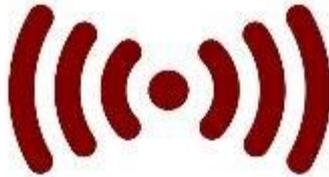


there is a song inside us all



twelve female writers from women aloud ni  
celebrate  
international women's day  
with the bangor literary journal

## WOMEN ALOUD NI



Women Aloud NI was set up to elevate the voices of Women Writers living in and coming from Northern Ireland.

Together WANI run events, support their members' professional development and provide a vibrant community of women who actively support and promote each other.

The Bangor Literary Journal is delighted to showcase the writing of twelve members of Women Aloud NI to celebrate International Women's Day.

'Women's writing matters'

Find out more about WANI here:

<https://www.womenaloudni.org/>

Cover Image: Detail from a piece by Amy Louise Wyatt

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Maureen Boyle

## Confession

The summer I did my A Levels, I went, despite my atheism, to Lough Derg with my friends to pray for good results, a tradition in our school. I told my father I was going to observe and write a poem about it like Paddy Kavanagh but he told me I'd have to do all that everyone else did and he was right. We had a great time and I loved the lost beauty of the place, the starkness and the pain. And then it came to confession and I thought I'd go in and ask about what I should do about loving a clerical student and before I could go into detail the priest said, 'You're Maureen from Strabane!' and he was laughing and saying 'It's a gas!' and I could see his big hands holding his head through the grill as he thought it was a great joke altogether – he was my friend's 'Spiritual Director' in Maynooth. It was bit embarrassing coming out of that booth since we'd made so much noise, I'm sure the other people wondered what monumental sins I had committed and what my penance was. I didn't think it was so funny and I'd later have reason to resent the hierarchy in Maynooth when I realised they were entirely cynical about women involved with clerical students so long as they turned up to be ordained. One of my friends in Trinity had her boyfriend leave their bed in Copenhagen to fly back for his ordination the next day.

*An extract from the memoir piece 'I Know How You Feel But the Grass is Too Wet....  
Falling in Love to Traditional Music' published in RTE's internal staff magazine.*

Trish Bennett

## The Hag Stone

The dog starts to yelp before we open the door.  
When released on the beach, she circles in laps so fast,  
her rear passes her front on the turn.

My daughter puts black glittered wellies on.  
We head for the rocks beyond the sea wall,  
scan shale for shells and stones for her bucket.

The wind whisks sand to sting our faces in waves.  
*It's like the Sahara*, she says.  
She asks that I search for a stone with a natural hole,

*Hag Stones have power,  
they bring good luck.  
If the hole's big enough,*

*you can glimpse the otherworld,  
but it won't reveal itself  
until you're ready.*

Her Father's lost in his own world  
as he picks his steps along black rocks  
to stand and look out to Aran.

The Atlantic opens her mouth,  
foams in to land  
in rows of seven roars.

There's something about the way that brown-sod bog  
rolls down to meet the scattered rocks of Spiddal beach,  
that brings me back to backpacker days,

when I stood in gobsmacked awe,  
at the sight of the rain forest meeting the reef  
at Cape Tribulation.

A lifetime away from this place, this rock, where I sit  
to watch the dog trail my daughter and sniff,  
as she gathers cockle and mussel shells, and pebbles.

I've wandered for years,  
not knowing what a hag stone was,  
or even what I was searching for.

When I gaze through the salt-spray breeze  
on this sacred day,  
I know, I've found it.

*Previously Published May 2020 Vision Anthology, by Poetry in Motion, Community Arts  
Partnership.*

Yvonne Boyle

## Coast

Waterbourne  
virus  
a kind of shingles  
of the soul.

We are at  
the low tide  
of the storm.

If being sea side  
helps the lungs

and being outside  
the tents  
pre-antibiotics  
helped Spanish flu sufferers  
survive.

