

# *Black Bough Poetry*

*~ Barddoniaeth Y Gangen Ddu ~*



*Christmas/ winter edition 2019*

## Issue 5 - editorial team



Preston Smith

*Guest reader*



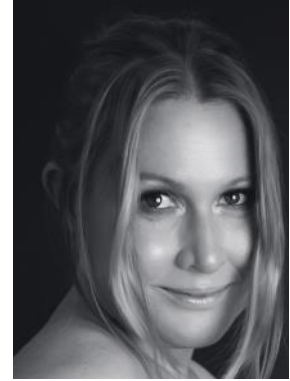
Matthew M. C. Smith

*Editor*



Polly Oliver

*Guest reader*



Erin Russell

*Guest reader*

### Editorial note:

We are delighted to present to you our fifth, festive edition. Huge thanks to Preston, Polly and Erin, three highly-talented poets who have greatly assisted the editorial process.

A huge thank you also to Swansea-based artist Emma Bissonnet, who kindly agreed to offer artwork. Emma's art is available for purchase.

Thanks also to *Seren Books* for allowing us to reprint two poems by Catherine Fisher.

This is a short, taster edition. We will be producing a fuller festive anthology in 2020.

*Matthew M. C. Smith*

Editor - Black Bough Poetry

December 2019.



Swansea-based artist, Emma Bissonnet



# Contents

Extract from 'Frost' and 'Cold'	<i>Catherine Fisher</i>	3
The Fox / Le Renard / Der Fuchs	<i>Pax Morrigan</i>	4
Christmas in the South Slavic Lands / Божиќ во Јужнословенските земји	<i>Boris Simonovski</i>	6
Diyas	<i>Leela Soma</i>	7
Festspiele	<i>Ronnie Smith</i>	
10:13	<i>Rafferty Wolfe</i>	
Lore	<i>Laura Wainwright</i>	8
Evergreen	<i>Guinevere Clark</i>	
On Wondering ...	<i>Preston Smith</i>	10
Behold, I Tell You a Mystery	<i>E. Samples</i>	
A Silhouette	<i>Paul Brookes</i>	11
Figurine	<i>Polly Oliver</i>	
Eve of Hope	<i>Ann Christine Tabaka</i>	12
Origami Winter	<i>Merril D. Smith</i>	
Since You Asked	<i>Lisa McCabe</i>	13
First-foot	<i>Alexandra McCauley</i>	
End of the day	<i>Patrick Williamson</i>	14
Ornaments	<i>Lucy Whitehead</i>	
Solstice	<i>Megha Sood</i>	15
Solstice Day	<i>Ian Richardson</i>	
Winter Solstice	<i>Marian Christie</i>	
In Winter's Path / Llwybr y Gaeaf	<i>Ness Owen</i>	16
Winter-maid (Matariki harvests)	<i>Ankha Spice</i>	
Advent	<i>Jane Mackenzie</i>	18
Blossoming	<i>Lynn Valentine</i>	
Christmas Party	<i>Lesley Williams</i>	
Christmas morning	<i>Elizabeth Moura</i>	19
Boxing Day	<i>Rae Howells</i>	
Christmas Message	<i>Lucy Dixcart</i>	20
Winter Solstice Incantation	<i>Kim Harvey</i>	
Holidays are just small wakes that	<i>Comyer Clayton</i>	22
The Edges	<i>A.A. Parr</i>	
Winter, maybe	<i>Erin Russell</i>	23
The Star in the East	<i>Iris Anne Lewis</i>	

(extract from 'Frost')

This is an art deco winter,  
all monochrome, all angles,  
the streets cornered,  
their edges neatly aligned  
as if nuance no longer counts,  
as if some deep geometric truth  
has come out into the cold.

### Cold

I know it has fingers. Can see  
the designs they scrape on the window.  
There are other things I know;  
how it strikes deep, stiffens the body

to a puppet, jerky, controlled.  
Bells in empty towers hang with ice,  
a bird skitters on silence.  
Even the young look old.

Through my grey wood, over the fields,  
no leaf falls, no starling rises.  
It's not anarchy, more like some lost project,  
a plan that died at the outset,  
a fallen coin on the pavement  
no one will unglove to collect.

*Catherine Fisher*

Poems from *The Bramble King*,  
(Seren Books, 2019)

### The Fox

Snow in the woods.

At dusk, I walked alone  
through the tree maze, spotted a trail  
of elegant imprints by the hazel.

I did not follow it.

### Le Renard

Neige dans la forêt.

