

P O E T R Y
W A L E S



A W A R D

2026

THE SHORTLIST

ABOUT US



Poetry Wales is the Welsh home of international poetry.

We're all about celebrating exceptional poetry and supporting the people who write it. We're here to shine a spotlight on remarkable poetry, no matter where it comes from. We hold the door open for Welsh and Wales-based poets to share their words with the world, and we invite writers from every corner of the globe to bring their work to the Welsh page.

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 5,000 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.

MEET OUR JUDGE

BETHANY HANDLEY

POETRY WALES AWARD 2026 JUDGE

Bethany Handley is an award-winning writer, poet and disability activist from South Wales. Named one of the UK's ten most influential disabled people in politics, law, and media by the Shaw Trust 2024, she campaigns for disability rights and better access to nature. An ambassador for Country Living's Access for All, Wales Coast Path and Ramblers Cymru, her debut poetry pamphlet *Cling Film* was published by Seren in 2025. Bethany co-edited *Beyond / Tu Hwnt*, a ground-breaking bilingual anthology of Welsh Deaf and disabled writers which was shortlisted for the 2026 Discover award in the British Book Awards. Her work has been featured by BBC One, BBC Radio 1, BBC Radio 4, the Poetry Foundation, Country Living, the Guardian and more. Her first work of narrative non-fiction, *My Body is a Meadow*, is published by Headline Press in 2026.



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PRESENTED ALPHABETICALLY

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KATIE BESWICK

Class War

At Tate Modern we're looking at Joan Mitchells play-school colours kick in frantic lines my rich friend tells me her children love their new private school in my school ants crawled across lunch tables which also were our history desks it was one classroom with no separate dinner hall my friend says all she ever wanted was the best for her own children not at the expense of anyone else's and how impossible babe like that celebrity with the city name the famous dad announcing her new baby birthed from someone else's womb in exchange for money all around the painted lines stab like so much frenzy outside women starve themselves so their kids can eat and if I stretch there's some baby choking on particles such thick air it needs its real mum you'll do anything to save yourself in the cafe I order a giant meringue and a hot chocolate so sweet I'll feel sick all day my friend pays I'm just like anyone else thinking I deserve exactly what it is I want.

JEANETTE BURTON

My grandmother and her sixteen siblings bake potatoes at Denby Hall Colliery, October 1925

They are their own organised workforce,
setting off much later than the miners,
but with no less purpose, striding out

over gardens, back yards, under lines
of washing, through jittys, past the church,
seaming the landscape with their procession.

Travelling light, no snap tins or Davy lamps,
just potatoes, picked from the vegetable patch.
The eldest take the lead out front, commandeer

the cream of the crop, smooth as pebbles.
Following closely behind, the middle children,
my grandmother being the mean, make do with

misshapen spuds, knuckle-hard, full of eyes.
The youngest, stragglers at the tail end,
are left with the off-shoots, runts, stunted

by drought, barely formed. Umbilical roots
still attached, the little ones make a game
of their soon-to-be lunch, wheeling tubers

high above their heads. Their big brothers
and sisters appoint themselves gaffers,
call an end to breaktime. Returned to shift,

they press on, marching over fields, stone stiles,
zigzagging woods, leapfrogging tree stumps.
Finally, on reaching the pit hill, they locate

the natural stove, a hollowed-out scrap of ground,
a mix of coal and slurry, warmed by the heat
of the earth, the machinery, the men, the animals.

The foreman of this unlikely team, a sibling
nearing adulthood, gathers in the small harvest,
places it in the makeshift oven, alongside

that other familiar harvest. All of them
amateur chefs now, prodding and poking
their one ingredient with foraged utensils,

turning each morsel until milky-brown skin
thickens, shrivels, blackens, becomes
indistinguishable from the rocks beneath.

Later, they savour the burnt bitterness, peel
off the crisp jackets to find fleshy goodness.
In this own open-air mess hall, sated,

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stomachs silenced for now, they await their
underground counterparts, that bumper crop
of men, soon to emerge as if for the very first time,

pushing up through soil, growing towards the light.

MANJU DEVI

The Glassblower's Daughter Considers Her Inheritance

My father's world was breath and fire.
His lungs were bellows, his cheeks two sails
bulging with the effort of creation.
He'd gather molten honey on the rod's end,
roll it, shape it with wet newspaper
that hissed and steamed. Then blow:
a bubble of impossible thinness growing
in the heart of the furnace's roar.

