



FourXFour
Poetry Journal

Issue 16 Spring 2016

Maureen Boyle
Chris Jenkins
Dave Wilson
Gary Allen

Editorial

Welcome to FourXFour Issue 16, bringing you another selection of fine poetry from Northern Ireland, as usual mixing established names, prize-winners and up-and-coming new talent.

By the time Issue 17 is released this summer, FourXFour will have passed its fourth birthday. So far, we have brought you sixty-four individual poets with two hundred and seventy poems (counting our Bonus Round Issue). These are phenomenal numbers, and are testament to the depth and variety of poetical talents in 'our wee country'.

FourXFour is committed to a 50/50 split between male and female poets (currently at 32:32) across all issues, and endeavours to seek out great poetry from all circles and backgrounds. We are only one platform for poetry in Ireland: I undertook a recent tally of literary journals and zines – both online and in print – within Ireland, and was delighted to find over forty. We want to see more NI poets published, within Ireland and outside it, and will continue our pledge to help bring those with promise and ability to the fore.

Regards and happy reading,
Colin Dardis, Editor

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Maureen Boyle

Maureen Boyle comes originally from Sion Mills in County Tyrone. She wrote poetry as a child, winning a UNESCO medal for a book of poems while still at school. She's won many prizes including the Ireland Chair of Poetry Prize and Strokestown International Poetry Prize in 2007; an Artist's Career Enhancement Award in 2011 and the Fish Short Memoir Prize in 2013. This Spring, her poems appeared in Blackstaff's 'New Poets from the North of Ireland' edited by Sinead Morrissey and Stephen Connolly. She lives in Belfast.

Setting Out

i.m. Seamus Heaney

That morning our house was at its most alive
Full of the busyness of the end of summer
The windows lit by the pinks and reds of flowers
At their most vivid in that Lammas light
Deepest just before they fall.
We would have spoken of you
With the painter come to paint the shelter
For the winter logs – himself the brother of a poet.
And then into the light and laughter -
The phone call and the news.

Later on, I'd picture you a kind of Tollund man
Spiriting yourself up and out across the bog
Storing your bundle of soul-clothes as you'd seen
The turfcutters do with your father
But this time having no fear of the plashy wet
The tell-tale places of purple water mint.
Lightened and buoyed across the causey
Through a meadow of bog cotton/asphodels
You go with long clean strides to meet your father
And hold him properly this time.

Black Mountain Viewed from English 6

Sometimes in the middle of a class we'll stop and look out the window. It is the highest and biggest in the school and framed in it is a sweep of mountain that gives a sense of the west of the city. The little streets become beautiful geometry as the light catches identical parades of chimneys, grey below the mountain's green and on the top a lazy orthographic cloud will lie along it in the morning, until moved or melted by the sun. And one day there's a fire with the fireman up a ladder peeing his water on a burning house and every so often a sunburst of white gulls will wheel upward, lifting like a surprise across the rooftops and the tall row of poplar trees that bind the nuns' graveyard have been pollarded stark against the winter sky and often weather will roll in and down, rain bleaching all the colour out to a grey blur, only for it to come back in bright contrasts after the shower.

Christmas Box

There is honey and chocolate on our doorstep
since Christmas – sweet box and coral flower -
one on either side. The heuchera with ruffled
cocoa-coloured leaves, hunkers in the corner but
the sarcococca or sweet box, is where we step
inside by design so that, on nights as dark as winter
and full of storm, we brush the bluff, squat, shrub
and trail the scent of summer on boots and coats
into the hall. Its flowers are what are left of flowers,
petals blown away - spindly threads ghostly in the leaves,
the odd, early blood-berry that follows.
Its genus *confusa* is right – from so frail a spindly bloom
a scent so big, as if the bees have nested in it
and are eager for their flight.

Jacinta Painting Under Trees

for Jacinta O'Reilly

(Annaghmakerrig, Easter, 2015)

Jacinta is painting under trees,
capturing every note of the birds' song
on a canvas that is netting the spring air.
From here, she is a child or a 1950s mother
hauling out a quilt to dry on the clothes line,
something deemed unseemly now for gardens.
My mother saw a full line of bright white nappies
flapping in the wind, the pristine fruit of her morning.
Jacinta hangs her work from the trees on Easter branches,
buds ready to burst, daffodils smears of yellow in the grass,
a black bird scuffling among the dead leaves of the beech hedge.

