ran

in and out, squealing, bed-trampolining,
 flinging and fainting off sofa arms,
 strutting, once, down the dinner table
 in imaginary cowboy boots
 to 'A Change Would Do You Good.'

This was the summer we listened
 to our quiet in place of silence.

My brother raised sunflowers higher than the house.
 At least, above the bungalow's gutter -
 his flowers loomed higher in the hot blue sky
 than the man we were in hiding from.

Kit Griffiths is a 33 year old, Cardiff-born and raised (Merthyr on weekends), Cambridge-educated and Margate-based award-winning filmmaker and published poet whose pamphlet, *Old Poverty* (Earthbound Press, 2020). Kit is currently building a first full collection, a set of redemptive family portraits called *Delusions of Grandma*.

📷 @kit_griffiths

🌐 www.kitgriffiths.com



ANNA KISBY

Minna Wolff's Hair

- I. My grandmother's grandmother Minna left me her hair.
In the torn photograph, it curls unloosed to her waist.

Minna's hair is a ploughing of fertile soil with birds winging
behind the horse for worms. When she spills her hair

it is a pealing of bells & a startling of deer, disappearing
into the forest.

- II. In the forests that Minna once knew, trees are snakes
that circle out of baskets or drunks who writhe
& sleep where they fall.

Minna began by the River Neman & ended
by the Paddington Basin.
It's a balancing act to begin where

Napoleon floated on a raft & Hitler stood on a bridge
but it was always a tightrope of a river
flowing between dark borders.

- III. The winter she was twelve
Minna bent with her hands on her knees &
flipped the world upside down.

On the banks of the Neman, she saw an alder
with branches like wet hair streaming down a back,
kinked & dark.

She blinked & her own curls came in.
It took her a week to cross half-a-continent
& reach the right port.

- IV. My grandmother caught Minna's hair & held on tight
before I did.

It was her great vanity, uncut, a wandering line
drawn across a map. She tipped her head

to the sky & fell into a city pressed by clouds
like a violet in an album.

When my turn arrives, Minna's curls
are a forgotten tongue.
I have this wave, not one thing or the other.

- V. I have this other photograph of Minna.
Her dress is patterned like a pike
grasped from open water, lifted into air & light.

Minna is walking by the Regent's Canal
with her daughters, who have bobbed their hair.
Avenues of elms lift green silk parasols.

She tells them off, tells them of a forest
by a river, of wild wolves & how she sewed gold coins
into the seams of her dress before the crossing.

- VI. Before passing, her daughters tell their daughters
about Minna & these daughters

like ringlets coiled then released
like rings in a tree
mouth within mouth within mouth

tell me.

Anna Kisby is a writer and archivist, whose poetry often incorporates historical research. She's author of *All the Naked Daughters* (Against the Grain Press, 2017) and co-author of *Sea Between Us* (Nine Pens, 2022). Originally from London, Anna lives in Devon, UK.

 @annakisby



KATHY MILES

The Magician's Assistant

He performs the classic magic;
Needle Through Thumb and Twisting the Ace.
It's not all woofle dust, rabbits-out-of-hats,
sleeving bewildered doves from secret places.
His fingers are artful, full of subtlety;
I can't see the trick when he flicks them,
and a wedding ring appears on my left hand.

I shine on the stage. Lycra and sequins
make me glitter under lights. I reek of sweat
and Leichner, but the watchers never know.
All eyes are on him, on the things he can do.

I'm just a helpmate; anyone would suit
as long as they're blonde, hold their tongues,
smile as he blindfolds them, shackles arms
and feet. I'm the Radium Girl, Zig-Zag Girl,
whatever he wants me to be; a marked deck
when he holds the cards in his strong Mechanics' Grip.

He likes us corseted, small-breasted. Easier
to cram inside a tiny space, less distraction for
the crowds. Nothing to wreck the spell. The spotlight
needs to be on him, and not our cleavage.

There are so many ways you can break a woman;
lock her into a box, saw her in half, put her
through The Wringer; wrap your cloak around her,
clap hands, say *abracadabra* – she's not there.
Once, he levitated me, a floating corpse
in the air. That time, I left my body behind.