He made vessels meant for light to fill.
I watched them cool on the annealing rack,
their colours slowing from rage-orange
to rose, to amber, to a final, fragile clarity.
He said the secret was in the cooling,
the patient surrender of the heat.
Too fast, and it shatters from the inside,
holding its own tension like a secret.

My inheritance is not his skill.
My breath is shallow, my hands unsteady.
I have the weak eyes of a reader,
not the furnace-squint of a maker.

What he passed to me is a vibration,
a pitch too high for most to hear:
the constant, almost-silent ring
of everything on the verge of breaking.

I hear it in the jam jar on the sill,
singing with the morning sun.
In the windshield, a complex chord
of temperature and tension after frost.
My teacup chimes a tiny, porcelain note
when the spoon stirs. My world is a menagerie
of held breaths, of strained, transparent skins.

He is gone now. His great furnace cold.
But in my quiet house, I am the curator
of his fragile zoo. I dust the shelves
that hold his creatures: a swan with a neck
curved like a question mark, a vase
streaked with cobalt like a captured storm,
a paperweight with a trapped swirl of white
that never settles. They do not hold water.
They hold the memory of his exhalation.

Sometimes, in the deepest hour of the night,
I swear I hear them. A faint chorus,
a harmonic of strain and beauty.
They are not singing of their form.

They are singing of the fire that made them,
of the breath that is their only reason,
of the long, slow letting go of heat.
They are singing of the inevitable.

I walk through rooms of glorious, transparent
pressure. I am the only opaque thing here.
My body, solid, stubborn, full of faults.
But when I stand very still, and breathe,
I feel it: the same fragile vessel, blown
from different elements, cooling too quickly,
holding a tension I cannot release.
I am my father's most complex piece.

And in my chest, a different furnace burns.
It does not melt sand. It melts experience
into a slower, darker syrup. I gather it
on the punty rod of language, I roll it
on the marver of the page. I blow
not with lung, but with attention,
trying to shape a bubble that can hold
the plain, stark light of being here.

It never cools. It never sets. It trembles,
on the verge of form, on the verge of shattering.
A flawed, enduring draft. I send it out
into the world's anneal, hoping the air

will be kind. Hoping it might hold, for a moment,
the shape of the breath that made it,
before it returns to the common silica of dust.

Footnote:

Punty rod, marver, anneal: Tools and processes in glassblowing. The punty rod is used to hold the glass, the marver is a steel table for rolling and shaping, and annealing is the controlled cooling process.

RAJENDRA PRASAD GUPTA Feedback Loop as First Language

A note on form: The forward slashes (/) indicate a simultaneous, overlapping voice—the internal hum of the hearing aid’s feedback loop.

My grandmother’s voice was a radio tuned to a station / fading.
Mine is a bone-conducted vibration, a fossil / in the making.
The audiologist calls it loss. I call it / translation.

This is the grammar of my ear:
the whine of the fluorescent sun/ a persistent vowel,
the refrigerator’s mantra/ a low and consonant drone.
Silence is never empty. It is a room / ringing
with the ghosts of sound, a bell jar / humming.

The aid is a seashell lodged in cartilage.
It doesn’t give me back the world/ but a version of it—
filtered, processed, a curator of / noise.
The wind on the microphone is a roaring/ god.
A crumpling bag is a gunshot. Your laughter
arrives as a stuttering pulse, a morse code / I feel
before I decode. I read your face / like a weather map,
your mouth shaping clouds/ of meaning.

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At the party, I am an etymologist / of fragments.
I collect syllables from the air, piece them into / possible
sentences. “How...week...you?” becomes “How was your week?”
It is guesswork. It is archaeology in / real time.
The feedback loop, that high-pitched / scream
only I can hear, is my mother tongue. / A private frequency.
It sings when I hug someone, when the phone / is too close,
a duet between machine and body, / a secret.

I have learned the topography of your throat / as you speak.
The way your jaw tenses on a hard ‘g’. / The flutter
of a fingertip on a tabletop for / emphasis.
The world is not less. It is / different.
I hear the scaffolding of sound, / its architecture.
The rumble before the train arrives. / The sub-bass
of a slammed door travelling up / the spine.

Sometimes, I switch it all off.
The silence floods back, a deep / and velvet sea.
In it, I am not broken. I am / whole.
My own pulse is the only drum. / My own breath,
the only wind. It is a country / where I know
every law, every contour. A quiet / so absolute
it has its own pressure, its own / weight.

