

~ Poetry NI ~

# FourXFour

## Poetry Journal

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*Olive Broderick*

*Ray Givans*

*Nathanael O'Reilly*

*Kavita Thanki*

## Contents:

*p.4 Olive Broderick*

*p.5 Half Turn*

*p.7 First Shoots*

*p.9 I make you a fertility figure that you don't want*

*p.10 Round Dance*

*p.13 Ray Givans*

*p.14 Father Dressmaking*

*p.16 Parkanaur: View from a Window*

*p.18 Mrs O'Brien*

*p.19 Halloween, Castlecaulfield*

*p.20 Nathanael O'Reilly*

*p.21 Mountain Forest Campground*

*p.23 Trail Ride*

*p.24 Preparations for the Fourth*

*p.27 Surgery Waiting Room*

*p.28 Kavita Thanki*

*p.30 Oak teaches Tao*

*p.31 At a ceilidh*

*p.32 Spoken Word Seven*

*p.34 Onwards, April poem*

*p.34 Jo Burns : Truth*

*p.35 Alec Solomita : Dance*

*p.36 Alec Solomita : This Is the Way I Talk to You*

*p.37 Elizabeth McGeown: Buen Camino*

- p.39 Howie Good : Holocaust 101*
- p.40 Robert Beveridge : Flower*
- p.42 DS Maolalaí : The emigrant*
- p.44 DS Maolalaí : Brass bells*
- p.45 John L. Stanizzi : 4.22.19*
- p.46 Paul Connolly : Claggart*
- p.50 Joe Cushnan : Black Mountain Mist*
- p.51 Anita Greg : What are we like?*
- p.52 Yvonne Boyle : I Was With You In Kenya, You Know*
- p.54 William Doreski : Futakawa*
- p.55 Jack e Lorts : Ephram Pratt Listens to a Silent Conversation*
- p.57 Paul Butterfield Jr : Me and writing at a fight*
- p.58 Alison Ross : Four Seasons Haiku*
- p.59 Linda McKenna : In the Utility Room*
- p.60 Jess Thayil : Wing | s*
- p.61 Karen Mooney : Vegetable Soup*
- p.62 Mel Bradley : Petitions*
- p.64 Imogen Darling : Quiet Child*
- p.66 Imogen Darling : Womanhood*
- 
- p.67. Submission Guidelines*

## *Olive Broderick*

Olive Broderick's first publication, *Darkhaired*, was a winner of the Templar Poetry Pamphlet Award. A full collection, *Night Divers*, was published by Templar Poetry in 2017. She has received a Hennessy X.O. Literary Award and acknowledges support from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

The poems featured here are from an Arts Council NI ACES/SIAP supported body of work exploring the meeting place of poetry, dance and movement.

*Half-turn*

A half-memory: more of light  
than of time.

The clock jumps back one pace

then forward.

The clock comes to the surface  
of the water and somewhere

in this forward, backward,  
sinking, carrying motion  
we meet and meet again:

aware of something new  
with every new movement  
drawing a little way towards -

not grieving as much,  
happier to remember -

somewhere else that is also here.  
Today, I stand half way down  
the slipway (not at the water's edge).

Almost walked by altogether -  
still I call them to mind, offer a word  
of acknowledgement for going before.

*Feel the horror of that.* Life  
is not a few snatched moments  
where someone else

bears witness. Life is here at  
the River Ouse, in the turbulence  
of my own head, in

the decision that something can,  
no longer, be borne or left aside,  
The plan to blow the system apart,

becomes re-start.

I walk away  
with my back to the Lough.

*First Shoots*1. *Aisling*

Before the first cross  
-quarter day, that year,  
two young children appeared

in my deep-winter drift,  
signalling me, with  
spirit eyes, to cross-over

to join the gradual,  
waxing light, to rise  
as it rises, but not to fight.

2. *Mark-making*  
*for Sarah*

The frank stare of the double-o.  
You take it in, then take the charcoal  
- breathe out

through its medium  
an upward sweeping vortex –  
swiftly overlaying another

in red chalk. Finished,  
you hold your body,  
without prejudice,

where noun and verb  
meet in their sense  
of propulsion.

