

FourXFour  
Poetry Journal

Issue 10 Autumn 2014

**POST  
NO  
ILLS**

Ruth Carr

Damian Gorman

Judith Thurley

Michael Wilson

# Editorial

Welcome to Issue 10 of FourXFour.

We're launching this issue to coincide with National Poetry Day on October 2<sup>nd</sup>. We're delighted to have reached our tenth release, and to be able to continue bringing you fine Northern Irish poetry.

We believe passionately in the promotion of local poets. At a time when the Arts Council of Northern Ireland faces cuts of 4.4%, and with our Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure suffering a minister and chairman with very poor track records in this field, support for the arts is absolutely vital. So much focus (and money) goes to dealing with the negative aspects of life in Northern Ireland. Perhaps Stormont would do well to remember the words of John F. Kennedy:

"When power leads man toward arrogance, poetry reminds him of his limitations. When power narrows the area of man's concern, poetry reminds him of the richness and diversity of existence. When power corrupts, poetry cleanses."

Regards and happy reading,  
Colin Dardis, Editor  
Poetry NI

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## Ruth Carr

Ruth Carr, a former editor of *The Honest Ulsterman*, has published two collections, *There is a House* and *The Airing Cupboard* (Summer Palace, 1999, 2008). She is a founder member of Word of Mouth Poetry Collective who recently published a bilingual anthology of five Russian poets, *When The Neva Rushes Backwards* (Lagan Press, May 2014).

Last year Ruth received a bursary from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland to explore the lives of Mary Ann McCracken and Dorothy Wordsworth through poetry. The resulting work will form the core of her third collection.

*The poem "On Friday, 8<sup>th</sup>, We Baked Bread" was inspired by and includes quotes from Dorothy Wordsworth's journal.*

## Homecoming

A wet, warm Sunday in July.  
Turning the corner into my road  
I glimpse my long gone father.

For no clear reason  
I'm reaching deep into his heart  
as into a pocket of silk.

I cup in my hand  
familiar, feather-light warmth  
cocooned within his breast.

He says he's been waiting for me,  
keeping the poor thing right.  
Waiting for me to catch the missing beat.

## The Little Horse

Smithed in Belgium  
bargained for in France  
ferried from Calais  
most likely on Dorothy's hand.  
Her finger finds the hallmark's sign,  
a tiny horse engraved  
outer side of the ring.  
Admire it as she might  
this is the pledge  
intended for dear Mary.

She

the hooves      the canter      the steady back  
the sure-footed Fell      the well-natured hack  
the quick, clear eye      the responsive mouth  
the untamed mane      the deep-hearted girth  
the mare that would clear every hurdle:  
whatever the inner weather  
these hooves outside the ring  
would bring him home.

## The Ring

He knocked and came in,  
raised you up like a child from the bed  
withdrawing the ring from your finger;

impulsively slipped it back on,

blessing those hands again,  
that body and soul of a sister  
who'd saved him from going under.

What words exchanged before he went to her?

Through the pane you watched them alter,  
her arm in his for the church  
that you would not enter.

Collapsed in the arms of a migraine,

how the bells tolled as you lay,  
peeling away your life  
with the ring of betrothal;

you would be three now.

“On Friday, 8th, we baked bread”

Two days home,  
two women in the kitchen.

Bread needs baking.

Dorothy stokes the fire.

Mary sprinkles flour on the table like snow,  
does not remove her ring to pummel the dough  
that Dorothy tips in a bowl

and leaves to prove.

She walks out into the air and up the garden,  
Mary stands beside her

watching a bee in a foxglove

the colour of snow.

Dorothy says she grew the flower from seed.

They knead the bread between their snow-floured hands,  
shape it and while it bakes the table is scraped,  
slates swept, aprons hung on a nail.

It comes out risen, crusty.

Dorothy cuts the heel

and they walk up the hill and on to John’s Grove.

Light filters through the firs as flakes of snow  
melting into the silent floor they share,  
the sealike sound in the trees above their heads.

They cannot find it in their hearts to leave  
until the sun grows strong, the clouds break blue  
and they go on to drink the view of Rydale.



Later, Dorothy writes:

'The first walk that I had taken with my sister.'

