



FourXFour Poetry Journal

Bonus Round #1
Summer '13

Editorial

Welcome to this special 'Bonus Round' of FourXFour, where we round up all sixteen poets from our first four issues, and give you an extra poem from each of them.

Usually I ask for any of the writers involved to submit 8-10 poems to myself, from which I will choose the four I favour the most for inclusion. Often, while in the midst of editing each issue, it is a difficult and challenging task to whittle each selection down to only four. So this bonus round gives me an excuse to include some pieces that I liked, but just missed the cut.

Thanks to everyone who has read our past issues so far, shared Facebook statuses and retweeted about us, spread the word, and generally supported us since our launch. Here's to the next four issues, and many more after that, we hope...

Regards,
Colin Dardis, Editor.

Contents

p. 4 : From Issue One

Chris McLaughlin

Tory Campbell

Mario Abbatiello

Colin Dardis

p. 11 : From Issue Two

Patricia Devlin-Hill

Ray Givans

Geraldine O'Kane

Adrian Fox

p. 15 : From Issue Three

Mel Bradley

David Smylie

Mark Cooper

Wilma Kenny

p. 22 : From Issue Four

Jenny Cleland

Ross Thompson

Brian Bailey

Clare McWilliams

Chris McLaughlin: 'Death of Mr Kellogg'

*I'm following this thread to find who wronged who,
A father lies dead and I'm as clueless as you.*

Charlie worked at the Kellogg's factory;
sometimes he hugged too tightly.
He brought a big bag of reflectors
when he visited Junior and his Mammy
and she always took her glasses off
just in case he crushed them;
Tip-top carton in Junior's wheel
and down the street he's thundering.

Junior reflected so much light,
you always knew that he was coming:
when he rode his bike in Tallaght,
you could see it out in Crumlin.
His pedals whirred all over Dublin,
searching for a paternal puff of smoke,
who humoured him for a little while
until he tired of the joke.

Charlie in the bookies during Cheltenham.
Charlie Tolka Park on Friday night.
Charlie winning every argument.
Charlie always sure that he was right.
Charlie laid-off from the factory.
Charlie, no new wife or kids.

Charlie – *'who are you exactly?'*

Charlie doesn't know who Junior is.

History is a wheel, Charlie's on the spokes
revolving there with Laius and a million other blokes.

'You killed your fucking father!'

Not your typical Kellogg's tagline,
you can't sugar-coat it with coco or the feline;
but it happens every day
and nothing's really sacred.

Charlie, prone, beneath the son that he neglected.

For Christ Jesus died for us
and then was raised to life for us,
and he is sitting in the place of honour
at his Father's right hand.

Charlie woken from his slumber;
Junior stood beside his nightstand.

Charlie teaching Junior to ride his brand new bike;
Charlie on the bedroom floor impaled upon a spike.

*I'm following this thread to find who wronged who,
A father lies dead and I'm as clueless as you.*

Tory Campbell: 'Braids'

Standing by the light of the kitchen window
You'd inspect your mother's face.

Ugly sproutings only show
In certain light. Thick. Black. Coarse.

Her face pinched
As your tweezered nails plucked.

Then you returned to gouging
The eyes out of potatoes

And you both would laugh
And gossip and smoke.

~~~

As a child you placed me  
In front of the mirror

Brushed my tats into silk.  
Tugged at tails I didn't want.

Pulled hands away when I stuck  
Fingers in to soothe my scalp

Then parcelled me up with ribbon  
And sent me off to school.

~~~~

Sitting beside each other
I drive you home from town.

Over the Albert Bridge
A ball of birds swells into plumes.

You turn to me and marvel
At their timing, at the merge of them.

The low sun catches your jaw. I see
The glint of a strand that would horrify you.

We are not ready.
I let it grow.

Mario Abbatiello: 'Mid-August'

I can feel the days shortening
the light dimming, the year
only half over—a little more—
drawing itself inward 'round itself.

It feels like sadness,
like resignation,
a recognition that as much as
we've accomplished this past year,
it's enough, it's all that can
be done for this season,
it's at a close, a completion,
totting up its harvest even
before autumn.

And coupled with
this sad resignation, an excitement
for the new season of learning and
exploration that begins for me
always in September, as if my body
says enough and my mind begins
its own season in the fall of the year
after harvest and on into the
darkening days of winter.

Rest then my body
all its questing and adventuring,
its pushing, pulling, building, growing.

