

# Menu of Poems 2024

Selected by Jane Clarke

'Menu of Poems' is a project of Arts and Health Co-ordinators Ireland, managed and produced by Saolta Arts and kindly supported by the Health Service Executive and Poetry Ireland.

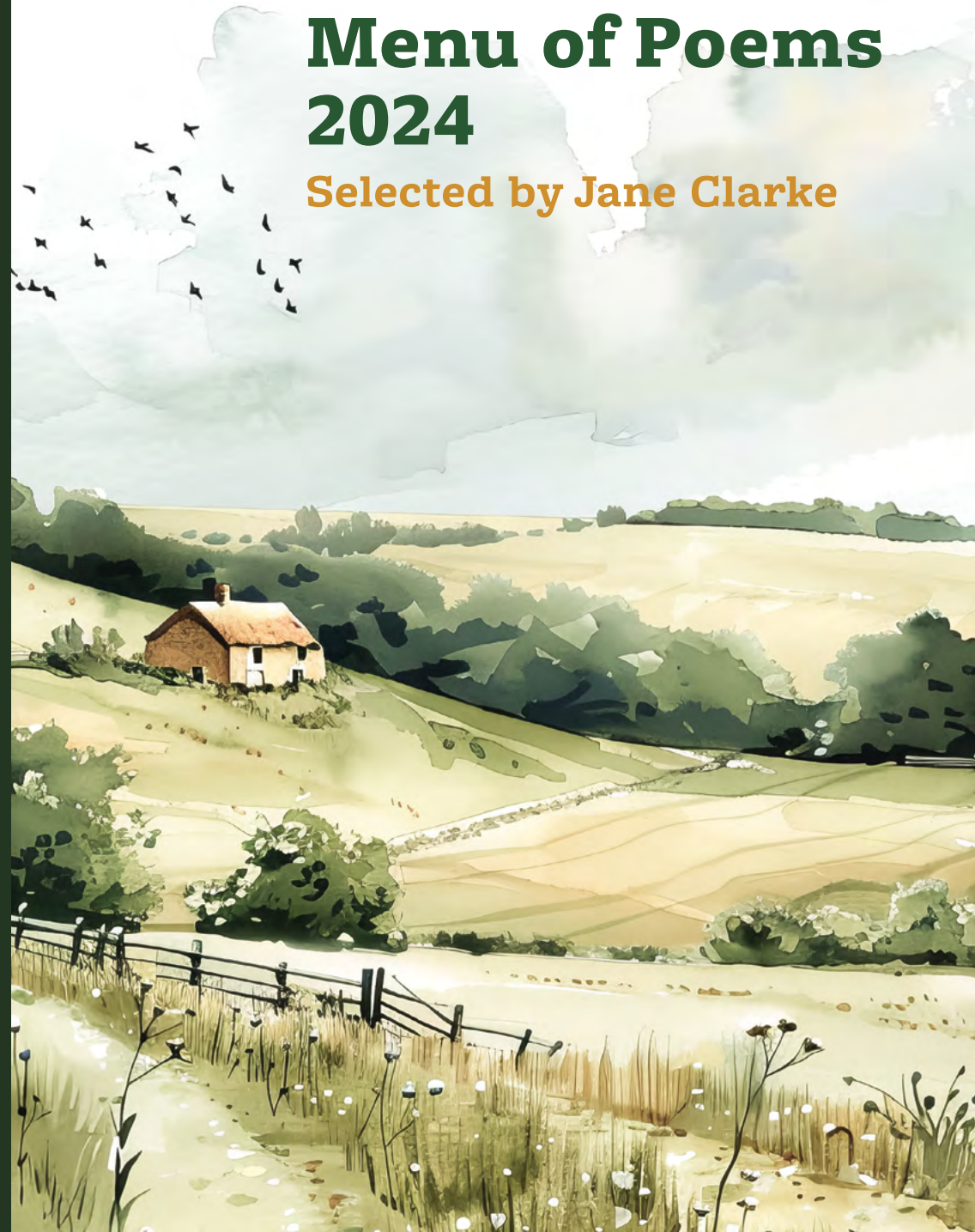


To listen to the poetry go to [saoltaarts.com/menuofpoems](https://saoltaarts.com/menuofpoems) where you will also find the wonderful *A Vole Pæm* by Linda McGrory which will be shared with children in hospital.

