



FourXFour
Poetry Journal
Issue 3 Winter 2013

Mel Bradley
David Smylie
Mark Cooper
Wilma Kenny

Editorial

Welcome to the third issue of FourXFour poetry journal.

Each quarter, we showcase the work of four poets, concentrating mostly on those from, or operating in, the North of Ireland.

Within, you will find four poems from each writer, giving you a small insight into their styles and approaches to poetry. FourXFour hopes to serve as a brief introduction to each poet's output, in the hope that you will seek out more of their work.

We hope you enjoy our third edition. Please subscribe to us on issuu.com as we release future instalments.

Happy reading.

- Colin Dardis, Editor

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Mel Bradley

BA in English and Theology, Mel Bradley has been writing for as long as she can remember. As well as being a writer, she's also an actor and self-confessed creative genius (who fails to take herself at all seriously). Born, raised and, despite the dodgy accent, has never lived anywhere other than Derry (she gets a lot of queries, honestly). Mel has become a featured figure in the city's cultural scene, performing at various open mic nights, theatre labs and hosting a regular pub quiz.

Although a passionate poet now, she will confess to you (usually after one glass of wine) that she grew up disliking poetry. It wasn't until spending one very long and arduous night with Percy Shelley that she fell in love with poetry as an art form and became hooked.

Mel writes honestly and from the soul about love, loss and everything else that goes into making her human. For 2012 she represented the North West section of Ulster in the All-Ireland Poetry Slam and plans to relish every opportunity to share her art with an audience in this coming year.

Pretty Little Marks

Silvery lines that shimmer,
Red ranks embedded in flesh
I know you all well, each one a
Steadfast reminder of emotions
Not felt.

If you each had words
What stories of me would you tell?
A father's disappointment,
A daughter's disgust
A lover tormented
Anguished and despairing
A woman, shattered?

Would you be kind?
Have sympathy for me,
Nod with active understanding
Feign interest
In how you've helped me?

I've dreamt of you often,
Before you appeared
Before I gave birth to you
Nursed you into being
Into agonising existence
Gazed upon you with amazement
Satisfied by your depth,

Length and duration
Smarted each time I forgot you
Mindlessly washed
And covered you with clothes.

Flexing flesh that pulled against you
A sharp reminder of your presence
But you were easier:
I welcomed you openly, an alternative to what
I could not bear to feel.

Pretty little marks, you cover me
And I've loved each one of you deeply
So natural in conception
Easily administered.
Medicine for the pain,
Giving pain back
My fingernails saturated
In my own blood

As I've etched you
Into me
Without thought,
Feeling you, not reality
My escape

Pretty little marks,
My precious, loving friends.

The Girls On The Hockey Team

I never wanted to be a hockey player:
Those were the scary girls
They weren't afraid of things like
Rain, or bruised shins or taking showers
In the school changing rooms;
They were made of strong stuff like
Nails and iron and concrete.
They looked good in their P.E. gear,
Not at all self-conscious;
Not like me.

I never owned a hockey stick,
Didn't get my own skirt until third year.
I avoided that game like Pythagoras theorem,
Preferred gymnastics and netball.
But deep inside, I had this secret:
I wanted to be like them.

I forgot about the hockey team,
Chased boys for fun instead;
Grew up, moved on, and had children,
Played my life completely safe
And lied to myself every day.

That was before I discovered
It's not just hockey girls
That are special;
(Smile) I'm not so secretive anymore.

The Mystical Moment

At night, in those moments just before sleep
When my mind is free to breathe,
As the deafening thoughts that analyse the day
Quiet themselves into dreamful peace,
My creative genius sparks to the life of
The endless music in my soul.

I've composed works of literary merit
That rival even the greats that I adore;
Philosophised over the injustices of the world
And set each and every one of them straight.

We've danced, my love and I:
Elaborately choreographed movements,
Effortlessly across glittered floors.
Witnessed the beauty of countless worldly wonders,
Sampled excited moments in [our] history,
Taken part in fantastical folklore.

I've had conversations with the greatest artists,
Quizzed incessantly on their designs.
Picked the soundtrack of rhythmic catwalk revelations
To fashion's most coveted shows.

I've sat with almost every world leader,
Pointed out their ridiculous mistakes.
Taught our sons and our daughters to respect themselves;
After all, that's really all it takes.

Of course, too often, in morning light I awaken
With only the tiniest fragments tucked inside my memory
To serve as reminder of my adventures in night time,
That mystical moment when this world meets sleep.