Jacinta leaves the painting out on the grass overnight and tends it
with a blue bucket in the morning. Is she adding to it or plucking
off what it has snared? The stray feathers of a crow or a bee
that has trespassed in the paint? Perhaps the course hair
of a puzzled creature that sniffed it and this minute
carries off the colour to its lair? When this painting
hangs, will it hold the outside in? Does it know
it is *en plein air*? I have never seen a painter
work like this and envy her the chance
to play which is surely what art is.
Jacinta is painting under trees.

Chris Jenkins

Chris Jenkins comes from Belfast. He has worked in public health in Uganda, Switzerland, and Thailand, and community development in Northern Ireland.

Chris recently moved back to Belfast and is trying to get involved in the poetry scene. Chris was published in issue six of *Panning for Poems* and this is his second publication. Chris can be found on Facebook at facebook.com/chrisjenkinswords and Twitter at [@ChrisJenkins90](https://twitter.com/ChrisJenkins90)

Omagh

Ten minutes into the match
the whispers begin;

old men hold creased ears to
their portable radios,

listening for score updates
from the other matches.

Normally they're false rumours;
our rivals are losing,

their captain has been sent off
and their keeper is injured.

Today they aren't rumours.
There's been a bomb in Omagh.

Nods, confirmations, and lowered eyes;
it's nothing new to people here.

Omagh Town's team is in front of us,
chasing a football on our pitch.

We watch their white kits
accumulate mud stains.

More new filters through;
it's not just a bomb,

it's a huge bomb, there's
twenty dead and counting.

Their captain crunches into
our centre-half; no one protests.

Weather Forecasting

Every time we go for a walk,
the same conversations ensue.
My parents share disproportionate confidence
in their weather forecasting abilities.

If the sun is out
my Mum will focus on the tiniest
of clouds lost in the blue sky:
a monsoon is imminent.

And if it's pouring a steady Irish rain,
my Dad will still point out
impossibly small pinholes of sun
that are sure to break the grey.

Ashes

A pile of ash
has accumulated by the window;
these are your signs
of disquiet.

A multitude
of grievances gets sucked
into your heavier lungs
and the pile grows.

You tell me smoking
helps you cope with me
and I am to blame
for your future cancers.

I should take
that pile of ash and cup it;
let the wind take it from fingers
like sifting sand.

Mosquitoes

Mosquitoes

are pulling at jean hems;
I wonder can they really
bite through denim?

I've heard before they
can bite through platinum;
an Irish guy that owns a bookshop
here told me so.

His bookshop
is packed to the roof
with every category; every book
written may be in here.

"Belfast! I have an Irish section!"
He runs to the corner,
pulls biographies of Ian Paisley
and Gerry Adams.

"Which one are you?"
He laughs and means it well -
the politics of home mean
little abroad.

I would go to his shop to run
calligraphy through my fingers
and to amuse myself with
erotic philosophy.

Sitting on the curb in the
impulsivity of dust swirls
I swat at the shoals of flies
devouring me

Wondering if each speck of blood
they take from veins
is a bit of me that
I'll never get back.

Dave Wilson

Dave Wilson is a sad, angry man, at home on the miserable and rain-slicked tarmac of Belfast's slumbering streets. He writes, more often than not, for the same reason people drink.

He is currently treading water on the Belfast poetry scene, frantically kicking out and hoping to stay afloat. His previous works can be found in such illustrious magazines as *The Linnet's Wings*, *Black Heart Press*, and *The Bunbury Journal*.

When not hoking through bins for bad poetry, Dave can be found on Twitter at @TheMythBastard.

Hell is Other Robots

itching at the edge of
rubbernecking, gawping,
watching hungry tongues lap at
the heart of something beautiful.

watching lives tumble down around
slender shoulders, laughing and
smiling at how warm and
inviting the flames look.

Vending Machines in a Rainy Alleyway at Night

moonshine slides on sodden tarmac
slick black fields of
oil stretch out so far
down twisting city arteries.
In the distance light shines
keys to some hidden night's lockup
opening doors to salt-soaked secrets and
fairy lights full of promise.
of something hidden and hopeful,
stolen away,
and locked behind
clear plastic.

Swimming Lessons From Stalin

teach your kids to swim
by throwing them into the ocean.
laugh at them while they're drowning,
falling, rolling;
trampled under
rabid iron horses.
look past their
bitter, hollow eyes and
ask them if they
understand yet.

Cado

dichotomy

how to love

how to be loved

pencil shaving skin tapped

granite or

graphite or

wired implausible

intermittent depressions

button-pressing two-hundred channels and

nothing's fucking on

feeling

wet feet and

fuck you asshole, you splashed me

feeling

a glass half empty or

a glass half full-of-shit?

juxtaposed

boredom and sadness and anger

nihilism is a cancer

biopsy reports

terminally miserable and

miserably terminal

let the last few decades pass in
relative discomfort

when life gives you lemons
make lemonade
and if you don't like lemonade
(who doesn't like lemonade?)
you're fucked.