Now my mind will have its questions
and adventures and perhaps even my soul
will have its time this promising winter and
even an exploration of spirit
and life itself may find its way
into my awareness.

Above me blue cold sky, only
a thin scattering of icy cirrocumulus
moving millennially across the zenith.

Eons ago these same clouds
lived close to earth as the breath
of woolly mammoths exhaled
on icy mornings.

This morning they creep across
the edges of my awakening.

Colin Dardis: 'At My Doorstep'

With my sleeve, I muffle the speaker
and open my ears to outside; hit mute
to hear beyond the window: nothing.

A knock, the imagination,
a shout, rampant paranoia
as if the hordes are structured,
ready to charge at any time.

They have been issued their maps,
my ordinates, know my number and postcode,
been told the colour of my door.

They are well-trained and come with fire,
scorn at the end of pitchforks,
primed to kill the monster.

I can do nothing to quell this bloodlust,
do not know where the leader sleeps;
only wait and hope they are too apathetic
to bend their torches through my letterbox.

Patricia Devlin-Hill:
'Memorandum of Days'

The day is too long for you,
even nap time rafts it in two,
that solid float confusing you
'two days, mamum,-
you left me for two days'

'not fair'
Your face pushes out,
through time,
onto me.

In the mornings,
I want to cuddle you good bye
at the breakfast table
with its multi-personed bowls.
Swathing you,
I would rub my thumb
along your shoulder blade,
touch my nose into your ear,
kiss your cheek,
but you would not let me go,
so I leave you in glum distraction
at Miss Maureen's kitchen.

I hug you before though,
in the driver's seat.
With your knees up,

your head down.
Burrowed in,
I encompass you.

But mamum mustn't be late.

So you walk beneath my coat,
and I arrive at the yellow door without you¹
-just two extra feet with knees just above
that bend so much more than mine.

- I find your name with its kite.
- I hurry you through
what's laid out in your room.
- Miss Maureen's hands
stroll you to kitchen cupboard contents.

I am gone

The nights before,
lacing through book song and story dreamers,
you will not sleep,
knowing what
the bringing of morning means.

¹ I pull you from it later,
looped as you are,
with the high fresh circle cries of friends,
piercing our continuum.

Ray Givans: 'Connemara'

Posthumous letter from Sylvia Plath to Richard Murphy

Dear Richard,

Forgive me for dying.

My mother put it kindly, 'some darker day',
impossible dreaming:

couple of New Yorker stories in Ireland,

dear dear wild Connemara

enough to drive a poet to madness,

Ballinasloe, Cleggan, Coole, Ballylee....

sailing the Ave Marie to Inishbofen.

And dear Tom. Did the strain show? I mean Ted and I.

Sweet relief, warmth of milk straight from the cow,
the savoury smell of a real turf fire.

Remember how you helped me rent a cottage

next door to that sturdy woman –

I could have drawn on her strength, her language.

I still walk your shores; sea and horizon mingle

throwing up ghosts to meet an azure sky,

and little hummocks of rock, shining black seals.

My freakish head may appear again in the Atlantic;

sea-splash, and I wear a white gown of beautiful Nauset.

Then a malevolent swastika black sea clings,

and I must ride those horses back across London.

I would starve here intellectually

but for the muse of Yeats that blesses me,
your seas of isolation sting as well as heal.

Geraldine O'Kane: 'False Economy'

Stowed in a box room of a third floor terrace,
the city lay as an abandoned gift:
pretty and unopened, a mystery
at the foot of her pedestal.

She pertained herself to his needs
and dreams, while disintegrating
among the damp and dry rot,
intensified by his stale words and hot breath.

He bought her pastel shades and powder,
just like he painted the walls
to conceal the depths of the cracks
and horror beneath.

Freedom knocked constantly;
afraid to fall, she hid in silence,
mourning the death of her self-expression
while he just carried on.

Adrian Fox: 'A Cold Front'

I have to dig in deep
to find a purpose
to find a stanza that
translates my soul.

My purpose is to be-
come a silent poet
a screaming din with-
in a noiseless state.

A person that is way be-
yond a person a human that
seeks to find humanity
a searcher of the truth within
the search, a man that has
touched his own black hole.

Mel Bradley: 'Love Poetry'

I once heard a poet speak about love poetry:
That it couldn't change the world,
Couldn't liberate those enslaved,
Emancipate the oppressed.
But I disagree.
See, I believe in love,
I believe in the beauty of love.
Because in love, we find ourselves;
In love, we find our humanity.