3. *Moving*  
*for Paula*

Difficult conditions, living seeds prepare  
to shoot through topsoil – a metaphor -  
you score a dance from the movement of breath:

all rise and rush, barely enough pause to refuel –  
make shapes of a body attacked by panic,  
or a cartoon character held in the air by *ra-ta-ta* gunfire.

*I make you a fertility figure that you don't want*

so I don't tell you about it. We have  
dispensed with the divine languages:

I am no longer *cailleach* or *Hathor* -  
just a woman old enough to know better.

*Genitori, Genitoque* – the raised sun-circle  
hides the father's face behind it.

I neither raise my eyes nor bow my head.

Little Priapus of Hereabouts is in my pocket,  
made of stones, dried grass and razor shells.

Its tiny neckless head is a formality,

important its expanse of centre  
the widespread legs to accommodate  
the *antiquum documentum*

You might call me obscene,  
or think this gift vulgar.

*Round Dance*

Dance with twine.  
This net in the making is yours  
Who knows where the dance begins?

Is it your first breath?  
The gathered cord on the floor  
is an invitation.

Stretch out to find  
an unravelling thread.  
Grasp it firmly.

Wind it round your toes,  
ankles, waist, wrist, throat,

between the web of your fingers.  
A faint smell of tar is uninvited  
- a sense of once-commercial quaysides.

The supple flex is all the while  
unfurling at your instruction – extending,  
catching, holding. Your body

is the frame of a nail picture  
and the nails, and you are also  
on the other side of it,

creating with your hands and feet,  
threading pictures into it – a noose,  
pulleys, shackles, epaulettes.

An unintended body art of intricate  
and beautiful designs. You are both  
artist and bride. You are entranced

by the sight of your own decorated arm.  
Caught up in the possibility of limits.  
This twine can be a taskmaster

- or a critic. It is also a shield  
as hair can be, and an illusion.  
It this you or me?

I am looking in the mirror  
at a girl, a young woman, in the act  
of creating herself, myself

in a defunct port town  
that seems always close  
to reinventing itself.

On the dressing table, a mess  
of rings, bracelets, waist chains,  
chokers, belt chains, chatelaines,

braided

laces:

the wonder of a skein  
of gold thread, the languages  
it can speak, the way it has been

a mouthpiece for the many people  
I have introduced to the world,  
simply for the beauty of it:

or as armour, and afterwards,  
with ease, released -  
then start again.

*\* dance~poem created in collaboration with dancer/choreographer Paula  
Guzzanti and musician Martin Devek)*

## *Ray Givans*

Ray Givans's poetry has been published in five pamphlet length collections, including two from Lapwing, Belfast. His first full collection, *Tolstoy in Love*, was published by Dedalus Press, and was shortlisted, in 2009, for the Rupert and Eithne Strong award for best first collection by an Irish poet.

His most recent collection, *The Innermost Room*, came out in 2018 from the Salzburg Poetry Press, at the University of Salzburg. For six years Ray was co-organiser of the Squat Pen literary readings.

## *Father Dressmaking*

My father shoved the three-piece suite  
against the fireplace kerb. The Safona  
banked with slack, he knelt on lino  
about to perform a sacred ritual.

It was for the adored, my mother,  
who went to Cuddy's haberdashery, bought  
ready-to-make patterns, and just enough  
off-the-roll material, measured and cut

by the very hand of Mr. Cuddy.  
Bowed, my father worked in silence,  
chivvied the cloth beneath the translucent paper,  
while pins did acrobatics between his lips.

He pierced the paper's hatched outline  
to marry skin to body beneath,  
and mother and I, a congregation of two,  
knew to stay hushed, for when scissors

were raised to cut and slit  
a moment would come when utensils  
went awry. "Curse that!" he'd say, grip  
the cloth more tightly, sweating

as he retraced the ceremony's steps  
until he shook the stubbornness from the cloth.  
If knuckles rapped the front door  
my father would swoop, gather cloth

and pattern, sweep through the scullery door,  
crumpled cargo flapping against his belly  
in case our clergyman was standing on the step,  
granite-faced, clutching the black book.