Gary Allen

Gary Allen was born in Ballymena. He has published fourteen collections, most recently, 'Jackson's Corner,' Greenwich Exchange, London 2016. A new collection, 'Mapland,' has been accepted by Clemson University Press, South Carolina.

Up the Arbor

Let us gather round and watch –
a Saturday afternoon, better than the professional wrestling
or the winners at Newmarket or Newcastle,
this Sisyphean family, dysfunctional on the green
where they have moved scuffed settees and armchairs
and a light-stand into the open on the Buttershaw Estate,
are passionately cursing their way through
a kitchen-sink drama, a passion play of sorts.

The father in string vest is fighting drunk
and racist, but one must ask oneself,
does he really understand he is racist,
any more than the Asian youth comes from Pakistan?

As the last of the winter light closes down the moors
the residents are standing around in small nervous groups,
but aren't sure if they are being insulted
or are the product of another social experiment
or the product of a creative-writing class
or the characters come to life
from one of their owns imagination –
one more teenage pregnancy.

The washing is on the lines
the children are horse-riding their Christmas Chopper bikes
Jameel has gone to fight in Belfast
and in The Beacon, Andrea is lying
on the piss covered toilet floor
quietly haemorrhaging in the brain –

and the play will soon be over
and we can get on with being forgotten.

Mapland

I am no Imran Khan
I never played the English game
I never had any power
I never found beliefs

my lover's teeth rotted away
and never were replaced
her eyes are always happy
she talks like Janis Joplin
she is no model
she has no modesty
she takes power in its lowest form

and takes sad pictures of her twelve-year old son
in a too big school uniform
in each one he tries to smile through terror
picked upon
his geography places countries
in absurd physical relationships –
oceans like ice caps like deserts
don't exist –
maybe the earth is flat after all

and no bigger than the boarded-up houses
of this Northern estate:

England is no bitch
she has football and game shows and tolerance
and is closer than an obscure language
or a second cousin
yet different enough to blame

for welfare cuts and baton rounds
and lost sports togs and broken pencils
and the girls who laugh at his sewed-up trousers

the Himalayas are a made-up place
in a film called Shangri-La
the Punjab and Peshawar are types of curry
from the Hot & Spicy Takeaway
Bid Laden is the President of America (or is it the USA?)

my lover and her son are not dumb
she relishes ignorance as she collects
the common colloquialisms
and sometimes she is profoundly right
in matters of sexuality or abuse
and sometimes I am twelve
and sometimes I am the purple mountain ridges

cutting across the fat of her belly
like Imran Khan looking up doe-eyed
from the woman's magazine
or her son cutting strange ciphers
into his thin arms after school.

Huguenot

He could never be one of us
everything about him was different
even his English was not our English

his clothes fitted without stitching
or turn-ups or patches
he was clean to the point of distraction,
almost shiny
although his skin was darker

he was wrong on so many counts
and ripe for it –
the teachers exalted him
but no one got too close

someone said his father sketched birds
for a nature magazine
yet it seemed more plausible
that he came over to see the installation of machinery
for the new tyre factory

and someone said, 'My father said
they only employ Catholics there.'

The first time we set upon him
we lured him to the corner of the high red brick wall
where we played handball
and kicked his legs from under him
into the overflowing drain –
we searched for a crucifix
how were we to know there were Protestants in France?

After that, he kept to himself
under the window of the headmaster's office –
and then he was gone, as sudden as school days
as sudden as ignorance
having left a chalked message on the blackboard:
Fuck your Queen and your King Willie.

Dog meat

Seven horses lie like bloated bear skins
dotted along South Carriage Drive
the hot wind that suddenly seared among them
cut away their legs.

The sirens talking to one another
the earthy stink of warm dung and burning
the farriers splashed from head to foot
with blood, the litter
of car wreckage, four and six inch nails.

England the bitch, the sow, the dumb
washes rosy red and mixed
into the drains

with little chunks of flesh
that cling to the bubbled tar
neither human nor equine

but a hybrid of historical letting
like windblown seeds in the air
and cloudy dust, that settles down to zero pain

like the Japanese tourists in the White Tower
and the black taxi cabs in the angry traffic
the cameras hoisted back on to BBC vans

and the shredded corpses covered with sheets
until they can be removed
and disposed off
like truth, like justice –
like an insurance salesman round the doors.

Thank you for reading!



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