



FourXFour
Poetry Journal

Issue 18 Winter 2017

Lorna Shaughnessy
Brian McGettrick
Suzanne Magee
Vincent Creelan

Editorial

Welcome to Issue 18 of FourXFour Poetry Journal.

This issue comes as a time of upheaval, not only in Northern Ireland, but in the world. We face another local election in the wake of the RHI scandal, while The Age of Trump begins in America, promising all guns blazing.

It is important at this time to find not only refuge in poetry, but to also find direction. To use poetry to speak of personal experiences in which universal concerns are revealed. To create our escapism while not letting those who must be held responsible escape.

Within here are another four strong voices, adding to the indomitable lexicon of the North. We have found comfort and wisdom in poetry before; let us continue to do so again in the times ahead.

Regards and happy reading,
Colin Dardis, Editor

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Winter

Lorna Shaughnessy

Lorna Shaughnessy was born in Belfast and lives in Co. Galway, Ireland. She has published four poetry collections, *Torching the Brown River*, *Witness Trees* and *Anchored* (Salmon Poetry, 2008, 2011, 2015), and a chapbook, *Song of the Forgotten Shulamite* (Lapwing, 2005). Her work was selected for the *Forward Book of Poetry*, 2009.

She is also a translator of Spanish and Mexican Poetry. Her most recent translation was of poetry by Galician writer Manuel Rivas, *The Disappearance of Snow* (Shearsman Press) was shortlisted for the Popescu Prize in 2014. She lectures in Hispanic Studies in NUI, Galway.

Hidden

He wrapped each one carefully:
his father's whisky glasses
and mother's cooking spoons,
lifted them into the attic to rest
among the tissue-wrapped hours
spent reading adventure books
under the steep, nesting eaves
while rain spelled out the names
of far-flung places on the window-pane;
beside the mittens meant for dusting
that turned into puppets, friends
named by brothers bored with toys,
and the boxed incomprehension
of a boy still searching for treasure
who never made it to the island
or wiped clay from the buried chest.

Inclement

A spoke snaps, wind warps the fragile frame,
fabric goes slack and the umbrella veers sideways -
one-winged, an injured thing briskly bundled up,
stuffed in a bag and left to drip in a sink.

Unremarkable as the garden bird we see every day,
though once we marvelled when it changed colour in the rain,
as if the rain could bring a change that was good,
as if a skeleton could weather the storm.

And once, in a place of little rain,
we saw a whole flock stripped from their bones,
stitched together in a kaleidoscopic canopy
to shelter us from the heat we craved;
the sun we had travelled so far meet.

Liberty Landing

For Babs Reilly

There are no pictures of you
at the top of the Empire State
or windswept on the ferry, bound
for the long climb into Liberty's torch.

If seeing is believing, your heels
only ever clicked on the parquet floors
of Fifth Avenue as you went about chores
with finesse, an eye for detail; above all, care.

So I take some pictures in my head. It's your day off,
a chance to see the sights with other Irish girls
before camera-toting husbands come along
for some. You smile and wave to day-trippers

who wait on the quayside of Liberty Landing,
strangers who will never know the size or shape
of the holes cut out of lives by your absence,
will never turn the pages of family albums

where we measure the years between your visits
by our height and the length of our summer dresses -
adults all lined up behind the sofa in the sitting room,
cousins in rows, sitting or kneeling,
and you,
impeccable in suit, matching shoes and bag,
you smile to us from another shore.

Painting in a Bog

In the fresh water of the larks,
wash your body, and release
your weary heart... Federico García Lorca

Waterlilies carpet the flooded cuttings.
I search for paintings in the oily water,
cadmium yellows and Prussian blues.

A rainbow springs from the steel-grey sky,
heavy drops blur the canvas
and before I can take down the easel

the colours glide down its legs
to film on a puddle at my feet.
A picture forms, flawless

as reflections
in Lough Ina on a calm day.
I grieve for the picture I wanted to make.

If it were a portrait what would it say?
Change the colours from the inside,
make them speak to one another.

Take a sketchpad, draw your feet
and watch them walk into the future;
with a bit of luck they'll carry the rest of you

into a landscape of endless summer days
to mount in a frame of long shadows and lark-water,
and sign with every letter in a new hue.

Brian McGettrick

Brian McGettrick lives a half life in front of the typewriter and a full life with his wife and two daughters in Antrim. His first collection, *'Everything Else We Must Endure'*, was published by Sunnyoutside Press in February 2011 (www.sunnyoutside.com). The broadside *'A Simple Exchange'* was published by the Kircubbin based Ten Point Press (<http://www.tenpointdesign.com/press/publishing.htm>)

He has appeared several times in *The Stinging Fly* with reviews and poetry also appearing in *Ulla's Nib*. His poetry has featured in *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Obsessed With Pipework* and *Dwang*, a journal from Tangerine Press. He is currently seeking a publisher for his second collection *'Advice From The Dead I Know By Heart'*; meanwhile his work continues to appear in various print and online journals.

pirates

your confessional cuts scab over
as the clock mumbles an apology
and the curtains secretly snigger.

we help ourselves to more
to feel less
sitting in a room paid for
by the hour
with the TV on a long-ago station
fizzing
and most everything else fading

you know the waitress is nearby waiting
to ignore you

there's the stool and counter and coffee and cutlery
but still everything seems out of place.

that the coffee tastes good
does nothing to elevate a failing situation.
I wait like everyone else,
not for anything in particular
but for something to change
as the tinted window steals the sunlight
making our shared space monotone.