Au crépuscule, je marchais seule  
à travers le labyrinthe d'arbre, j'ai vu une piste  
d'empreintes élégantes proche du noisetier.

Je ne l'ai pas suivie.

### Der Fuchs

Schnee im Wald.

In der Abenddämmerung ging ich allein  
durch das Baumlabyrinth, sah eine Spur  
von eleganten Abdrücken beim Haselstrauch.

Ich folgte ihr nicht.

*Pax Morrigan*





### Christmas in the South Slavic Lands

Aroma from  
the white lime trees  
cradled away by the Vetrushka.

Children and other folk  
with dances and song,  
invite the old man  
Svarovich, the sunborn.

With this golden hand  
to surely warm up  
the unholy season.

### Божик во Јужнословенските земји

Арома од  
белите липи  
разнишана од Ветрушката.

Деца и разни луѓе  
со игри и песна,  
го повикуваат старецот  
Сварожиќ, родум од сончевината бесна.

Со неговата златна рака  
белки ќе ја оплемени  
оваа зимска мака.

*Boris Simonovski*

### Diyas

Light the fire, bring forth joy in the parlour  
lamps, *diyas*, tea lights are ablaze lending colour  
As light sheds its glow and dispels the dark  
Sparklers fizz, fireworks blaze rids the murk.  
The raging storm, freezing sleet is kept at bay  
as we *coorie*-in, snug in the warmth of *Diwali* day.

*Leela Soma*

### Festspiele

Between Ringstrasse and  
Rathaus, a dim neon space  
fogged by the steam of wurst.

Thin laughter mists, the slice  
of steel in the arena and  
sleigh-less chimes in a loop.

Top mountain brands, the gaud  
of once-a-year things. A fest  
with no crib, holding its breath

as the ice runs into the sea.

*Ronnie Smith*

### 10:13

The 10:13 yawns, stretches, shudders  
as its snow-packed pistons forget their pain  
and pull away, from a city winter-varnished grey,  
the colour of northern stations at dawn  
in Christmas rain

*Rafferty Wolfe*



### Lore

Holly in a moon-found wood:  
    unhung, unwound,  
    unmade  
by snow-starred card  
and robin-perched plate  
or embossed cup of blood.  
Intricate between ghost-prints  
of oak and bitter ivy. A king  
who would be queen, cloaked  
red under Saturn.

*Laura Wainwright*

### Evergreen

Sun white,  
cone-clad, ice-wed  
in our garden shrine.  
Circling roots with berry blood;  
we dress you.

*Guinevere Clark*



On Wondering Whether Persephone & Hades  
Might Attend the First Supper

After religion class I was sure  
Hephaestus had forged Christmas lights  
from radioactive embers sprayed  
from Apollo's chariot as he circled  
the globe each December.

I was sure he had hung them  
while Zeus ordered nymphs to cook  
the first supper in Olympus.

I did not pass religion class.

*Preston Smith*

Behold, I Tell You a Mystery

Nine candles burning, drip and wane;  
the long Cold Moon of folklore.  
December crumples like a wish list:  
bed of hay, guiding star,  
child-king of the cross.  
Nine bright fires on blue wax dance;  
Oh death, where is thy sting?

*E. Samples*

### A Silhouette

Winter is a silhouette.  
A definition by outline,  
colour bled into starkness  
a flat surface  
as if the world is ragged paper.

Shy the inexhaustible shy  
of winter, worry away the rest.  
Wear worn decay; the rest  
hunkers into itself  
as if afeard, afeard for itself

*Paul Brookes*

### Figurine

It was Santa who started it;  
tears smearing his resin-moulded cheer  
as the window wept drear December mist.

Enchanted, Mum had plucked him,  
exotic fruit on a charity shop shelf;  
he sparkled in her festive tableau.

In the year's wonky gallop towards its end,  
he lies atop miscellany and boxes.  
Mum had fallen from the ride.

*Polly Oliver*

### Eve of Hope

Hope, hung upon sweet balsam branches  
with anticipation of distant dreams.  
Love, wrapped in shiny, red ribbons  
tucked carefully beneath.  
Warmth, surrounding the wonder of it all,  
while winter, crystalline, sleeps.

*Ann Christine Tabaka*

### Origami Winter

That Christmas holiday in Philadelphia  
we watched ice skaters from our hotel room,  
and traveled by subway  
as the snow fell--and kept falling--till we were marooned  
at the Borenstein's, a rowhouse island in a sea of white.  
We ate our Yuletide feast of bagels, cream cheese, and lox,  
My sister remembers we did origami,  
our memories now unfold these shapes  
of winters' past.