He gets the applause he deserves. The real magic
is going back each day, for more of the same old
sorcery, struggling through matinee and evening
show, not protesting when he lessens me.
The guilt when a trick goes wrong; it's never his fault.
Sometimes I'm my own illusion. Sometimes I escape.



Kathy Miles lives in West Wales. Her work has appeared widely in magazines and anthologies, and her fourth full collection, *Bone House*, was published by Indigo Dreams in 2020. She is a previous winner of the Wells Festival Poetry Competition, the Shepton Mallet Snowdrop Competition and the Bridport Prize.

 @Kathym974

 Kathy Miles

LESLEY CURWEN

The receipt from the pound-shop speaks

Thank you for your purchase.

You have bought the truck that brought it to the store
a tank of diesel and the driver's sausage bap

You have bought the warehouse that held it plus a thousand
like it and the forklift woman who shifted them

You have bought the forty-foot metal container
(painted green) that it travelled in

You have bought the shipping terminal
whose crane hauled it from the hold

You have bought a container ship, a month
of heavy bunker fuel and meals for seventeen crew

You have bought a factory in rural China, the injection moulds
that made your item and a tired man who pushed the button

Please note: no returns.



Lesley Curwen is a poet, broadcaster and sailor who lives in Plymouth. She often writes about the sea, our climate, loss and grief. Her poems have been widely anthologised and her work is soon to be published by Nine Pens in a *Nine Series* pamphlet.

 @elcurwen

 @elcurwen

 www.lesleycurwenpoet.com

KATHRYN BEVIS*Translations of Grief**Denial*

We meet each week. I tell her who I am today: how, in disbelief, I am a nursery of sardines. Go on, she says, and I speak of our flicking, cross-hatched skins, our silver, shoaling bodies, the swallowtail of our fins. I explain our obedience to the pull of colder currents, how we dine on blooms of plankton, how oblivious we are as dolphins wait to herd us toward a surface snatch, as gannets mass to fire themselves — gold hooded — a thousand arrows to the sea.

Anger

Next time, I'm fury sitting there. Zipped in a zebra suit, my nostrils flare. One word from her and my body is a bucking bronco that never wants to stop. I'm fabulous, of course — a fashion model with a perfect arse — dressed to kill in symmetrically shredded tights. I launch the designer handbag of myself, thrash my tail and mane. I hoof the box of tissues, boot old Freud and Jung and Klein onto the floor. My kick, we find, is fierce: too much for me to bear.

Bargaining

Friday, midday again, and I'm here on the dot as a lyrebird on her chair. I shrill, she nods in time to the rhythm of my tiny, clockwork heart. I'm haggling today with chirrups, whistles: *What if?*, *If only...*, *Why?* Rehearsed on the forest's

velvet-curtained stage, I negotiate
with all I've got these days: the tune
of chainsaws, the song of car alarms,
the camera shutters I must mime. I open
my throat, descant my own demise.

Depression

At last, one day, I come as myself.
The quiet holds us both. I try
to tell about the blue whale I'm trapped
inside. There's so much we don't yet know
about blue whales: how many they are,
and where they go to breed. But she knows
as well as me that a blue whale's heart
is the size of a Ford Fiesta: each chamber wide
enough for a drowning woman to pummel
herself against, each beat a boom against
her bones, a deep-sea detonation.

Acceptance

The months strobe by. I shapeshift again,
again, begin to believe
in the transubstantiation of the flesh.
I am a deep-sea jellyfish, pulsing
disco lights of green and yellow, red. I am
a black-capped squirrel monkey leaning
on a ledge, an elephant doggy paddling
in the rain. I feel my fins grow in. I know
this darting synchrony: I am sardines again.
I am the white ibis who stands one-legged on a rock.
To the sound of distant thunder, I am
the bushbuck – alive, *alive* and licking salt.

Kathryn Bevis is former Hampshire Laureate. Her poems appear in: *Poetry Review*, *Poetry Wales*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Magma*, and *The London Magazine*. Last year, her poems co-won the Mairtín Crawford Award for Poetry, the Poetry Society Members' Competition, and won the Second Light Competition. *Flamingo* is her debut pamphlet, published by Seren.

 @BevisKathryn



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