*Parkanaur: View from a Window*  
*for Colin and Geraldine*

Mr Doran, from hereabouts, Castlecaulfield,  
made his fortune in America, heading up  
The Cheerful Greeting Card Company.

I imagine, unlike my roly-poly Uncle Ray  
he didn't roll up on Main Street  
in a big long Cadillac, puffing a Havana.

I imagine his calling was understated,  
tea from a petite Belleek china cup;  
he and Rev. Eakins in a tête-à-tête at the Manse.

The year was 1955. Mr Doran wrote a cheque,  
acquired a Tudor-style manor house and estate  
at Parkanaur, made available to his Reverend friend.

Go forward ten years, I am standing  
in the manor's kitchen, licking cake mix from a spatula.  
My mother disputes Madge's claim to be Billy Fury's cousin.

I have moved to a drawing-room, silk curtains and deep pile  
carpet.

A full-size billiard table, I'd only seen in magazines;  
the green baize a field stretching to the horizon.

A kitchen porter, on his break, might have shown me  
how to hold the cue, strike the white, cannon off yellow and red.  
I recall the hush of those rooms, like a morning mist

settled on our village countryside.  
Ghost-like presences would limp or shuffle past.  
Stanley, the stand-out presence is locked in my memory.

Stanley, only child of Rev. and Mrs Eakins,  
on crutches, in callipers, in clumsy orthopaedic boots.  
His staccato movements, his indistinct speech.

When Rev. and Mrs Eakins closed their bedroom door  
what looks passed between them? When they gazed out from the  
window  
their eyes might have rested on two parasol beech trees

once hidden in woods, replanted in  
the ornamental park around the manor house –  
A rarity in the world of things botanical –

branches grow down, touch the ground,  
create a tent-like space within. On entering  
they'd touch the twisted branches, rub against

a trunk resembling the vertebrae of a deformed giant.  
Yet, all the light within the tented space  
is tinged with the fresh green of newly opened leaves.

*Mrs O'Brien*

for many years a hello-and-nod neighbour,  
notable for her throw-back-to-the-sixties bouffant  
blacker than Eskra Lough,  
luxuriant as the hedge she kept in check each week  
her oversized shears held in skin-hugging yellow gloves.  
She brushed up every leaf and branch,  
painstakingly scooped them onto a shovel.

Then she failed to show. And for weeks after.  
The hedge branches, unchecked, randomly jabbed  
out forks to spike the unwary.  
Indiscreetly, leaves sauntered across her footpath.  
Only a sough wind informed the neighbourhood  
that, unexpectedly, a dissident growth had taken root.  
Its tresses unloosed, a shadow passing over her.

*Halloween, Castlecaulfield*

At twilight we spilled from terrace houses  
to form in ranks; a ragbag force  
opposing the opposite side of the road.  
My daddy, a nod and smile good neighbour

on sounder days, would angle a bottle,  
shove home the rocket, ignite the touchpaper  
and watch - tail flame, leap and whoosh  
and thud - barely missing Frizell's window.

As dark descended adults closed front doors.  
Banshees, headless riders  
haunted Lloyd's front room; tale-bearers hunched  
shoulder to shoulder. Only a broom and sooted

visitor might call. Once, my mother's smeared face  
confronted me, and I, staring back  
into her man dark eyes, felt afraid  
no less than when stirred earth trembled evil-

wombed Quatermass. Outside, loutish  
boys massed for devilment; climbed  
Pump Hill, entered Galbally's dark,  
sneaked across a dung covered yard

to thread McMinn's door, slink in wait ...  
thrill of McMinn's breath chasing at my shoulder.