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But I return. To the fractured choir, / the cacophony.
To the messy, imperfect translation. / Because here,
in the feedback loop between silence and / noise,
is where I live. Where a dropped spoon / is a cymbal crash,
and your hand on my arm is a complete / sentence.
Where listening is not a passive act, / but a reaching.
A constant, brave negotiation / with the static,
plucking meaning from the air / like a fruit
from a charged and buzzing tree.

BEN GWALCHMAI

Dignity: 2. How to dance with care

She still dances, just not to music nor in
a ballroom; today she has an audience and,
it being a good day, she relishes the stranger.

She leads but I, I know the dance and I
have since twelve; it's not the foxtrot,
waltz, or salsa but something far more

balletic. We stand 4 yards apart,
in poised silence, waving our gripped hands
from our wrists, until the sheet's creases come

undone and we can fully outstretch our arms,
tilt them 45 right then 90 left and back to
making our bodies a t-shape again

until it's time to fold and count, fold
and tug at the new folds of the space between us;
finally, we walk in and I bend the sheet up.

There are days when she forgets my name
and dignity means listening, waiting, then
there are days when dignity means dancing.

TAIWO HASSAN

conversations with my mother on the prayer mat

*allahu akbar/ this might be a supplication/ where its end/ is a
pyre/ where fears replace corpses/ where my mother/ is
another synonym/ for God/ and promises of a miracle burn./ on
mornings/ like these/ i fold myself/ on a prayer mat/ a journey/ i
begin/ with a damp body/ inside and out/ my troubled spirit/
seek answers/ in the embrace of *wuduu*/ heaviness replaces my
soles/ and my voice/ becomes a stranger/ *iqamah*/ thoughts
seep in/ and ordinary names/ don't do them justice./ i
remember you/ *iyá beji*/ your face/ melting my worries to sand/
your lips/ a smile/ then a line/ then a verse/ then a supplication
/ *táyélolú, rántí*./ i / a wall/ *ruku'u*/ your words/ *subhana rabbi al
adheem*/ i remember the first time/ you taught me/ to pray/ to
find an anchor/ in the unknown/ to be a testament/ of elements/
that latch on to hope/ even in the dark./ *màámi, mo kúkú rántí*/
how threads/ of your light/ morphed into strings/ then knots/
then these knees/ then the ground/ *subhanah rabbi al a'ala*/
how like the rain/ i fell/ and promises/ nested on my back/ is
this how/ a boy/ learns/ the science of diffusion?/ carry my
hands, mother/ can you feel the hollow/ in their bones? / hold
each finger/ the cold on every nail/ is this where i let you go?/
where i melt into everything/ but peace?/but you?/ *asalam
alaikum warahmatullah*.*

STEPHEN JOFFE DUOLINGO.

i am learning spanish
so i can speak with my father's ghost
the next time he visits
my dreams.

there are questions
i have for him
that cannot be answered
in the language by which
he raised me-

the one he lost toward the end
as the cancer ate his brain:

moving through the house;
turning out the lights
one at a time,
until all was dark
& quiet.

i still get stuck
between the past and future tenses.

tuve, tendré
i had, i will have.

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perdí, perderé

i lost, i will lose.

i want to ask him:

¿por qué no me enseñaste a hablar contigo?

¿qué temías que dijera?

PATRICK JONES Know their Names

A Welsh morning at 7 am on October 4th 2025 people
gather to say the names of Palestinian children killed by
Israeli forces since October 7th 2023

To bear witness.

To say they existed. Were seen and loved.

The syllables stick in my throat

The rhythm of the reader rocks my head like a tidal wave

The volunteers start with the names of those children who had
not reached their first birthday

The names fly off into the dawn like doves

Noura, Maryam, Fatima, Oday, Mohammed, Adam
Zero. Years. Old.

The clock ticks

People pass on their way home, to work.

Look.

Look away

Page after page after page of children's names

All those dreams, those scuffed knees, those questions,
those smiles

Wiped out like sandcastles on a beach

What possibilities extinguished by
a cowardly hand pulling a trigger.

An afternoon somewhere in Palestine.

LEENA JOSHI

City Born

I was born where the ground forgets itself.
Concrete teaching the feet to hurry.
Sky rationed between buildings.
Even the trees learned to apologise
for taking up space.

Still, the body remembered green.
Some older instinct stirred.
At the sight of water holding ducks,
my heart broke open.
Their small, serious paddling.
The casual miracle of it.

In the park, grass performs wilderness.
It does its best.
A pond pretends to be ancient.
I kneel as if at a shrine.
My breath alters.
Something feral wakes.