Shadow Talker

Footsteps that echo through the silent courtyard
Raining the thunder of my heavy tread,
A shaded figure surrounded by the
Deep blackness of this night time breath.
My stalking is not silenced:
I warn you of my approach,
Throw your caution off guard
With my vulnerable façade.
You'll see me, just a girl
Alone and fragile in this
Dark and open space,
I'll provoke in you a sense of
Old-world chivalry
In your need to protect and serve;
You'll try to comfort me,
Hoping to make me feel safe
And I'll let you
Because, that's what I do.
You'll believe you're building up my
Trust in you, not wanting to see me hurt.
You'll be strong, self-assured
To my wide-eyed innocent ways,
You'll mistake my submissive gesturing
As a battle you've won,
Feeding your confidence with
Misleading triumphs in your seductive techniques

What you won't realise is my
Parasitic nature that needs you
To believe, relishing your efforts in pursuit.
But my hunger is great
And I'm not easily sated:
I'll strip from you every drop of goodwill
And generosity you have to give.
My damaged ego needs you - willing,
Assured of your servitude,
I'll strike, sealing your death
With my poisoned kiss.
I'll have you, intoxicated,
Drunk in me.
You'll want more, and more still,
But I'll be rationed, restrained:
I won't give you what you want.
I'll drain from you all purity,
Drink it down with pleasure.
I'll be giddy from your demise,
Make your destruction my art;
I'll kill you, completely,
And you'll love me for it.

David Smylie

Belfast born, David Smylie's poems are usually quite short and have been described as minimalist, ranging from the universal themes of love and hate, to more abstract musings about ATM machines and supermarket encounters, all with an incisive and uniquely witty style that is often tinged with a hint of melancholy.

David's poems have been published in the Sunday Tribune, as well as various magazines and journals.

Beach Master

The sandman sits
and while watching
is watched,
a lone male
predatory,
on who or what?

No one invades his space
his charges play in the surf
while he oversees their overseas.
All around their scattered cast-offs, to show
that he is not alone.
In his pockets golden grains,
last years sand .
Slowly sifting he decants,
returns them to their timeless anonymity.
Half remembered footprints;
squeezed at the edge of the tide.

Scrawled messages and other sights and sounds,
now but weathered specks on the cold shore of
the Sea of Moyle,
as he sits he gathers
a new harvest of memories
and waits for the bell to say
it's time to go.

Blow in

Sitting with a toxic overload, libation at hand,
listening to the voices from within.

Meanwhile in another cerebral hollow
a juke box plays a sad song
that I almost know.

A slow low saxophone solo
for the lonely seat and his pint
who waits for that nod of recognition
to show that his head's been given
the all clear,
to enable conversation to begin
from the chair by the door in the bar.

Last Post

I held you knowing, but not wanting to admit that your
time had come.

A new intimacy.

Mea culpa.

You stood unbending in your own simple way, a hard
man, yet soft.

Mea culpa.

I have your traits. Good and bad.

Like life, you took on death, a true stoic.

I never hugged you, that was not your way.

Admired you, yes; and if yesterday was today

I could tell you how much a man can love another.

Mea maxima culpa.

I rubbed your cold flesh trying to return your warmth.

As dawn broke you said "cheerio, son."

My father who art in heaven, Harry be thy name.

Yours was the first dead body that touched me

And, as I closed the eyes that had travelled the world,

I thought of a boy who, underage and malnourished, took
a shilling,

Joined the forces of the Crown to do dirty work in the
far-flung regions of the Empire.

His legacy: photographs of China, India and Afghanistan,
but few of home.

He pawned his campaign medals in the 1930s.

Ormeau Baths / Gallery

I ponder the images on sterile walls
And hear echoes of my past
As I run headlong with Robert, John and Joe
Down to the pool.

Shoes slapping on the slate slabs.
Our sound reverberating
Along the grey and white corridors.
The air thick with the smell of chlorine and anticipation.

Already splashing, diving and ducking,
Our aquatic antics often verging on what was not
permitted
By the shrill cautionary whistle of the attendant
Who paced the pool perimeter.

We charged past the no running sign
And wooden changing cubicles.
One side for the girls,
The other usually full
To the communal "cooler" room.

Here we "flicked" each other with wet towels,
Leaving bright red wheals on pale buttocks
As we dressed with no sense of decorum
Or sexuality.

Quick change and into cold water,
Aquamarine reflecting the tiles
And our sense of everlasting youth.

A dive to touch the bottom at the deep end
Or a breadth underwater,
gasping for air as we surfaced.
Only noticing that our eyes were stinging from the
Bleached water as we made our way home.

Mark Cooper

Mark Cooper was born in Manchester but saved from a life in urban sprawl by an Isle of Man upbringing. It was these informative years, spent by the Irish Sea and in the Manx countryside, which provided much of the subject material for Mark's work. This engagement with the natural world continues through his career as a geologist.

His experiences make for poems that find parallels between what happens in nature and human life. Now in Belfast for 18 years, it can safely be said that he has come of age on the Northern Ireland writing scene. He has numerous poems in New Belfast Community Arts Initiative anthologies and performs regularly at various locations across Belfast and beyond.

In recent years Mark has fronted the 'Poetry Landscape' collective and in doing so has performed alongside Moyra Donaldson, Michael Longley and other highly respected poets.

His first full colour collection called 'From Mountains to the Sea' will be released this year, and follows the wondrous life cycle of the Atlantic Salmon.

Different Worlds

In Meenafergus Townland I waved him over,
my shouts scattering sheep and alarming birds.
I spoke of the world beneath our feet –
of rock, of clay, of peat.
Of how mountains and oceans come and go.