## *Nathanael O'Reilly*

Nathanael O'Reilly's poems have appeared in journals and anthologies published in twelve countries, including *Antipodes*, *A New Ulster*, *Australian Love Poems*, *Backstory*, *Cordite*, *FourW*, *FourXFour*, *Glasgow Review of Books*, *Headstuff*, *Marathon*, *Mascara*, *Postcolonial Text*, *Skylight 47*, *Snorkel*, *Tincture*, *Transnational Literature*, *Verity La* and *The Newcastle Poetry Prize Anthology 2017*.

He is the author of two full-length collections: *Preparations for Departure* (UWAP Poetry, 2017), named one of the "2017 Books of the Year" in *Australian Book Review*, and *Distance* (Ginninderra Press, 2015); and three chapbooks: *Cult* (Ginninderra Press, 2016), *Suburban Exile* (Picaro Press, 2011) and *Symptoms of Homesickness* (Picaro Press, 2010).

*Mountain Forest Campground*

pitch the tent beside the river  
listen to the rushing water  
all day and all night  
always the rushing water  
even in dreams

sit at a picnic table  
in the shade of the pines  
eight thousand feet  
above sea level  
eat drink read write

brew coffee over an open fire  
chop wood and carry water  
sit in the darkness  
beside the fire  
and simply exist

listen to your fellow camper  
with the grey ponytail  
blow his sax  
all through the slow afternoon  
beside his caravan

hope that one of these days  
he plays Van's Caravan

watch the pines sway  
in the evening breeze  
breathe in the pine  
listen to the wind  
merge with rushing water

*Trail Ride*

Meet Bart and Pecos Jimmy  
where the dirt road ends,

eight thousand feet above  
sea level, higher than Kosciuszko.

Chat about forest fires,  
bear sightings and snowfall

while horses and cowboys  
are watered. Tighten saddles,

adjust stirrups for each rider  
before mounting and setting

off across the high meadow  
fluttering with golden, white,

black and Monarch butterflies.  
Ride single-file into the forest

weaving upwards through  
birch, ponderosa and aspen,

always climbing and watching  
blue skies above mountains.

Face-height branches flicking  
fallen logs under hooves,

daughter's bare legs gripping  
leather and smooth brown flanks,

bare feet resting in cool stirrups,  
wind blowing sun-lightened hair.

*Preparations for the Fourth*

Mow and edge the front  
and back lawns, weed flowerbeds  
and cracks between paved areas,

scrub the BBQ grill and wash  
cooking implements,  
add fresh water to the pond,

sweep the front porch  
and the back verandah,  
add chemicals to the hot tub,

drive to the store and purchase  
a gas canister refill,  
hamburger patties, buns,

sausages, tortilla chips, avocado,  
onion, lime, tomatoes,  
drinks for the kids,

cerveza, gin, tonic and fireworks,  
stock the outdoor fridge,  
create a retro party playlist,

prepare for blatant displays  
of xenophobia  
and narrow-minded patriotism.

## *Surgery Waiting Room*

HGTV plays on the wall-mounted flatscreen  
in the dermatologist's waiting room –  
a respite from Fox News. Elderly patients

bicker loudly with spouses over petty issues,  
watch videos on their phones of grandkids  
with the volume maxed out, oblivious

to the preferences of other waiters. Patients  
sport bandages advertising sites of excisions  
from noses, ears, cheeks, foreheads and scalps.

Unsteady hands and weak eyes puzzle over  
the newfangled coffee machine until the youngest  
patient - only forty-three! – steps in, takes orders,

makes coffee for his elders. The television sells  
materialistic fantasies of aesthetic glories,  
enviable residences at reasonable prices,

bargains under list price with minimal renovations  
needed - *Just five hundred grand move-in ready!*

The botoxed, bleached-toothed, spray-tanned hosts

gesticulate and gush over glistening kitchens  
and bathrooms - *We will make this your dream home!*  
Tremulous elderly patients watch and listen, nodding

assent, declare *AIN'T THAT PRETTY, HONEY?!*  
The nurse returns, adopts a sympathetic expression,  
sighs ... *Well Sir, it looks like we're going to have*

