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**P O E T R Y**  
**W A L E S**



**A W A R D**

**2024-25**

# POETRY WALES AWARD

Previously known as the Wales Poetry Award, the **Poetry Wales Award** was established in 2019 by *Poetry Wales* magazine as a **national** competition seeking to discover the very best **international** poetry.

Since its inception, the **Poetry Wales Award** has had over 4000 entries, given out a dozen First, Second and Third Award prizes, and published over 50 winning and Highly Commended poems both on our website and in our magazine.

All entries are judged anonymously.

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## JEREMY DIXON

### POETRY WALES AWARD 2024/2025 JUDGE



Jeremy Dixon (he/him) is a prize-winning poet, editor and workshop leader. He is the author of the pamphlet *In Retail* (Arachne Press, 2019). His first full collection *A Voice Coming From Then* (Arachne Press, 2021) won the Wales Book of the Year Poetry Award 2022. He is co-editor of the anthology *JOY//US: Poems of Queer Joy* (Arachne Press, 2024). His new pamphlet of Polari-inspired poems *Bold in the Life* has just been published by Broken Sleep Books.

# POETRY WALES AWARD

## FIRST AWARD WINNER NATASHA GAUTHIER 'VIA CRUCIS ON THE PICCADILLY LINE'



Natasha Gauthier (she/her) is a Canadian poet living in Cardiff. A 2024-25 Representing Wales alumna, she has appeared in *Poetry Wales*, *Scintilla*, *Ink*, *Sweat and Tears*, and *Black Iris*, among others. Her work will be featured in the upcoming *Afonydd* anthology (Arachne). She is nominated for the 2025 Forward Prize.



@tigerbaynatasha



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@NatashaGauthier | @TigerBayPoetry

## NATASHA GAUTHIER

### Via Crucis on the Piccadilly Line

The auntie on the Cockfosters train wears a t-shirt  
proclaiming Jesus is the WAY, the TRUTH, the LIGHT.

I know, without needing to ask, that a cheap rosary from Fatima  
or Lourdes tangles around her handbag mints like a string

of Christmas lights. A fancier set hangs from the mirror  
of her husband's Mercedes, Our Lady on her blue bungee,

warding off accidents and death. Auntie drones daily novenas  
for her daughter, sitting shameless next to her. The girl

has a Kali tattoo, talks back and has stopped going to Mass,  
they snipe at each other in-between stations, on either side

of the scrimmage-line pole, in accents my people would have had  
If they had come here instead of Canada. Later at dinner, my family

will watch me eat from their silver frames on the walls of a jazz bar  
in Kensington, slight women in saris and beehives, small grinning men



draping arms over each other in front of the cricket club in wide ties  
and high-waisters, or playing baritone sax and upright bass for dancers  
in post-Raj rooms. Maybe our photos in their striped satin albums fell  
overboard, floated ashore, found their way to a Notting Hill charity shop  
to be plundered for atmosphere. In truth, they are not my relatives  
at all, even though I know their faces, the smell of their Shalimar  
and cigars, their correct, topiaried voices, English roses on jacarandas,  
just like the sound of this woman and her daughter, fighting Christ  
and the Devil on a train to my childhood, where my mother waits  
on the platform, worrying, clutching a prayer-book and a slap.

# POETRY WALES AWARD

## SECOND AWARD WINNER NATASHA BORTON

'BUCKET HAT BOIS'



Natasha Borton (she/her) is a poet, musician and theatre-maker from Wrexham. She uses performance and music as tools for connection and discussion. Her poetry is rooted in identity and community and everyday folklore. She hosts Voicebox Wxm, supporting emerging and diverse voices and she is part of Representing Wales 24/25.



@tashabpoetry



@NatashaBorton

## NATASHA BORTON

### Bucket Hat Bois<sup>1</sup>

At full time bois bach<sup>2</sup> brave the trek to'r Dafarn.<sup>3</sup>

*Turn it up la, Yma o<sup>4</sup>*

He breathes into last season's crest.

Pawb<sup>5</sup> pulls at the table

mwyl<sup>6</sup> bums than chairs, mwyl legs than lads.

Drops his bucket hat to the sand

that swimming sun reclaimed

with two's stained fingers

his other hand rubs the Queen's

nose on a fiver collapsed into his pocket.

Around his neck the chain

his Taid<sup>7</sup> wore 'til death

Mam<sup>8</sup> cursive to collarbone like

the pulsing tide.

Shouts behind *Where we headed?*

*West la,*

*Straight into the sea*

Where buoys mark their depth.

