

# **Winners of the 2020 Easter Ekphrastic Challenge**



**Photograph by Paul Daniel Rafferty**

Stalks lined up, a proud stalwart row. Like their leader, they are all of a kind, each entirely familiar to the other in all their exceptional, verdant greenness. Waving in the wind, they clap each other's backs, sing their glory. They resist any encroachment.

'Go back where you came from,' they say, 'you're not like us.'

The irises don't respond. Resolute, they claim their space, unfolding glorious yellow ochre against the azure sea. Their brilliance enhances the stalks, who now congratulate themselves. But the irises don't engage. They reach to the light, knowing the sun shines for them too.

David Braziel      *After*

After the storm rolls out,  
out beyond the mouth of the bay.  
After the breathing sea-swell calms  
and the trembling sands fall still.  
After the wreckage has been hauled  
the last of the sun picks flowers,  
arranges them along a high sill,  
touching each with a warm light.  
With luck they will see us  
through the night.

**Arthur Broomfield**

*Iris pseudacorus*

You suitors should think again, in my deepest roots the gifts of aeons  
sustain my gold-leaf crown, legends have decreed me  
daughter of the morning sun. Far below your barley fields  
and beef-to the heels uplands I delight in my rushy wetlands.  
I am Iris, queen of the callows. My emblem is the blue flag of nature,  
my emissaries buzz with music and chatter, assure the future.  
My swordsmen and pikemen will blunt the tines of your harrow,  
my gullies will swallow your tractors. The pitch from my reeds will make dung of  
your seeds.  
I, feileastram of the quagmires, promise, if you drain me, I will drown you.

Moyra Donaldson

*Spring*

pushes her green spear through the earth,  
raises her flag – *I'm here* – she says  
- *though you may have despaired of me,*  
*stopped believing, almost forgotten,*

*'what is a blossom?' you asked*  
*in the darkness of your heart's winter,*  
*when the nights were long and the cold bitter.*  
Look – says Spring – *resurrection; life.*

Shelley Tracey     *In Isolation*

rose has its meanings  
in the language of flowers:  
silk pink of *grace*,  
yellow *deception*,  
red *love*, unashamed

marsh iris is *message*,  
sings a vague tune  
to the blur of the coastline,  
each note repeated by pleated seagrasses,  
making no sense to unboundaried skies

Joanna Nissel      *visit from my unborn child*

please stay here with me  
by the border of long grass

mark the veins of phloem in the blades  
the richness of verdure deepening in shade

keep your eyes on the golden splay of flower  
the wrinkle in the bud    the pelt-soft petal

this tiny sun is for you    warm yourself  
upon it    I know you are tired    rest *here*

don't look out to the sea's heat-hazed horizon  
don't notice the gulls calling you home

## **Biographies**

**Brid McGinley** is a writer from Co. Donegal. She enjoys working on the small canvas of flash fiction, creating full stories with few brushstrokes.

**David Braziel** is a poet, writer and performer, three times winner of the Belfast Book Festival Poetry Slam and a regional and national finalist in the All Ireland Poetry Slam. He is currently working on a new show with the support of a grant from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

**Dr Arthur Broomfield** is a poet, short story writer and Beckett scholar from County Laois.

**Moyra Donaldson's** most recent collection is *Carnivorous*, Doire Press, 2019. In 2019, she received a Major Individual Artist award from Arts Council NI.

**Shelley Tracey's** poems have been published in *Abridged*, *Artemis*, *Bangor Literary Journal*, *the Honest Ulsterman*, *North West Word*, *Bray Literary Journal*, *Skylight 47*, *The North* and *Write to the River*. Shelley's first collection is *Elements of Distance* (Lapwing, 2017).

**Joanna Nissel** is a Brighton-based poet. She has been published widely, including *Tears in the Fence*, *Eyeflash*, and *Atrium*.