## Damian Gorman

Damian Gorman has been a writer, and encourager of other people's writing, for the best part of thirty years. In that time he has worked as a playwright, poet and documentary filmmaker, as well as facilitating hundreds of writing sessions.

His own work has garnered awards as diverse as a Better Ireland Award and an MBE, a Golden Harp and a BAFTA. His verse films *Devices of Detachment* (about the "Troubles") and *The Skull Beneath The Skin* (about 9/11) - both directed by Hugh Thomson - have received widespread critical acclaim. *Devices...* has had network screenings in both the US and UK.

Damian now lives in Wales with his wife Bronwen Williams. He rarely publishes the texts of his poems.

## Stop

*Written after seeing two sets of parents bury their children during the Gazan war*

Today I bury my child,  
stop  
And it was you who killed my child,  
stop  
I know that he wasn't the target,  
stop  
But that doesn't make him any less killed.

I know that "these things have contexts",  
stop  
I have walked all around the contexts,  
stop  
I have tried unfamiliar angles,  
stop  
But they don't make him any less killed.

You say, "what should we do - tell me?"  
stop  
And I say, "don't murder my child,"  
stop  
"Walk as far away from that as you can,"  
stop  
"Move forward, away from that thing."  
stop

And you say you are "just like" me,

stop

That we feel and we do the same things

stop

I know what you mean, but we don't

stop

For today you don't bury your child

*stop*

## Rumours

There are rumours of things which survive Hell,  
But they are only rumours.  
Most things - most people - don't,  
And that's a fact.

There are rumours of Love being heard above the furnaces,  
Glimpsed by the ear as a clearly-separate note  
Different from all the roaring going on,  
But these are only rumours  
- Which says it all.

For rumours are only whispers, which is next to nothing  
Like the sound of a kiss without the kiss itself.  
I am tempted to say that, when all is said and done,  
The only thing that stacks up is our corpses.

Except that the thing which survives is the rumours  
                  themselves:

The legends of love we share, like sacred bread;  
The hell-accented stories of Beauty and Life;  
The rumours which are only rumours,

But are, maybe, enough...

## Acts of Resilience

If you are lost,  
If you're out of your depth,  
If you cannot explain  
Yourself to yourself,

If you're too tired to sleep,  
Too tender to touch,  
And if even a little  
Is much too much,

If the trails to what's sweet  
Have all grown cold  
Or you're full of fright  
Like a falling child,

Then the thing is to act  
As brave as you're not -  
Act like your life depended on it.

Act like a child  
Who is simply free;  
Pretend you're as big  
As the shadows you see.

Borrow from dreams  
That you've had – and you will;  
Gather the pieces;  
Know you are whole.

## After the Poet

*In Memoriam, Victor Jara*

A bird can sing  
With broken wings, or none at all.

All that it needs  
Is a full throat,  
    And a hearing;

All it needs  
Is not to be too afraid  
Of singing;

All that it needs  
Is to be - or have been -  
A bird.

# Judith Thurley

Judith Thurley is from Bangor in Co Down. She is a nurse and has a degree in Spanish and French. Her pamphlet *Listening for Hedgehogs* was published in 1995 by Lapwing Press in Belfast and she has had poems published in *The White Page* (Salmon Poetry), *The Backyards of Heaven*, *The Crab Orchard Review* (Illinois) and *Snap* (Templar Poetry).

Judith was shortlisted for the Templar Poetry Prize in 2010, and she had non-fiction nature prose writing published in the anthology *A Wilder Vein* (Two Ravens Press). She has written and edited *The Enchanted Way*, a chapter on the nature poetry of Ulster, in *The Natural History of Ulster*.

Recently, she has been writing in Spanish on Bolivian themes and translating these poems into English. She is currently working on a full collection of poetry.



*Cuando el cura*

*levantó el sacramento  
en sus manos,*

*la luna llena  
se levantó*

*sobre el espino  
sobre el mar*

*sobre La Paz  
sobre los Andes*

*vestidos de su  
mantón blanco.*

*Cuando metó  
el cuerpo de Cristo*

*en mis manos esperandos,  
bercí la cara pálida*

*de un niño espantado,  
de un clafero.*

When the priest

raised the sacrament  
with his two hands,

the full moon rose  
over the hawthorn

over the lough  
over La Paz

over the Andes  
in their white robes.