- <sup>1</sup> Welsh: Bois - Guys
- <sup>2</sup> Welsh: Bois Bach - Little Guys
- <sup>3</sup> Welsh: To'r Dafarn - to 'the pub'
- <sup>4</sup> Welsh: Yma o - 'here from'
- <sup>5</sup> Welsh: Pawb - Everyone
- <sup>6</sup> Welsh: Mwy - More
- <sup>7</sup> Welsh: Taid - Grandad
- <sup>8</sup> Welsh: Mam - Mum

# POETRY WALES AWARD

## THIRD AWARD WINNER LIAM BATES

'MAGIC'



Liam Bates (he/him) is a poet based in Lancashire. He won a Northern Writers' Award and has been published in *Magma*, *Under the Radar*, *Berlin Lit* and elsewhere. His two pamphlets and his debut collection, *Human Townsperson*, are available from Broken Sleep Books.



@liambatespoet



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## LIAM BATES

### Magic

A man at the front was yelling  
he knew how I did that  
after every trick. At what stage  
does a thought become  
an act? An attitude like that  
won't appear out of nowhere,  
how is a feeling like a fruit,  
when does a shoot become a plant,  
how does a baby grow *ta-da*  
from cosmic to a boy and how  
does that boy become a man  
who buys a ticket to my show  
just to heckle, I wondered,  
fumbling a bullet catch,  
losing another tooth.

## **SHORTLIST**

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**when i came out to my family in that Airbnb  
in Rome**

Teddy Mills

**Winter Flowering**

Sophia Argyris

**ANNA BOWLES**

## **February the Thirty-Seventh**

*For Yulia*

My Masters degree and I  
knew Russia would never really invade.  
Not *like this*.

\*

In March, it's still February  
as the map crackles and shrinks,  
blackens towards Kyiv.

The reeling city bleeds people.  
Your friends' kitchens yield mouldy onions,  
champagne, washing-up and a refugee hamster.

Telegram pleads: *Driver needed...*  
*... elderly... medicine ...*  
Empty playground. Train window.

On the hallway plastic mattress, sleepers  
jostle out of rhythm with artillery  
up in Irpin. You scream into a towel.

My gift from London:  
*Summary of official guidance*  
*on how to survive a gas attack.*

Your flatmate won't sleep near glass.  
From the devil-glow of Irpin,  
a shockwave rides south.

\*

Each February dawn I levitate,  
and feed myself sick on news.  
*Kyiv rocked overnight by new explosions.*

Tanks crawl dogged round my brain.  
It's, what, February the thirty-fifth?  
Evacuation train doors slice off your family.

*Fears that the capital will be encircled.*  
Kyiv is a thicket of hedgehogs, jilted kiosks  
and posters for luxury flats in Bucha.

England's a pale concern of drifting phantoms.  
I'm cracked on the London pavement, marvelling  
at puddles of iridescent filth.

Andriy texts from a basement:  
*They are wiping Mariupol  
from the face of the earth.*

In Kyiv, the sirens give you three minutes notice:  
just enough time to boil coffee.  
Your cat eyes the hamster.

\*

Video call. *Occupied airstrike*  
*curfew missile checkpoint...*  
I hold a thimble to your haemorrhage,

then we voyage separately to dawn.  
Time stamps in Telegram  
show that you finally slept.

You say the night you first  
dreamed of the war was  
when it became real.

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## ANNA BOWLES

Anna Bowles (she/her) is a freelance editor and pro-Ukrainian activist. Since Russia's invasion she has divided her time between London and Ukraine. Her poetry is a response to her experiences and has been published in a number of magazines and placed in competitions over the past year.



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## RICHARD LEWIS

### The Circus

My performance was flawless. I now bask, breathless,  
in a red and white waiting room, stroking my wrists wrapped  
by a first-year resident. I recognise him from my first job  
juggling burgers at sixteen. He doesn't recognise me.  
In his smart checkered shirt and clean-shaven jaw, nurses  
look up to his ringmaster authority with gasps and awes.  
I'm ignored by two strongmen in hi vis leotards  
guarding the entrance, crushing their phones like apples.  
In school it was a punchline. 'you're mad', they would joke,  
'you'll end up in Cefn Coed.' Can you hear the applause?  
That's midnight, its fireworks exploding over the sea,  
the start of a New Year. Breathe. Take a deep bow.  
It's tomorrow. You're still here. On with the show.



## RICHARD LEWIS

Richard (he/him) is a writer from Swansea. In 2015 he was second prize winner of the Terry Hetherington award, and in 2018 he won the Foley Poetry prize. He has had poems appear in publications including *Bare Fiction Magazine*, *Ink Sweat & Tears*, *London Grip New Poetry* and *Shot Glass* journal.