*to go back and take off another layer.* The patient's  
wife interjects - *I guess it's a good thing you mowed*  
*the lawn and fed the cat. You'd better go and pee -*

while couples on HGTV attempt to assemble  
a crib in preparation for their firstborn. An old man  
shakes his head, mutters *Well, that was a stupid ad*

to his wife snoring in the recliner beside him.  
On the other side of the wall the surgeon's scalpel  
slices skin, excavating through layers, eliminating

cancerous cells, cutting down towards healthy tissue.  
An accompanying spouse shakes her head theatrically,  
clucks and sighs like a deflating balloon -

*It takes longer to get sewn up than it does to get cut!*

## *Kavita Thanki*

Kavita Thanki is a waste scholar and poet living in Belfast. While her academic work focuses on the Big Questions of utopia/dystopia and the creation/destruction of value, her everyday is spent in the small, surprising adventures offered by kitchens, dog-walk woods, and Bollywood dance studios – thoughts from which can be found on Instagram @big2leg.

*Oak teaches Tao*

So many things in this world

I don't understand:

why is the sun

so generous

with its magic?

How does the tree,

both rooted and rising,

refrain from laughing

at us little scampering creatures?

What is eutopia, if not

the here and now?

*At a ceilidh*

The accordion's a-jumping  
and our feet are all a-flutter,  
skittering and skirmishing,  
and the whole hall's a-stomping –  
hands reaching out and grasping;  
with our heads thrown back in laughter  
we can barely breathe for gasping;  
and the wine and whiskey flowing,  
and our hearts are one heart thumping,  
and our gratitude's a-glowing,  
and our grief

is outside knocking

and something in me screaming  
my soul raw and ragged

“How many more suicides  
how many more goodbyes”

## *Spoken Word Seven*

There is a gap between who I am and who I aspire to be.

Mary Douglas says, “there is no such thing as dirt;  
there is only matter out of place.”

Am I any less rubbish, I wonder, if my place is in waste? –  
it is the only collective to ever admit me unconditionally: my  
brethren,

all the shit flushed quickly and unquestioningly out of sight,  
the plastic bottles washed up to contaminate and revile on paradise  
islands;

all the things once needed and valued and now  
discarded as outdated, disgusting,  
used and broken and unwanted. There is a gap

between pride and self-knowledge;  
there is a gap between who I am and who I aspire to be.

Mary Shelly says “you are more than the sum of your parts:  
yes even you monsters, you misfits,  
you who are scraps of others patch-worked together,  
a misshapen shadow of the ideal.”

Ideals are created by someone else’s value-system  
with the express purpose of keeping you out,  
of keeping you inadequate, of making you unwanted.

There is a gap between acceptance and happiness,  
between pride and self-knowledge; there is a gap,  
between who I am and who I aspire to be.

There is a gap, and in that gap – life is lived.

*Onwards, April poem*

Shed it,  
winter fur  
in springtime;

shed it, your snake skin;

shed it, the overweight which keeps you  
housebound and immobile.

It's been too long now  
building up.

Shed this thing;  
shed it and see what light is  
shed on the way forward!

*Jo Burns : Truth*

Before the going under,  
there was a word;  
a word  
we let slip away.  
On the leader's orders,  
most were erased,  
even the most important  
words  
and yet we obeyed.  
Smothered by black and red,  
those words slipped  
exquisitely  
into nowhere. The weight  
of history couldn't hold  
the most important  
word.  
Detained by apostasy and cage,  
our new currencies fake,  
jargon obscured the mess.  
Explosions of gaslight buried us  
and empty language dug our grave.  
The word  
disappeared  
before we went under,  
as we thought and prayed.

*Alec Solomita : Dance*

People recognize me but they don't seem glad to see me.  
If you choose to go to one of these events, it's probably best  
to have gotten an invitation. The floor swirled the time  
I asked Phyllis to go steady. The song was a Beatles single.  
That was so long ago and I still feel dizzy when I bring it back.  
The floor shone, too, with just-buffed reflections. The boy  
on stage had red hair. He sang "I'm Down", his face getting red  
and then redder as he lived more than he ever would again,  
Toward the end of the song, he fell to his knees, crimson and  
gorgeous.