Then walk  
breathe  
against the elements  
at the shore  
distanced from others

but close to  
earth  
water  
fire  
air  
stone.

*Previously published in Pendentic.ie April 2020.*

# Gráinne Tobin

## Fine

Why don't we have a cross of folded reeds,  
cartwheeling along our kitchen lintel? We want  
to chant. We want a square of tin, stamped  
with the image of a baby, to lay in a cave  
in the mountains. We cannot help but know  
of wounds no cures can heal, a woman  
held in extremity, a trial by ordeal  
which pins her to the edge of her power,  
turns her inside out and back again.

In February, when it's all gone on too long  
across the water, and we're pacing the house,  
unable to do anything to help our son,  
or his gallant girl, or their baby,  
whose moving into life is so delayed –  
we let ourselves be led by urges beyond reason  
to fertility goddess tales, sham-Celtic rigmaroles  
for a fruitful spring at Imbolc or the feast of Brigid.

Prayer's never a temptation, knowing rightly  
there's no-one there to hear –  
but we trace the ancient spring to a rugby club  
by a fingerpost to mark St Brigid's Well  
where we set down our foolish rose.  
The sacred water seeps from underground  
behind locked gates with lorries and CCTV.

Away out to the graveyard, where the bones  
of loving parents decay together, RIP,  
and we're tidying up, pinching off dried leaves,  
tucking new narcissi in the spaces.

The phone! It's done. A perfect child,  
lifted to safety from his mother's womb.  
She's well, she's smiling at her baby.  
Our son now has a son. We're all reborn.

I lean against the car, crying and shaking,  
overcome as any pilgrim.

*Previously published in **The Uses of Silk**, Arlen House 2018*

# Réaltán Ní Leannáin

## Unnatural

If I were a man  
I should compose the lore of the ages  
Myth and saga and great deeds of yore.  
Sitting in quiet comfort every evening,  
Heaping word upon word on top of each other.  
In my free time.  
At the end of the day.  
In my armchair.

But I have babies to feed and clean and put to sleep.  
I have clean sheets to fold, and frocks, and socks as well.  
Heaping all of them one on top of the other  
In the hot press.  
One mitt in the kitchen sink, the other directing homework.  
Dirty laundry to put in the machine, dirty floors to clean.  
Lunches to pack for little mouths.  
Bed.  
Dreams.

Two bend to work every evening.  
One sits.  
Having eaten supper.  
In the dusk.  
Alone.

Moyra Donaldson

**First Glimpse of Orcas in Faxafloi Bay**

We've stood on deck for hours  
until we've nearly frozen,

nearly given up; our small family,  
husband, wife, our two grown girls

and our granddaughter, swimming  
in her own warm amniotic ocean.

Then a shout goes out.  
My body begins to tremble:

in the very crest, the blessing  
of their movement upwards,

in the curve of their black bodies  
hung for one moment

against the white ice space  
between sea and sky,

I am lifted on their shining backs  
into a fierce new longing.

Gaynor Kane

## In the En-suite

*Trigger Warning: Postnatal Depression, Self-harm.*

Your buttocks press into the hard, white, surface of the toilet. You are doubled, with your fingers in your unbrushed hair, your nails are making crescent moon shaped indentations. You don't feel them. You have been there so long that you can no longer feel your legs – you are an amputee.

A once practical space, nine foot by three, with fully tiled white ceramic walls has become a coffin shaped cell and you sit there having a conversation with yourself, silently in your head. You roughly wipe the dampness off your pale cheeks, not liking yourself enough to be gentle. What does it matter if you won't see the end of the day?

Loud wailing stops that train of thought and once again you feel relieved to have three solid pine doors between yourself and the source. At that point you resent it so strongly that your twisted mind makes you think of it as some sort of infant demon. Because it now breathes, you are in a living hell. The delivery of it has changed you, body and mind, completely.