Love reminds us of what we are.
No man or woman is an island:
Bereft of love, we are empty.
With love, we have empathy.
Love shows us the truth of our being,
The emotions that lie inside.

Love, that blazes in our path
Igniting fury and passion
Above all else,
Tells us that we are feeling.
All the intellect in the world could not
Move us to tears
When love triumphs.
But love, in its glory, is magnificent:
Transcending all other emotions,
Gives hope to the hopeless.
And I am hopeful.

And as for poetry,
Love poetry,
It reminds us how love feels;
Love poetry brings us back
To where we need to be.
It evokes in us a response:
To be elated,
To be hurt,
When we are feeling,
We know we are alive.

To Tennyson, Shakespeare, Neruda,
Despite our arguments,
I'd like to thank you
And to all the greats that I admire:
In art you gave me purity,
You spilled your souls
And we watched, ignorant.

David Smylie:

'WB, Two Boys, A Dog and Me'

I paid my respects to your memory,
explained about a cold eye, life
and horsemen passing.

they had no sense of reverence,
laughed at someone called Frizzelle
interred close by you.

We walked by the river,
listened to small birds singing,
threw hazel twigs -
then watched as the current carried them
downstream.

I looked for silver trout,
searched for inspiration
but my thoughts got lost in the wind,
and are out there somewhere
under Ben Bulben.

Mark Cooper: 'Ammonite'

Split the rock, left of line,
owl eyes draw into mine.
Sight that has not seen
since monster serpents
swam the oceans green,
and terrible lizards walked
in sun bathed forests.
Split the rock, left of line,
owl eyes draw into mine.



Wilma Kenny: 'Memory'

A memory
I had left
at the sidelines of
my emotions
crashed through all
my carefully placed barriers.
It broke through my tender skin.

I wept.

God was here
holding the broken bits that are me
in the hollow of his hand.

I am whole again.

Jenny Cleland: 'The Dress'

The dress made the wearer beautiful.
It made her incandescent.
It heightened vulnerability,
But made her, ever present.

The dress was luminosity,
The dress was softest silk.
It sang of dreams and bygone days
The dress was pearls and milk.

The bones were of eternity
And truth that could not change;
Hearts that beat indefinitely,
Beauty without age.

The fabric flowed like kisses,
Cascaded over curves.
The dress was sweet and sensuous;
More than anyone deserves.

The dress promised many promises.
It promised love throughout all time;
Endless, sumptuous happiness;
It cradled every line.

The dress whispered of forever.

It truly flattered form.

The dress was all I wanted.

The dress was never worn.

Ross Thompson: 'Mariner '

When the shift nurse called my name
I pictured myself in a ship resting
on the barbed tongue of a storm.

When I slipped off my day clothes
I disrobed for a pretty serving wench
who tended my every need.

When the needle pierced my skin
I saw brails reeving the clews of the sails
which bore my insignia.

When the liquid filled my veins
I felt the open bore of a hip flask
draining rum into my mouth.

When the mask covered my face
I kissed the wet lips of a piratess
who sent me snooze, snooze, snoozing.

When they cracked open my chest
they scooped out flagons of octopus ink
and dark, sticky molasses.

And when the swell grew too fierce
I pitched myself into the howling sway.

My body was never found.

Brian Bailey: 'BELFAST'

Youz got money for guns
and no cash for murals.
I was born there in Slumland
and raised there with love
and every hard-nuttid bastard
that BELFAST could throw at me
was;
but I knew good men there,
loved good women there
and many people older than their time
taught me to fight to the death
for my right to love.

BELFAST
taught me
the meaning of the metaphor.

Clare McWilliams: 'Daddy'

Once a giant God of jolly
Reduced to a clean-smelling shell
Atop a rectangular, crisp-white shroud.
Nonsense spewed from a former font
I was baptised by.
I held your huge, frail hand,
Whispering my permit for release.
Head turning,
Eyes I had inherited
Lifted their glaze
To be sure I spoke the truth.
In the brevity of that cavernous moment
I was once again his blonde, pig-tailed princess
And he, the King of my world,
Bearing me high in the sky
Above all that I knew.

Thank you for reading!



Copyright original authors © 2012-13

Fossil photograph: Mark Cooper

All rights reserved

Produced in Northern Ireland