*Merril D. Smith*

### First-foot

Step out young man, step out  
be not here at the bells, on the stroke.  
Let mid-night throw off its yoke.  
Return with airs of coal  
yet bow to pass -  
pay your silver at the door  
present your dram -  
set first-foot fortunes here to last.

*Alexandra McCauley*

### Since You Asked

What I really want this Christmas is not to forget  
A thing, or be forgotten —

Each breath, every sensation,  
Every head banging grief or memory,

Gestures of pure love I once gave or received,  
All bundled together into one great gold-trimmed  
Seam-bursting package.

And I would fall on my knees,  
Offer it up to someone, anyone — a child perhaps;

Saying this is from me, this is my life. Take it please.

*Lisa McCabe*

### End of the day

Friday. Time passes. The black crow  
cloaked by shadow –  
slump into armchairs, stoke the coals.

Huddled, the flickering stops  
abruptly, test card, hum, listen.

It whistles out there. Drift  
leaves, drizzle, nothing.

*Patrick Williamson*

### Ornaments

The winter we were evicted and you'd been let go,  
with no baubles to decorate our Christmas tree,  
you sliced up oranges, baked them hard  
until the house was scented with orange oil  
and they shone like stained glass  
among the fairy lights. You made  
a gingerbread family with icing smiles,  
strapped their bodies to the branches  
with satin ribbons. They looked  
like people who'd lost their parachutes.

*Lucy Whitehead*



### Solstice

In the winter sun,  
boughs of wild oak  
are encumbered by snow;

the stooped shoulders  
of my grandmother.

*Megha Sood*

### Solstice Day

Frost festival fair.  
Frozen river in floodlights,  
bathing in chill glow.

*Ian Richardson*

### Winter Solstice

Even at noon  
the shadows are too long -  
dark streamers on a frosted lawn.

*Marian Christie*

In Winter's Path

We expect to see no-one  
*all doors are safely shut at*  
*Mari Lwyd* time when we  
know, we can be defeated  
by a song. The trees bared  
show their true shape, soft  
dead-wood holds life beneath  
our feet. There's little to hide  
behind, on walks like these.

Llwybr y Gaeaf.

Ni ddisgwyliwn weld neb  
*â'r holl ddrysau ar gau yn*  
*ddiogel yn amser y Fari Lwyd*  
pan fyddwn yn gwybod, gallwn  
gael ein trechu gan gân.  
Heb ddail, mae coed yn dangos  
eu gwirionedd, coed crin sy'n dal  
bywyd dan ein traed. Nid oes  
llawer i gynnig cuddfan, ar  
deithiau fel y rhain.

*Ness Owen*

Winter-maid (Matariki harvests)

We climb until we hear her. Wailing windfloats the hilltop - finding  
four cold bright ears, tipped keen to the winter-maid's starsong grief

Like the harbour fireworks, some hearts are a conflagration always ready to set off, tonight  
Ra shimmies the black ice, away to the shining arms of another  
for Hine-Takurua to forgive – only her strong south currents  
wax a little saltier each year, and there  
in the long chill shadows of touchpaper gods, I palm you the foil-skinned planet  
plucked from the coals of the bonfire, left tide-eaten far below

Split deep softsun orange, the sweet kūmara steams, burns fingers  
and eager mouths – a minute more tasted light, and full bellies glow against the dark

*Ankeb Spice*



### Advent

A flame sputters,  
chokes black smoke  
and curls in wisps  
to nothing-  
Then, a draft;  
elemental incarnation.  
A small breath  
breathes hope.  
The flicker leaps  
and burns anew.

*Jane Mackenzie*

### Blossoming

The plums leach their heat, shape  
brandy into winter's rich wine.

As snow shifts on the window at Christmas  
we uncork the bottles and jars,

sip the sugar of summer and shiver  
as bright light blazes into winter.

*Lynn Valentine*

### Christmas Party

A stranger's hands on my waist,  
hot lips brushed the nape of my neck.  
Shockingly thrilling, and not unwelcome.  
This indelible memory, no identity.

*Lesley Williams*

### Christmas morning

Ma puts more suet on the tree,  
right into that crook,  
where any bird can spy it.  
She doesn't care.  
Sparrow, jay, crow, grackle,  
all are welcome  
on Christmas day  
in the morning.

*Elizabeth Moura*

### Boxing Day

You could shatter like a bauble,  
prick a heart with the things you said.  
But it was magic to be by you,  
each afternoon sweet with sugar, a gift.