I am ridiculous with longing.
I count birds like blessings.
I touch bark as if it might speak back.
Every leaf feels like evidence
that another life is possible.

The city taught me spectacle.
Nature taught me attention.
In the countryside I imagine,
nothing asks to be impressive.
Fields exist without permission.
Silence holds its ground.

I picture myself there.
Mornings rinsed in birdsong.
Mud honest on the hem.
Time paced by light rather than clocks.
A life where my nervous system
finally loosens its grip.

Yet even here, between sirens and glass,
the wild finds me.
A weed splitting stone.
A fox crossing headlights.
Rain reclaiming the street.

Perhaps longing is inheritance.
A memory carried forward.
The body knows what it needs
before it knows where it belongs.

When I watch the ducks,
they do not ask my origin.

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They accept my stillness.
For a moment,
the city loosens,
and I am held by water,
by wings,
by the quiet truth
that loving the earth
is already a form of return.

MICHAEL KELLEHER

Notes on withdrawal

Why do you get so angry
when it's me who says "I'm sorry?"
I dread this world designed for hearing
though I lived there many years,

have mastered the art of folding,
to wrap myself within,
keep the outside world right there,
let my private orchestra

play melodies that only I can hear,
convey another world, calm my soul.
Secret arias sing of unrequited love,
overtures swirl swans around the stage,

live paintings on a silent canvas
bring waves of quiet applause.
I like living here inside,
my mind a symphony of coloured sounds,

arrangements of fragile beauty,
shelters from the constant pound of drums,
harmonies infinitely more pleasant
than the impenetrable roar outside.

ALEX SCARBOROUGH to a can of Red Bull

all

raw

life

packed with phosphoric power squeezing into an outfit so silver so svelte dressed to impress back alley skaters & park bench goths they all want a taste of you & nestle you in their soft palms because you speak the same tongue & when they kiss you they taste pixie dust dreams & yes you promise to shoot them to the skies & yes many a stressed adolescent can testify to your powers and yes some have said you are and I quote *the secret source to my success* but in truth your words are webs of fiction meticulously crafted from word clouds in a boardroom your kisses are carbonated & passionless you are a false prophet you are john terry in full kit (shinpads & all) lifting a trophy you did not play any part in winning but here I am drawing another one of you from the glove compartment lukewarm as I hand it to the possessed driver with whom I have spent unfathomable hours but can't decide if I love or loathe as we accelerate towards another speedbump to see if we can fly higher this time

JOSHUA SEIGAL Football on the Radio

There he is, my dad, listening to the radio
at the kitchen table. No internet back then,
no mobile phones – I'm lying in bed

and he's downstairs, following the match
through the crackle and static,
adjusting the aerial to get the right signal.

See him now, banging his fist, a whoop
and a clap when we score, a colourful curse
when the run of play doesn't go our way.

And there I am, six years old, downstairs now
on a school night, sitting on his knee,
listening to the match on that little box

and I can't quite work out what's going on
but here we are, and he holds me tight, and
we're winning, we're winning, we're winning.

GORDON TAYLOR A QUEER BOY WATCHES MOVIES ON SUNDAY

first i was Kate Hepburn
in On Golden Pond hoping
my family would get along

i was also her daughter Jane
Fonda waiting for my father
to say he loved me before he died

i was Julianne Moore hiding
in the bathroom in The Hours
pretending to be fine

trapped in a straight life
i drew a gun from my holster
as cowgirl Mercedes McCambridge

in Johnny Guitar i shot
a villain from my horse
i was more badass than Joan Crawford

but not as wise
as scientist Amy Adams arriving late
to learning the language of grief

i couldn't stop crying as Kerry Fox
writing *An Angel at my Table*
my wild curly hair

a supporting character
i was Geraldine Page in *Interiors*
rushing up a candlelit church aisle

running from my own rage
the only revenge to take
since i was too old to be angry

at my father was to arrange an exquisite grey
vase on a bare pine table
before walking into the ocean

i was Marilyn in *The Misfits*
my final role
written by my fresh ex-husband

my wet gaze more beautiful
when i stopped caring
about my critics

just before the credits
i was Mercedes again in *Giant*
insisting Liz Taylor was mean

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but my nephew was James Dean
and speaking of Sigourney Weaver
i retreated from an ice storm to bed

rolling in a deep insensible sleep
where family never fails
and children survive their youth

BIOGRAPHIES



Katie Beswick is a writer from South East London. Recent poems appear in *And Other Poems*, *Ink Sweat & Tears*, *Rattle* and *New Verse Review*, among others. Her books include *Plumstead Pram Pushers* (Red Ogre 2024) and the hybrid book of poetry, cultural history and arts criticism *Slags on Stage* (Routledge 2025).