When he placed  
the body of Christ

in my cupped hands,  
I cradled the pale face

of a petrified child,  
of a street-child.

## *El Dia del Mar*

*Estoy sacando una foto  
de la voz del viento  
en la hierba.*

*Escucha:  
y usted tambien está metido  
hasta las rodillas  
en la hierba,  
el mar enfrente de nosotros.*

*Estoy pintando  
el olor del aire  
en la playa.*

*Alienta:  
sienta el olor de las algas,  
como centellean  
de sal y luz.*

*Estoy tejiendo las canciones  
de ostrero, archibebe,  
vuelvepedras,  
con arena, ola,  
viento del norte.*

*Toque:  
sienta como esta manta  
reconforta su alma.*

*Estoy alargando la mano,  
cantando a la aurora boreal,*

*que baila verde como dioses.*

*Mira:*

*como se asoman de sus cielos norteros  
risueños,  
arrojando serpentinas  
hacia la tierra.*

*Estoy enviándoles todo esto  
al sur, al Altiplano  
donde ustedes  
no oyen ni huelen las olas  
donde están de duelo  
a ciento cuarenta años  
de distancia de su mar.*

## Day of the Sea

I am photographing  
the sound of the wind  
in the grass.

Listen:

and you too  
are knee-deep in grass  
and the sea before us.

I am painting  
the scent of the air  
on this shore.

Breathe in:

smell how seaweed  
glistens with salt and light.

I am weaving  
songs of oystercatcher,  
redshank, turnstone  
with sand, wave and north wind.

Here:

feel how this cloth  
comforts your soul.

I am reaching up,  
singing to the northern lights  
who dance green as gods.

Look:

see how they lean down

from their heavens,  
smiling,  
hurling streamers  
towards the earth.

I am sending  
all these things south  
to the High Andes  
where you can neither hear  
nor smell the ocean.  
To where you grieve  
for your lost coast,  
one hundred and forty years  
from your Bolivian sea.

## *Mientras dormia*

*Mientras dormia,  
viniste del Titicaca  
en tu barco de junco,  
tu barco de cielo oscuro.*

*Atracaste a orilla de mi cama;  
viniste sin ruido  
a bordo de mi cama.  
Te quité tu gorra  
de arco iris.*

*Me revolviste,  
besando la cicatriz  
sobre mi corazón,  
punto por punto.*

*Tata Inti nunca tocó  
mis senos pálidos  
pero tu piel quechua;  
ombbligo, vientre, pecho  
olía bello  
de sal de sol  
y dije  
Ari.*

## While I slept

While I slept,  
you sailed from Titicaca  
in your reed boat,  
boat of the dark sky.

You tied up alongside my bed,  
you came noiselessly  
to the banks of my bed.  
I took off  
your bright cap.

You turned me over,  
kissed the scar  
over my heart,  
stitch by stitch.

Sun God never once touched  
these pale breasts,  
but your Quechua skin:  
navel, belly, chest,  
smelled beautiful  
of salt of sun  
and I said  
*Yes.*



*Mientras nadabas*

*en el lago profundo  
de sueños,  
navegando el cielo oscuro,  
caminando por las nubes,*

*al otro lado del mundo  
me desperté  
con la voz del Mar Irlandés.*

*Buscaba  
la piedra  
la concha  
el queipo  
perfectos,  
capturé el viento radiante.*

*Te las regalo envueltas  
en estas palabras.*

*Mira:  
los puse levemente,  
sin ruido, a tu lado,  
y me escabullí a la madrugada*

*mientras dormías.*

While you were drifting

in the deep lough of dreams,  
sailing the dark sky,  
walking the clouds,

half a world away

I awoke to the voice  
of the Irish sea.

I searched for the perfect  
stone

shell

kelp,

I captured the bright wind.

I offer them to you  
wrapped in these words.

See:

I've placed them lightly,  
noiselessly beside you.

I've slipped away into the dawn

while you sleep.