You died on Boxing Day, oblivious  
to ribbons, mince pies, tinsel.  
There were the gifts we still hadn't given,  
shrouded in splinters, a falling rain of pine needles.

*Rae Howells*

### Christmas Message

She smashed the friendship decades ago  
in a careless knock, saw it plummet and splinter.  
She swept up its severed continents,  
interred them in a cupboard for future repair.  
Later she turned over the rough edges,  
found too many slivers had been lost.  
It will never be whole. But each year,  
December flings opens a window.  
Each year, as the month ripens,  
she writes some words, launches them into air.

*Lucy Dixcart*

### Winter Solstice Incantation

Snapdragon petals, pink and yellow, rose hips, gold  
paint chips tossed over my shoulder. Hellebore  
  
and phlox, candles to burn through the long pitch-black.  
This spell's being cast at last light and you'll come back  
  
through the mirror's crack like Lazarus from the dead  
tonight if I can just find the right words. *Close* and *closed*,  
  
what you were to me and a door slammed shut between  
this world and the next. Outside, a wild wind whips  
  
through the trees, whispering its warning—what's done  
cannot be undone. Slippery as winter ice, you're gone.

*Kim Harvey*

MY TRUE LOVE GAVE TO ME

ON THE SECOND DAY OF CHRISTMAS



TWO TURTLE DOVES





Holidays are just small wakes that

remind me of my  
mother - god, cinnamon  
rolls so sweet. I cannot make  
the potatoes right.

More snow here than there and there snow  
is ash, or not ash, is buried, or not buried.

Let's sleep in - uncooked, flesh fresh.  
Thick pale batter. A wake.

*Conyer Clayton*

The Edges

Shells like leather, left too long  
by the remains of a fire, tumble from  
the edges of great-grandmother's cut-glass dish,  
scatter across the faded, crimson tablecloth as voices tire, as aging hands slow,  
picking from this day, with care, the last bits of the plumpest walnuts, chestnuts, cashews.

Tomorrow, we'll wash the gold-trimmed china, then pack it all away  
awaiting the promise of next year.

*A. A. Parr*

Winter, maybe

an unquiet term,  
autumn's crimson giving ground  
in midwinter thaw

the waters came on  
twins under shelter, sight of snow,  
the veining maple, lips skeletal  
against white cover

this claret drained for lack of light  
what it could be to the boar-bile bones  
a twinning brother, his nobody hand prelapsed, precise -

the stigmata of sulfur, empty these words  
hand in hand a mother-ringed womb

the moment we let go

*Erin Russell*

The Star in the East

Wolf-moon-light  
blooms in the dawn-dusk sky

Trees with bare-black-boughs  
guide the way

Beyond the horizon, hidden,  
a star looms

ox-blood-bright

*Iris Anne Lewis*

OLD APPLE TREE  
WE WASSAIL THEE



WASSAIL



HEALTH TO  
THE APPLE  
TREE



B.



# Contributor information

## Artist

Emma Bissonnet grew up in Norfolk, studied Art in Sheffield & Swansea, and gained a City & Guilds in Printmaking on Gower. She has worked in conservation & gardening across Wales. Her inspiration comes from a deep love of nature. Emma's prints feature Welsh landscapes, wildlife and folklore.

etsy.com/uk/shop/EmmaBissonnetDesigns  
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Twitter: @EmmaBissonnet  
pinterest.co.uk/emmabissonnetdesigns

## Poets

Catherine Fisher is a poet and writer for children and young adults. Her latest collection is *The Bramble King* (Seren, 2019) and her most recent novel *The Velvet Fox* (Firefly 2019). She is a past winner of the Cardiff International Poetry Competition and was the first Young People's Laureate for Wales.

Pax Morrigan is on a quest for imagination and loves playing with words. Twitter: @paxmorrigan [www.paxmorrigan.com](http://www.paxmorrigan.com)

Boris Simonovski is a second year undergraduate student in the Faculty of Philology, Blazhe Koneski, in Skopje, Macedonia, where he studies English Language and Literature. A number of his poems will be published in the upcoming anthologies of December 2019 and February 2020 titled *Oceans of Emotions* and *Oriental Prism 3*.

Leela Soma was born in Madras/Chennai, India and now lives in Glasgow. Her poems and short stories have been published in a number of anthologies, publications. She has published two novels and two collections of poetry. She has served on the Scottish Writer's Centre Committee and is now in East Dunbartonshire Arts & Culture Committee. Some of her work reflects her dual heritage of India and Scotland.