## HEATHER CHAPMAN

### Kiss Me Like I'm Edward II

Like divine judgement is hanging  
above our heads, a fashionable kicking  
blade. Kiss me like compassion, the kingdom  
devastated by fire. Like an enemy army  
storming ashore, the water choking  
on every anchored foot. What does it matter?  
Touch my neck like the golden ram, tripping  
through whispering cloud. Tell me  
you'd die for duty, die for dying's sake. Kiss  
my palm. It doesn't count. I am not my own.  
God cinches each of my breaths to the next,  
my voice the hollow toll of a ruby  
stumped in a crown. Whatever.  
Don't cry! Look at me like I've found out  
about your politics, your piracy.  
Like I don't mind too much.  
Put on my spurs. Let's pretend  
I am flush from battle, frost wincing  
on my boots. You're flighty, fancying  
a challenge. Pluck a thousand knights  
from their beds with mythic talons.

You are leaving - you are leaving  
because I ordered you to. Funny story.  
I am turning my hand to other matters -  
my palm angling the certainty of a country.



## HEATHER CHAPMAN

Heather (she/her) is a Durham University student. She was a 2023 Foyle Young Poet, and was shortlisted for the 2024 Tower Poetry competition. Her work is published or forthcoming in *The Garlic Press*, *Bloodletter*, *Disco Kitchen* and *Carmen et Error*. She likes vampires, sestinas, and Edward II.



@heatherchapman4523

## GARNETT 'RATTE' FROST MANSCAPE

A facial flourish not fit for everyone  
Separating the Cubs from the Bears  
The moustache's butch brother grows

Free to express, impress, or just trim  
A must for any Santa or wizard  
Testosterones six o'clock shadow  
Remnants of a head full of hair  
A sign of age, if not wisdom  
Nature's crumb catcher  
Embraces faces whilst  
Always snagging in zips  
Not just for men  
Harnaam Kaur at her  
Most feminine  
Hiding where  
The chin  
Actually  
END

s



## GARNETT 'RATTE' FROST

Garnett 'Ratte' Frost (he/him): Wirral based dyslexic Transman with an English BA. He is also an ink and wire artist. Co-facilitator of Merseyside LGBTQI+ Creative Writing group, Queer the Page. Published in Writing on the Wall's *TranScripts*, *Moving Foreword*, *Write Minds*, *Surface/Below* anthologies and *Joy//Us* by Arachne press.



@RatteWrites



## ELIZABETH WILSON

### Mulholland Drive Weather Report

*'Everyone, have a great day'* David Lynch (1946-2025)

You want me to make this easy for you? No fucking way!  
It's not gonna be. We merge, we double, reality blurs and breaks,  
twists and bends, the city burns with passions, our days  
ooze dark and vast. We act, react, we dream, we wake

deliriously we interpret, reinterpret, try to illuminate, make sense,  
yet Hollywood's narrative lies rebellious, wild along that road  
and all along the way stars flare, with energy and brilliance,  
blaze then fade and die. Dead end. Their story's closed.

Tonight the owls are crying. The Sunset wildfires swirl  
in Santa Monica, the city burns untamed  
a starless smouldering breathless tale of loss starts to unfurl,  
and this is how it ends. Once he claimed 'love is a bird of flame,

coming into a dark world'. Today, no music, no *Llorando*.  
Fade black. No weather to suggest. *Silencio*.



## ELIZABETH WILSON DAVIES

Elizabeth Wilson Davies (she/her) is a poet from Pembrokeshire in west Wales. She has an MA in Creative Writing and a PhD in Post-colonial Literatures and has received a New Writer's Bursary and mentoring support through the Literature Wales scheme.

## DOMINIC FISHER

### Black rubber on the hard shoulder

Then call this road reality  
its white chevrons, overhead signs

its mallow flowers streaking  
down the central reservation

a magpie, cruciform, landing  
on the nearside crash barrier

and one Hell's Angel vanishing  
out to a point on the windscreen.

Call this road karma, the way home  
or the history of the nation

where a dark car is overtaking  
with lights like half-hooded eyes

trucks like freezers alongside us.  
Contact info, slogans, logos

and midday dazzling a river  
also blinding our mirrors.

Black rubber, flat fox, hard shoulder.  
Bald truths on an island of lies.



## DOMINIC FISHER

Dominic Fisher (he/him) lives near the allotment in Bristol he shares with sparrows and foxes. An English language teacher for many years, he was a co-editor of *Raceme* magazine, is widely published, and sometimes broadcast. His second collection, *A Customised Selection of Fireworks*, was published by Shoestring Press in 2022.



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## ZAIN RISHI

### Potter's Field

*for Abdullah*

I knew that to win a fight  
with my brother, the trick  
was to go for his wrists.

Elbows locked, toes  
gripping the moss-  
margined tiles, I'd thrash

him every time, red  
with satisfaction, hungry  
for more as we split

like yolk, the clouds  
kneeling to ask what even  
was the point of it?