With turf stained nails and tobacco teeth,
He took me to the white rock.
Warning cuts, he showed me stars.

Winter in my centrally heated office;
I imagine him well wrapped, spreading feed,
then taking warmth and tea from a turf fed fire.
I wonder if he remembers me and the vanished oceans?

Silent Abductor

Camouflage turret surveys gloom:
eyes and ears focus,
silence and patience pay off
as the tiniest movements provide direction.
The owl's head turns, senses lock on,
a calculating blink of preparation.
Take off is fluid,
the flight short, swooping,
soundless, until impact
when piercing talons extend and close
gathering leaves, twigs and this time the prize;
satisfied the silent abductor flies.

Tread-Polished Layers

Step down the tread-polished layers,
beds of stone, where past sleeps holding secrets,
through mud, silt and sand - many times repeated.

Wind, wave, water - energy depleted.

Tracks laid, records played, stacked -
many times repeated.

Step back, take care not to fall.

Shows Twice Daily

Early as I can wake,
and often that's before daybreak,
I stand and sing from my high point
to those who think they'll dare to flaunt
boundaries of this sacred patch -
eggs laid soon will hatch.

I am the bird who gets the worm
because I stand here proud and firm.
Enter in and down I'll swoop,
landing with a hop and a dip to hoop.
A flip of the tail signs all is not well -
with hackles raised, I think you'll tell.

Late afternoon, back to high singing;
see by dusk, ears will be ringing.
Into the dark, my message flows:
'don't step on my toes!'
Take notice, take care, I don't say pardon -
I am the blackbird of this garden.

Wilma Kenny

Wilma Kenny works as a freelance journalist and lives in South Belfast with her husband Andrew. She has two grown up children, Andy and Rachel.

Wilma enjoys all aspects of the arts, especially visual and written. She loves going to literary events such as the John Hewitt International Summer School, which she has attended for the past ten years. She has read her poetry on RTE and UCB radio and several years ago was a part of an event at the Edinburgh festival.

Many of Wilma's poems were written at a residency at Multyfarnham Franciscan Friary. She is excited by the new vibrancy that has entered the art scene in Belfast in the past few years.

Son

I cannot stop him:
like this running water
he slips through my fingers.
Another stream, another time,
he casts out as a boy fishing.
I watched proud, adoring, devoted.
He reeled in as a man.
running to his art,
Running to some inky haired, bloodless beauty.
I am helpless.
I try and try to hold the water
in my hand but it too slips away,
it will not stay.
At the other side of life's field
he waves at me, laughs, blows a kiss.
Life embraces this handsome lad,
stealing him from the net of my apron strings.
I think I will drown in this stream.
Mothers beware the running stream, how quickly it slips
away.

Odyssey

Torpor set in,
it was the last I saw of you for many months.
These passed like the sun
on an old iron dial.

Like a reptile
I clung to a tree of normality,
fearing to flex one muscle
lest the actor's mask

drop

exposing your illusion.

Waiting

I see the two women in the garden,
like plump magpies among opium poppies,
saffron crocuses and curly headed parsley.
Dazed, they stare in anticipation.
Then as if by clockwork they leave
the sugary smell of the garden.

One prepares and cooks.
The other washes and tidies in the stale,
ancient kitchen. Their tools, a brown basin and
an enamel sink, hanging like a rotting tooth.
Sadness fills the air, never leaving.
Mustiness malingers in every crevice.

They sit again in the garden
healed by the fragrant air,
which sails down in cloud boats
from the heather mountains.

We took Christ off the Cross

We took Christ off the Cross
Where we had let Him hang,
A barbed crown pressing
Ever down
Ever down
Ever down.

Tenderly you and I
Laid Him down
Laid Him down
Laid Him down.

Cleaned His wounds, red flaming
Raw, with dirty rags found at the
Side of our thoughts and deeds;
Still He bleeds
Still He bleeds
Still He bleeds.

I tried to heal the holes in His feet with goodness;
To fill the gaping hole in His side with prayer;
to kiss away the holes in His hands with Love;
Still He bleeds
Still He bleeds
Still He bleeds.
Next you tenderly removed the crown
embedded deep into His brow. You said it

would ease the pain you held inside you;
Still we bleed
Still we bleed
Still we bleed.

We threw ourselves onto
His body broken by man's
Rage. You said there is
No way out
No way out
No way out.

I felt a hand on my shoulder: a
Light touch, a faint breath of
warmth encircling our loneliness.
I love you
I love you
I love you.

We heard these words,
turned and saw Him
scarred but standing;
Take my hand
Take my hand
Take my hand.
Slowly we touched the holes,
Placed our Hands in His,
Placed our lives with Him.
It was us who needed Life,

Who needed Him to wipe
Away our bleeding tears.

He is risen
He is risen
He is risen.

A New Ulster

A **New Ulster** is Northern Ireland's newest online and hard copy literary and arts magazine. Featuring the works of new and established poets, short fiction writers, photographers and artists. Edited by Amos Greig and Arizahn, A New Ulster is released digitally on the forth of each month.

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