Ronnie Smith is 61, comes originally from Glasgow, has travelled widely, lives in south west France and has published stories and articles in the U.K., France, Romania and Australia. He came late to writing poetry, having been unable to find a voice until recently, but better late than never.

Rafferty Wolfe is a photographer and poet from Whitby in North Yorkshire. She frequently works with themes of religion, nature and personal and cultural displacement, and seeks the establishment of a new contemporary Gothic poetry.

Laura Wainwright was born in Cardiff and lives in Newport, South Wales. She is author of a book of literary criticism, *New Territories in Modernism: Anglophone Welsh Writing 1930-1949* (University of Wales Press, 2018). She was shortlisted in the Bridport Prize poetry competition in 2013 and 2019. Her poetry has been widely published in magazines and journals. Twitter: @wainwrightlj

Guinevere Clark lives in Swansea, where she is studying for a PhD in Creative Writing Research, forming a new collection based on

themes and narratives surrounding motherhood. Her first book, *Fresh Fruit & Screams* was published by Bluechrome Press (2006). She has had recent success with *Minerva Rising*, *The A3* and *Atlanta Reviews*.

Preston Smith is an MA candidate in Rhetoric & Writing at Wright State University. He has interned with *Mid-American Review* and worked as the managing editor of *Prairie Margins*. He can be found on Twitter (and Instagram!) @psm\_writes, tweeting about his cats, Helios and Misty, and his love for fairy tales. He has poems published in *Black Bough Poetry*, *Brave Voices Magazine*, *Catfish Creek*, *Nightingale & Sparrow*, and *Pink Plastic House a tiny journal*, among others.

E. Samples lives in Indiana with her family of L.P. (human), Gypsy (queen cat), Dot (calico-fox cat), Black & White (beautiful nuisance cat), & Yoshi (smallest of dogs). For Christmas, she would very much like to see a ghost. Twitter: @emilysamples

Paul Brookes is a shop asst. who lives in Wombwell. His recent chapbooks include *Please Take Change* (Cyberwit.net, 2018), *Stubborn Sod*, (*Alien Buddha Press*, 2019), *As Folk Over Yonder* (*Afterworld Books*, 2019). Forthcoming is *Khoshbali* (*Alien Buddha Press*, 2020) He edits The Wombwell Rainbow Interviews.

Polly Oliver hails from Cornwall and lives in Swansea. She's been writing poetry on and off for years, mainly reading it at open mic nights across the city and enjoys hearing the work of other local poets and spoken word artists. Her poems have been published in *Black Bough*, *Spillwords.com* and on her blog 'RocksandBones – Poems from the Celtic Fringes'.

Ann Christine Tabaka was nominated for the 2017 Pushcart Prize in Poetry, has been internationally published, and won poetry awards from numerous publications. She is the author of 9 poetry books. Christine lives in Delaware, USA. She loves gardening and cooking. Chris lives with her husband and three cats.

Merril D. Smith is a historian and poet. She's written nonfiction books and had poetry published here and there. She likes the moon. Website and blog at [www.merrildsmith.com](http://www.merrildsmith.com), Twitter: @merril\_mds, and Instagram at mdsmithnj.

Lisa McCabe lives in Lahave, Nova Scotia. She has published poems in *The Senawee Review*, *HCE Review*, *Nonbinary Review*, *Better Than Starbucks*, *Limestone Review*, among other print and online journals. She works in the field of software translation.

Alexandra McCauley lives in the Scottish Borders with her husband and two black Labradors.

Patrick Williamson - latest collections are *Traversi*, *Beneficato*, *Nel Santuario* (English-Italian, Samuele Editore), *Gifted* (Corrupt Press). Editor and translator of *The Parley Tree*, *An Anthology of Poets from French-speaking Africa and the Arab World* (Arc Publications), founder member of transnational agency Linguafranca.

Lucy Whitehead has poetry in *Amethyst Review*, *Anti-Heroine Chic*, *Barren Magazine*, *Burning House Press*, *Collective Unrest*, *Electric Moon Magazine*, *Ghost City Review*, *Mookychick Magazine*, *Neon Mariposa Magazine*, *Pussy Magic*, *Re-side*, *Twist in Time Magazine*. Twitter: @blueirispoetry.

Megha Sood is an editor at *Whisper and the Roar* and *Ariel chart* etc. Works featured in *Statorec*, *Piker*, *Visitant Lit*, *Quail Bell* and *Dime Show Review*. Works featured/upcoming in 15 anthologies by US, UK, and 11 Canadian presses. Two-time state-level winner of the NAMI Poetry Contest.