The shower begins to drip like a metronome, perhaps it's counting down the time you have left. And then you begin to think of your family. Your husband has been so good. He does all the night feeds so that you can get some sleep, even though he has to go to work. You've no siblings, so who will look after your parents in their old age? That glimmer of your rational self knows that it's not the baby's fault; she needs you, now and always.

'Who said this is a coward's way out?'

Amy Louise Wyatt

**there is a song inside us all**

30 ladies on my granny's mantle  
demure & painted  
*(bells hidden inside their skirts)*

porcelain skin & the same expression  
never changed by time or place

what i loved as a child—is the same thing i love now

for you'd never have known they were more  
than static ornaments  
~sitting pretty~

we can wait a lifetime—silent and still  
& all it takes is touch of another to make us ring

know luv  
there is a song inside us all

Fiona O'Rourke

**Yes, I See Your Name**

Yes, I see your name.

Three initials scar a desk

undeniable just confess

the only O name in that mess.

Half tough, half in love, apostrophe relish

catastrophe cherished in frown hard skin

you rescue orphans from last line gallows

gooseberry same with punch drunk vowels

safer trouble in a crowd.

Yes, I see your name.

Words languish this day,

sloth drop on an average page

you have no heart to fully hate.

Covid drought burnt out fireplace fodder

would be no bother to spark the lot

those hell raisers whisky chasers flying solo

knee deep trouble with no crowd.

Yes, I see your name.

Insta love is twenty-four seven

Twitter shit and HateBook heaven

vamp juicy lines til desert dry.

An empty hovel once your novel

keeps a peeled eye in the dark

marinated no hardship wasted

crowd surfs into the lonely crowd.

Clare McWilliams

## Narcissus

Like narcissus I sit,  
three inch golden lilies as my feet.  
Echoing past digressions,  
I pass to the underworld.  
My body burns in the flame of urine, is sucked dry by antibiotics.  
My skin retreats,  
sheds unnecessary history.  
In morphine sleep there is heaven.  
Dante's Inferno with the Devil as Tim Rice, hands on hips.  
Bowie's soundtrack in my memory.  
There are bright blue skyscrapers,  
cartoon clouds with Monty Python Gods dancing underneath my taped eyelids.  
I hear songs that are sung to me,  
secrets that are hummed to me,  
Just in case  
I die.

Meg McCleery

## Culture Vultures

*Elegy for a lost friend...*

With our hobnailed boots bombarding  
their way through middle class pretensions,  
we were the culture vultures;  
High on High brow.  
First generation college girls.  
A vanguard for the future in a time where  
everything stretched before us:  
everything was a possibility, but not for you;  
time was an illusion, your enemy.  
A glimpse of what could be, should be,  
but never would be.  
We were just a passing through and with  
the roll of a dice, our future was set.  
Now Bertolt will always be "Brek" said  
with a smirk, and Heaney's *Helicon* will be  
forever etched in my memory.  
Your Swanson, Your Epitaph,  
My Turning Point and Awakening.

# Helen Hastings

## Perfect

I count twenty beats of my heart  
My body moves forward  
Then forty  
Sixty  
Eighty  
And then there will be nothing underneath me  
I have lost my ground  
I am suspended  
Isolated  
Perfect  
A life hanging in the gorgeous balance  
The sea has taught me a new lesson  
That to experience connection  
I must first learn disconnection  
Disconnection from boundaries set  
Disconnection from foundations I have built  
Laid  
Hundreds of feet deep in my human experience  
I am the vulnerable, foolhardy woman  
In the black eyes of seals  
I am one breathless gasp in a roaring sea  
I have my whole life ahead of me  
I am moments away from drowning  
In an ever hostile world  
The wild sea is mother, father, lover  
Kissing my scars caressing every lump and bump  
Cradling a broken heart  
I have lost my ground  
I am suspended  
Isolated  
Perfect

## Contributors

### Yvonne Boyle

Yvonne Boyle has had a range of poems published in a variety of magazines, books and anthologies. She was an Arts Council of NI Support for the Individual Artist (SIAP) Awardee 2018/2019. A member of Women AloudNI and Causeway Coast and Glens Councillor.