I order the chilli pork which the waitress brings;
it sounded better than it looks and looks better than it tastes,
and she goes back to resting just out of sight.

leaving, paying the bill,
I reason
we do more than eat to stay alive
and even more
to avoid the realisation of it.

honeymoon down

only from the corner does the street reveal its reach
showing off its breadth of attractions.

I'm sure the tiny trees
curse the squares of earth they're bound to
as gun-barrel eyes watch tourists navigate
those who yield gladly to the pavement
and the flowers in showy short skirts
distract cars that slow
but never seem to stop.

the veneer picked from another day
waiting on my folly to drift into view
each shift in weight
holds under heel
advice from the dead
I know by heart.

just like they did

your presence
is not nearly enough:
they want you to be doing
what they are doing
or would like to be doing
and you, years older, taller, broader
are supposed to follow right along.

until the day
when any suggestion you make is scoffed at,
when you're an embarrassment, a nuisance,
and are shunned.

then you'll know how they felt
with every request denied
due to a hangover or impatience
or some other meaningless matter.

then you'll turn and walk away
just like they did
and maybe you'll look back
unnoticed
just like they did.

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Suzanne Magee

Suzanne Magee is a writer and musician from Belfast, a graduate of English literature and postgraduate of Classical Studies, whose interests lie in moments that punctuate human experience.

She has had previous work published by Tower Poetry at Oxford, The Honest Ulsterman, Abridged, The Yellow Chair Review, Visual Verse, and other journals. She is currently working on her first chapbook.

Madden's

Old songs drummed on skin-faced
wood and strung into the blood.

The key carries the silent weight
of attempted conversation with fathers,

and the slow slip of the granite past
grinds down to the beat of marching children

to the unnameable bedrock of tomorrow,
as wars rage on the strings of the playing-harp.

Good News For Global Economics

Having no evidence is a new currency.

Seems easy enough to trade with; none of us need clarity, really,
when we have no evidence.

There's no international standard
for no evidence and etiquette thereof.

You don't need to show how much of it you have,
and it doesn't matter who prints it or how heavy
it is compared to gold.

The best thing is, the louder you are about it, the less of it you need
to breathe,

and in this regard it's like most money.

It's listening to no one, especially not those asking you to provide
proper reasons.

It's like a voice in a mask through a megaphone, screaming in
all caps

MAKE ME MAKE ME

MAKE ME MAKE ME

Definitions on Post-Its

LIFE

Noun

The Various processes of undermining the credibility of concepts of beginning, and its subsequent decay. Points of reference:

The struggle to maintain gravitational stability at the edge of a black hole.

Restless boredom, stretched between hours;
anxious procrastination,
from wake-up to knock-out.

Rituals, collection of;
functioning to tie meaning
to events through time.

Semantics, declarations of;
operating on the presumption
that distinction matters.

At work, after hours

an ambush over a few bottles, a shift, and little sleep.

Just us two in the bar,
you talking and straight in, no warnings,
slamming open the guards
edging over the buffer zone
of *not even talking about it* years before.

You knew.

The magma of your voice,
lowered and raw;
staring at you, Atlas-armed, holding up nothing now
but a face that gets no less edible with age;

You definitely knew.

Saying without saying, we're both politicians at this,
both the man with the axe, unmasked,
the bones of it now bare
Naked in the light, both our necks each three paces a-piece
across the marble table we draw a truce, embrace,
the frontline marked to be seen again for the final strike.

Vincent Creelan

Vincent Creelan is a retired gamekeeper, scientist and police officer and has been writing poetry for the past 12 years. His writings are a reflection of life's experiences and observations, returning very much to his roots as an environmentalist and connections with mother earth. Of late he has found himself able to look back on a career within the police and begin to chronicle times of profound challenge, personally and professionally, producing he feels some of his best work as a poet.

Currently he is planning to publish a first collection in the Spring of 2017 where his kinship to service, sexuality, family, citizenship and the sacred will be fully explored.

In The Barn

I never had much call
to travel the Hilltown road
to Mayobridge.

But this cold
Autumn night
there was cause
to visit a farmstead.

A mother and father
stood in the yard
staring steadfastly
at the open barn door.

Within, their young son,
carrying the hopes
and the burden of
all their futures,
hung by a length
of coarse old rope.

A note in
his jacket pocket
of sorrow, of love,
of shame; taking the blame.

Revealed

The bruises to her torso
are revealed reluctantly:
where hidden, an amalgam
of so much violence.

A canvas of yellow and blue,
black and purple.

He was an artist
of such passion, so
careful, well-practiced,
brutally honest and focused,
relying on his muse's
capacity to suffer.

She had.

She did.

She would.

No name on it

The asking of a favour
meant one would go
on a first date,
the other would
work instead,
and that meant
walking mean streets.
Being familiar, alert,
with fingers crossed
not to be in
the wrong place
at the wrong time.
The bullet had
no name on it,
and now either does
his empty locker beside mine.

Winter

A black crow clings
to the rim of an old clay chimney pot,
one of four, above the wet slate roof
like an oil slick on a dark sea,
its very own titanic.

A gull, wings rigid and angled
like a kite, battles forward
against the prevailing, whilst
a pigeon hurtles, wings tight,
in the opposite way.

Dull light on heavy clouds
burden the day and echo
along, around and above.
There is no other sound,
just waiting.

Thank you for reading!



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