Please email your comments to: [saoltaarts@hse.ie](mailto:saoltaarts@hse.ie)

***Menu of Poems* a celebration of Poetry intended for distribution to patients and staff in participating hospitals and healthcare settings across Ireland in November 2024. This year's selection was edited by award winning Irish Poet Jane Clarke.**

This initiative is supported by Arts & Health Co-ordinators Ireland: Arts for Health Partnership programme, West Cork; Cork Kerry Community Healthcare; Kildare County Council Arts and Wellbeing Programme; MISA Creative Life at St. James's Hospital; Naas General Hospital Arts Committee; Saolta Arts for HSE West and Northwest; St Luke's Radiation Oncology Network, Dublin; St. Vincent's University Hospital, Tallaght University Hospital Arts & Health Programme; University Hospital Limerick; Waterford Healing Arts and West Cork Mental Health Services Arts and Health Programme. Menu of Poems has been co-ordinated by Saolta Arts CLG Charity Number: 20067915



It's a pleasure to share three poems with you today. I hope they'll arrive like shafts of sunlight. There's no need to study them, no need to look for hidden meaning – just read them a few times, maybe aloud to hear how they sound. See how they make you feel, what memories they unfurl, what pictures they evoke. Poetry doesn't solve problems and doesn't take away pain but most days it helps me connect with people and nature around me and helps me feel more alive.

### Perhaps the World Ends Here by Joy Harjo

The world begins at a kitchen table. No matter what, we must eat to live.

The gifts of earth are brought and prepared, set on the table. So it has been since creation, and it will go on.

We chase chickens or dogs away from it. Babies teethe at the corners. They scrape their knees under it.

It is here that children are given instructions on what it means to be human. We make men at it, we make women.

At this table we gossip, recall enemies and the ghosts of lovers.

Our dreams drink coffee with us as they put their arms around our children. They laugh with us at our poor falling-down selves and as we put ourselves back together once again at the table.

This table has been a house in the rain, an umbrella in the sun.

Wars have begun and ended at this table. It is a place to hide in the shadow of terror. A place to celebrate the terrible victory.

We have given birth on this table, and have prepared our parents for burial here.

At this table we sing with joy, with sorrow. We pray of suffering and remorse. We give thanks.

Perhaps the world will end at the kitchen table, while we are laughing and crying, eating of the last sweet bite.

From *The Woman Who Fell From the Sky* by Joy Harjo, (W. W. Norton and Company Inc., 1994).



### An Empty Barn in the Midlands by Eva Bourke

An empty barn in a sodden field filled with nothing but clouds and sky, no more than a galvanised roof on four posts, open to wind and rain. Was there no one to store a harvest beneath its roof, the corrugated roof under its red blanket of rust? From the train window I saw it standing alone in the field, and it struck me how it was a monument to nothing, always waiting for plenitude or to be given a reason why it stood out there in a midlands field, just as the roofless temples on barren hillsides of the Peloponnese with nothing but the sky between their broken pillars are waiting for someone to tell them why and to what purpose these stones were hewn, squared and cut, heaped and tapered. Was it to hold a tympanum or a frieze of feasting or squabbling titans and gods, or to enclose a great emptiness? Everyone and everything long to be accounted for, even the barn, the corrugated iron, the temples, the hewn stones, I thought, watching the emptiness of a world pass by that was once filled with your gaze.

From *Tattoos* by Eva Bourke, (Dedalus Press, 2024).



### The Yellow Jumper by Jane Clarke

They weren't married long when she saw it, a turtle-necked jumper in Murray's window - yellow as happiness, as the flash on a goldfinch's wings.

She imagined him wearing it at the fairs, standing out from all the rest in their greens and greys. Eighteen shillings and sixpence, she paid for it on tick, thruppence a week. For all that he smiled on his birthday, it remained on the back of the bedroom chair.

One day she folded and packed it in the chest with the spare candles, letters, photographs and the other questions she didn't ask.

She likes to think of him there, among pens of breeding heifers, weanlings and hoggets, splendid in yellow.

From *When the Trees Falls* by Jane Clarke, (Bloodaxe Books, 2019).