Jeanette Burton is a poet from Belper, Derbyshire. She has placed in several competitions, winning the McLellan, 2021 and Ware, 2022. Her work appears in *Poetry Wales*, *The North*, *Mslaxia*, *Atrium*, *Ink, Sweat and Tears*, among others. Her debut pamphlet, *Ostriches: Ten Poems about My Dad* is available from Candlestick Press.



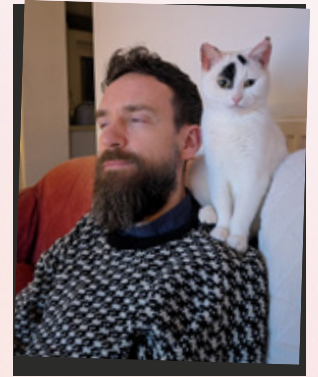
Manju Devi is a writer from Bhojpur, Bihar, specializing in poetry and flash fiction. Her writing, often rooted in the vernacular spirit and rural tapestry of her region, condenses profound observation into evocative, concise forms. She finds equal power in the expansiveness of a poem and the focused resonance of a short story, establishing a distinct voice in contemporary Indian literature.



Rajendra Prasad Gupta is a literary voice emerging from the cultural richness of Bhojpur, Bihar. His creative expression moves seamlessly between the poignant brevity of poetry and the sharp, focused narrative of flash fiction. He captures the subtlest human emotions and the realities of the social landscape, leaving a lasting impression on the reader's heart and mind. His writing is a unique blend of deep empathy for everyday life and the refined sensibility of a skilled artist.

BIOGRAPHIES

Dr Ben Gwalchmai is a Lecturer in Digital Innovation at USW. His first poetry collection - *swimming in locks//kites over marches* - was the joint winner of the Indigo Dreams First Collection competition in 2019. His second collection is seeking a publisher. He is an unpaid carer.



Taiwo Hassan is a writer of Yorùbá descent, a poet and a vocalist. A 4x Best Of The Net Nominee, his poems have appeared in *Uncanny Magazine*, *trampset*, *Lucent Dreaming*, *The Shore* and several other places. His first chapbook, *Birds Don't Fly For Pleasure*, was published by River Glass Books.

Stephen Joffe (he/him) is a Toronto actor, musician, composer, writer Pushcart Nominee, and Leonard Cohen Prize finalist. Featured in *Black Warrior Review*, *CV2*, and *The Literary Review of Canada*, he is a playwright, Bournemouth Prize longlistee, and songwriter for Birds of Bellwoods.



Patrick Jones is the author of *everything must go, before i leave*, a *constellation of sorrows* and *fuse/fracture*. He worked with Public Health Wales, The Samaritans, Welsh Refugee Council and National Museum of Wales on writing projects. Father. Poet. Playwright. Lives near a mountain in Cymru with his cat.

Leena Joshi is an award-winning poet, environmental artist, founder of Climate Conservancy, and author of *Ethereal* and *The Climate Awakening*. Her work has appeared in international journals, art galleries, museums, and elsewhere. A TEDx speaker, she has spoken at Harvard, Oxford, and Cambridge, and works between art and ecology.



BIOGRAPHIES



Dr. Michael Kelleher is a member of the Newport Stanza and has published in anthologies and magazines. He is hard of hearing and is inspired by this lived experience. Mike is delighted to have been selected for the 2025-26 Representing Wales programme managed by Literature Wales.

Alex Scarborough is a poet from Hertfordshire, UK and currently based in Sydney. He studied songwriting at the Institute of Contemporary Music Performance in London. His work has recently appeared in *Ink Sweat & Tears* and *Cacti Fur*. He is currently working on his first pamphlet.



Joshua Seigal is a London-based poet, author, performer and educator. He has several collections of poetry published by Bloomsbury and HarperCollins, and has written and performed for BBC television. He is best known for his children's writing, and spends his time running workshops in schools around the world.

Gordon Taylor is a queer, emerging poet who walks an ever-swaying, braided wire of technology and poetry. A 2022 Pushcart Prize nominee, his poems have appeared in *Narrative*, *Cincinnati Review*, *Rattle Poet's Respond*, *Poet Lore*, *Palette Poetry* and more. He writes to invite people into a world they may not have seen.