Ian Richardson - in September 2015, Ian was Overall Winner in the Scottish Borders 'Waverley Lines' poetry competition. In November 2016 he received the Anstruther Writing Award. His work has appeared in various poetry publications and spoken word podcasts. Twitter: @IanRich10652022

Marian Christie is originally from Zimbabwe but now lives in Kent. When not reading or writing poetry, she looks at the stars, puzzles over the laws of physics, listens to birdsong and crochets scarves in mathematical patterns. [marianchristiepoetry.net](http://marianchristiepoetry.net) Twitter: @marian\_v\_o.

Ness Owen is from Ynys Mon. Her poems have been published in journals and anthologies including in *Poetry Wales*, *Red Poets*, *Mslaxia*, *Arachne Press*, *Mother's Milk Books* and *Three Drops Press*. Her collection *Mamiaith* (Mother-tongue) is published with *Arachne Press*.

Ankh Spice is a sea-obsessed poet from Aotearoa (NZ), whose poetry appears in a number of international publications. He truly believes that narrative and kindness create change, and you'll find him doing his best to prove it on Twitter: @SeaGoatScreams or on Facebook: @AnkhSpiceSeaGoatScreamsPoetry

Jane Mackenzie lives in Scotland and loves to write haiku and observational poetry. She also writes for children and will have a haiku published in a children's anthology on insects early next year. Twitter: @jpmackwriter,

Lynn Valentine writes between dog walks on the Black Isle in the Scottish Highlands. She is widely published, both in print and online, and has won and been placed in competitions. In 2020 she will be mentored by Cinnamon Press, working towards her first collection. You can find her on Twitter at @dizzylynn

Elizabeth Moura lives in a converted factory and works with elders. She has had poetry, flash fiction or photographs published in several online and print publications. She can be reached on Twitter: @mourapoet and on Instagram mourathepoet.

Rae Howells is a prize-winning poet and journalist. She is widely published and tweets @raehowells

Lucy Dixcart lives in rural Kent with her family. Her poems have appeared in *Acumen*, *Eye Flash Poetry* and *Riggwelter*, as well as in *Pale Fire*, an anthology of lunar poetry by *The Frogmore Press*. She has an MA in Creative Writing from Bath Spa University. Twitter: @lucydixcart

Kim Harvey is a San Francisco Bay Area poet and Associate Editor of *Palette Poetry*. Her work has appeared in *The Comstock Review*, *Rattle*, *Radar*, *Barren Magazine*, *Typishly*, *Poets Reading the News*, and elsewhere. Twitter: @kimharveypoet. Insta: @luna\_jack. [www.kimharvey.net](http://www.kimharvey.net)

Conyer Clayton has 6 chapbooks. Her most recent is *Trust Only the Beasts in the Water* (above/ground press, 2019). She won *Arc's* 2017 Diana Brebner Prize. Her debut full length collection of poetry, *We Shed Our Skin Like Dynamite*, is forthcoming Spring 2020 with *Guernica Editions*. Twitter: @c\_conyer FB: @ConyerClayton.

A. A. Parr is a Canadian writer, artist and entrepreneur with a Spec Honours BFA from York University. She writes a weekly series of poetry for strangers on Channillo.com\* and her debut chapbook, *What Lasts Beyond the Burning* is forthcoming from *Nightingale & Sparrow Press* in 2020. Twitter: @ifitfeelswrite .

Erin Russell is a writer from Calgary living in Amsterdam. Winner of the 2019 Patricia Goedicke Prize for Poetry and the University of Toronto's Wycliffe College Poetry Award, her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *CutBank*, *Burning House*, *Train*, *Talking About Strawberries*, *Time Out*, and *The Holland Times*, a.o., and has been translated into French and Chinese. She lectures at Amsterdam University College. Twitter: @etcall

Iris Anne Lewis writes poetry and short stories. Her work has been featured at the Cheltenham Literary Festival and the Bradford on Avon Arts Festival. She has been successful in local and national competitions and is published in magazines and anthologies. Twitter: @IrisAnneLewis

Lesley Williams lives in Swansea. After a long career in Social Services, early retirement gave her the opportunity to attend a variety of writing courses run by the University. She has performed her work locally as a member of the Garage Players and continues to meet monthly with a small group of Swansea poets. Lesley can be found on Facebook and on Twitter: @Lesley60510918