### Maureen Boyle

Maureen Boyle's debut poetry collection, 'The Work of a Winter' published by Arlen House Press, was shortlisted for the Strong/Shine Poetry Prize in 2019. Her poem 'Strabane', was commissioned for Radio 4. She lives and teaches in Belfast.

### Trish Bennett

Trish Bennett grew up on the Leitrim/Fermanagh border. She spent her youth changing jobs, careers, and cities, not realising that she was building up a lifetime of shenanigans to tap into later on, when she gave in to the urge to write.

Website: [trishbennettwriter.com](http://trishbennettwriter.com)

### Gráinne Tobin

Gráinne Tobin lives in Newcastle, Co Down. Her poetry collections are *Banjaxed*, *The Nervous Flyer's Companion* and *The Uses of Silk*. She has poems in magazines, anthologies such as *Where the Neva Rushes Backwards* and *Female Lines*, and online, including Poethead, the Poetry Ireland archive and the ACNI Troubles archive.

### Réaltán Ní Leannáin

Réaltán writes mainly in Irish. 'Cítí na gCártaí', a novel set in Malta and Belfast at the end of the First World War, was nominated for the An Post Book Awards in 2019

in the Irish Language category. More about her on her blog <http://turasailse.blogspot.com/>

## **Moyra Donaldson**

Moyra Donaldson is a poet and creative writing facilitator from Co Down. She has published nine collections of poetry, including a limited edition publication of artwork and poems, *Blood Horses*, in collaboration with artist Paddy Lennon. Her most recent collection is *Carnivorous*, Doire Press, 2019. In 2019, she received a Major Individual Artist award from Arts Council NI. A new collection, *Bone House*, is forthcoming from Doire Press in Spring 2021. [moyradonaldson.com](http://moyradonaldson.com)

## **Gaynor Kane**

Gaynor Kane is author of *Circling the Sun*, *Memory Forest* and *Venus in Pink Marble* (The Hedgehog Poetry Press 2018, 2019 and 2020). She is also the co-author of *Penned In* along with Karen Mooney. Gaynor won the 7th Annual Bangor Poetry Competition.

## **Amy Louise Wyatt**

Amy Louise Wyatt is a poet from Bangor, N.I. Amy was shortlisted for the Seamus Heaney Award in 2018/2020 and won the Poetrygram Prize in 2019. She is editor of The Bangor Literary Journal. 'A Language I Understand' is her debut poetry pamphlet by Indigo Dreams. <https://amylouisewyatt.com/>

## **Fiona O'Rourke**

Fiona O'Rourke from Larne writes social realism undercut with gallows humour and the odd piece of time travel. Her stories have been published in The Lonely Crowd, Sonder II, The Broken Spiral, Spontaneity, Troquel Revista De Letras, Francis MacManus, and Fish Anthology. She holds the MPhil Creative in Writing from TCD.

## **Clare McWilliams**

Born in Bangor Hospital in 1977. Clare McWilliams, aka Belfast Beatnik, is a performer that has tried to achieve goals in both spoken and written word circles. Her mediocre achievements in both are a good example of what she may be capable of if she reads and writes more poetry.

## **Meg McCleery**

Former College lecturer in English Literature and Media Meg also ran Creative Writing classes in Belfast Community Centres and Women's Centres. She was awarded third place at the 7th Bangor Poetry Competition 2019 and has had work published in various journals and books including "North Star" in May 2020. Originally from Belfast, Meg now lives in North Down.

## **Helen Hastings**

Helen Hastings is a poet and writer from Northern Ireland. She has had work published in a wide range of journals and anthologies. Helen has read at events throughout Ireland, including Dublin Book Festival, Aspects Festival and Open House Festival. She is a member of WANI.

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