## Michael Wilson

Michael Wilson writes on the tried and trusted themes of sex, drugs, and rock n' dole. A national award winner, multi slam champ, and creator of a number of published collections, as well as one time authority on the 1957 American Civil Rights Act, he now runs a spoken word event in his home town of Portstewart.

As a member of the Art Academy at The Islington Mill, Michael participated in residencies in Glasgow, Berlin and the Lake District, A workshop facilitator for adults with mental health issues and learning difficulties, he cut his teeth on the well-established Manchester poetry scene, and is currently organising his first tour of Ireland and a way to convert his street art towards the more coastal environmental surroundings of North West Northern Ireland.

## Postcards from Space

They say love, new love,  
bright as new pennies  
in a till drawer.

They say new love  
is like going into space,  
sounds delicious,  
remembered as a sea blue day.  
But space has two sides,  
the three bar heater light  
and the tar pit night.  
Messages between us took forever  
across the meteor belts,  
through the static fields.  
Your light, a glow  
amongst a billion others,  
plays tricks  
on a starved mind.

We orbited Saturn's rings,  
but close up,  
they were just rocks and dust,  
turning slower than the eye made out.  
Jupiter's red spot,  
too fiery to gaze at for long.  
Io too forbidding.  
Neptune too dark

to make out the contours of a face.  
The moon, too dry.  
The moon just an afterthought,  
a cut out shape left over,  
a shaving of something greater,  
found by accident  
on the Creators workshop floor.

But there is one difference  
as we wait for gravity's pull  
out of nothing:  
dying suns have their spectacular,  
final call;  
ours will be, I see, the cut of candlelight,  
nothing more than just dark matter,  
a light particle,  
a photon,  
slowly fading out,  
no place amongst the boxed compass sky.  
Just another blackness  
between the mystery of two  
constellation stars  
that slowly orbit each other.  
Like pieces of a clock.  
Running backwards.

P.S.

Say a prayer for the demon on your back:  
he knows which direction is north,  
so even with your eyes clamped shut  
he knows the way home.

When I was ill, someone stayed,  
told me every film has three endings:  
you can be Red, or Andy, or Brooks,  
you can leave together or alone.

I sat in a park  
opposite a man with an apple in his hand.  
He was bronze, I was white with cold.  
Around his fingers were kisses left by those that know.

I live in a bugged house,  
people move above my head;  
it's ok though, sometimes they take my mail,  
sift out the ordinary life for more interesting one.

I found myself in a ramshackle room  
in King's Cross.  
An angel or whatever told me not to fret:  
"Life is the train ride, not the overgrown station at the end."

So I say a prayer for the demon on my back,  
at least it keeps him from others -

or her, it's so easy to get things wrong these days.  
I keep him with whiskey, and stories of dreams long gone  
from me.

## A Cross-Mid-Section of a Day

There are three ships.  
Great tankers  
in the bay,  
sheltering from storms.  
They sit, pretty when at night.  
Unmoving.  
They will remain there.  
Then, suddenly, they'll be gone.  
We won't notice straight away.

The ocean looks like a certain album cover.  
The surfers are out in force.  
I've lived here years,  
but never seen them before.  
Not like this.  
Their long boards at angles  
like strange birds,  
shapes breathing,  
multicolour land, simple black and blue,  
so very blue.

Clogged, round stones:  
the seaweed looks like branches,  
or gnawed on chicken bones.  
The waves that collect  
sound electrical to me,  
a watered down version,



of the aeroplanes engines as they ready for the runway.  
When I was a wicked lad,  
things were not as they sounded at all,  
so this distortion, reached in half maturity,  
is delicious to me.

At the gate of the beach: I say hello.  
and find I know them all.  
Try to balance conversation on my head,  
they tell me the beach is great  
in words, in smiles, in nods, in the very packs of them,  
and all they brought in, walking.  
And I walk under a blessing,  
but the sun cannot last.  
Home beckons,  
with thoughts of televised football  
and a family to share this all with.

## That's All, Folks

At the end of the day,  
the day is the end of us all.

At the end of the day,  
sleep is a language none of us talks.

**Thank you for reading!**

**4 X 4**

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