That was the summer  
we buried a bird, the ground  
black and dandruffed

below the chamomile sun.  
We were always digging  
up old ghosts, making

room for new ones  
in the hollows we circled  
like Kaabas in the dirt.

I would watch him work  
like a god, before Maghrib  
filled the dark with djinn

and other flora. The year  
he outgrew me, I began  
to keep pot plants

as friends, not decorations.  
I learnt the hardest thing  
is staying clean, finding

dirt in places it doesn't  
belong. So much heaven  
left to scrub off your wrists.



CREDIT: CHRISTA HOLKA PHOTOGRAPHY

## ZAIN RISHI

Zain Rishi (he/him) is a writer and bookseller based in Edinburgh. He won Third Prize in the 2024 Oxford Poetry Prize and is a Young Poets Network prizewinner. His work has appeared in Fourteen Poems, Horizon, Gutter and Propel. He is currently working on his debut poetry pamphlet.



@zain.rishi

## GINNY DARKE

### Sea Witch

I am four drinks in, poolside  
and the sun is hurting my eyes.  
Tomorrow, I'll let you peel  
my skin off my back  
like you filet a salmon.  
I go looking for the oracle  
in the deep end of the  
chlorinated public pool.  
I glimpse her in the corner  
near the ladder. She is pearl  
on black velvet, her arms  
limper than I first expected.  
I've heard she is something  
to fear and that her skin is translucent,  
or at least in this light it is.  
She told me never to trust  
a boy with a biblical name.  
She gestures to the blue floor tiles  
where I think about sleeping,  
only to awaken with a layer  
of sand on top of me.  
There is an anemone  
on my left big toe and I let it rest



## GINNY DARKE

Ginny Darke (she/her) is a Welsh writer based in Bristol, U.K. Her poetry has been shortlisted for the Foyle Young Poets award (2018) and the Creative Futures award (2019, 2020). Her work has been published with *Poetry Northern Ireland*, *Anthropocene*, *The Remnant Archive*, *Al Literary Review* and *Ink, Sweat and Tears*.



## TEDDY MILLS

### when i came out to my family in that Airbnb in Rome

A ghost lodged itself in that hollow place behind my collarbone. I turned counselor in my sister's grief, soaked up her wine-slick tears as I assured her that I was sane, that I'd be the same, that I wouldn't change, not really. (I was a small thing then and didn't know how I would grow around the ghost). Just bowed my head and held them all. My sisters and our mother asked their questions and we laughed around the new sounds unconvincing: son, brother. My stepdad sat still in the corner. After, I smuggled my shade on the plane back home then tried to find a place to put her. I looked in all the drawers for space but they overflowed with cups and plates, the Christmas tree, prom dresses, make believe. I combed through my journals for an empty page but they all blurred before me. I went into the garden to see if I could find a pot to put this seed in, but everything was frozen shut. I was frozen shut. There was a cold ghost inside me and a burning. I had never carried a ghost before and I didn't know what I should do. I was prepared for

pain but not for this. I didn't know I would get a  
ghost. I went to bed and we curled around each  
other like parentheses: the new me and the old  
me / the same me and the changed me / the  
beginning and the end



## TEDDY MILLS

Teddy Mills (he/him) earned his PhD in Applied Linguistics from Swansea University in 2024. He lives in Swansea and spends most of his spare time on the beach with his dog.



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## SOPHIA ARGYRIS

### Winter-Flowering

My mother taught me to follow  
a recipe. I think of her each time I break  
a rule. I think of my father when I'm bad

with money, too lazy to fix even one small  
corner of my life. We go grey so slowly  
have you noticed? From the tips of our fingers

it spreads stealthily inwards. Only happiness  
and salt water could make us whole.  
Forty-five minutes after birth, fawns stand

flick their ears at flies. We take years  
to walk and be dissatisfied. In December  
the sky gives in to relentless murk

but the buds on a winter-flowering plant still open.  
I will boil an orange, blend it all into the cake.  
Dimple of rind, fascia of pith, flush of juice,

trace of bitterness. My mother strong-armed  
eggs into stiff peaks. She and my father liked  
to sing often, but in different situations.

She when driving, he when walking  
or sitting in a restaurant. He sang me an entire  
blues number once, by the river Spey.

Considering this orange, I think I feel young  
enough to understand new truths and how  
to wear bright colours on dark days.



## SOPHIA ARGYRIS

Sophia Argyris (she/her) is of British-Greek origin, grew up in Belgium and Scotland. Her work has appeared in *MsLexia*, *Poetry London*, *Under the Radar*, Live Canon Prize anthology. Her pamphlet *Heronless*, (Palewell Press) published in 2025, and her forthcoming pamphlet *Blood Tundra* will be published by Broken Sleep in 2026.



@Sophia\_Argyris

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