*Alec Solomita : This Is the Way I Talk to You*

I stopped by the cemetery  
for the first time, stood for  
a minute watching them repave  
some of the wandering asphalt paths.  
I'm not going back. I'd rather visit you  
like this once in a while. It's been six  
months. Six months, says one person,  
it seems like yesterday. Six months,  
says another, it feels longer than that.

*Elizabeth McGeown: Buen Camino*

There is a photo of us at the cottages, clustered together so small as  
the photographer tries to encompass the whole terraced  
row.

They are called The Apostles, I find out today -  
A National Trust information board explains - because there are  
twelve of them.

If you had told me back then I would not be here again for another  
25 years I would have cried;

If you had told me he would die without seeing this place again, in  
the context of 25 years I would not have been surprised.

A long time, surprising perhaps that all of the rest of us are still  
alive:

One writing and walking this, one abusive and estranged, one lives  
in harsh reality; looking down on daydreamers, one  
grieving, one with brain lesions spreading; the gift of  
Multiple Sclerosis.

I do this for them, of course, but most of all for me.

This is my Camino.

Familiar stone silhouettes appear before long

Although it will be some time before I reach them,

Leaning into broad strides that take me up a grassy slope.

Face stretches and I realise it's a wild grin, the kind you only feel  
crease your face after you've involuntarily made it,

No social confusion of what expression fits here.

It happens most often in these solitary moments, when people are  
far away, I can breathe freely and do not feel the need to  
speak,

Instead a wordless, formless burble escapes my lips;  
A soft soothing stream of sighs, a giggle when I stumble and grab  
some long grass to steady me.

Harsh headwinds swirl around the cliff, salt in the air corroding all  
and I climb the Temple steps to a little girl in white, one foot  
raised, arms spread out,

Her parents hold cameras up expectantly.

She sees me, stops and I know that she wants to dance.

"Go ahead," I tell her, "I don't mind" and I look away,  
photographing pillars and brickwork as she frowns at me  
suspiciously.

As I leave, others enter.

I hope she got her time to dance.

*Howie Good : Holocaust 101*

In one dream I'm walking to work, choking down a granola bar for breakfast, when an eight-passenger van slams to a stop. The side door slides open. Armed men jump out and take up positions behind trees and parked cars. My great grandparents, both sets, were loaded into boxcars with six million others and then herded through barbwire gates and not just murdered in the camp, machine-gunned or gassed, but expunged, vaporized, obliterated. There are nights that despite having bad dreams, I'll sleep straight through till morning. Other nights I find myself in bed with the lights out trying to escape thinking about God's so-called plan.

*Robert Beveridge : Flower*

Windows down, fan defeated  
in the struggle to wring  
the final Freon from a car  
on the verge of extinction.  
So hot the air sweats. The grocery store  
a welcome, air-conditioned relief.  
Just inside the door  
a rack of flowers. You picked  
two small bouquets.

The sameness of shopping.  
Sausage, sour cream.  
The quotidian ruin of cashiers' lines,  
of the parking lot and the curved air  
of heat through glass.  
For once the line is too fast.

On the drive back to your apartment you pull  
the bouquets from their bag. One bud  
has snapped from its stem. You put the rest  
back, pull the petals away from the centre,  
look for other cars,  
pedestrians at stoplights.  
By the time we reach Lorain you've seen

no one to give it to, now in full bloom.

You place it between us. "You can have my flower."

We carried in the groceries. The flowers  
went into a vase of water, other things  
into their proper places:

soda in the fridge, pasta  
in the pantry, you in my arms.

You stand on the arm  
of the couch, your mouth  
out of reach unless I stretch.

Temptation, instead, to lift your shirt, undo  
bra hooks, tongue the buds  
of your nipples into erection.

You bloom beneath my fingers.

*DS Maolalaí : The emigrant*

I pick up a dustbin  
and some plastic bags. plates  
second hand,  
a french press  
and a teapot. glasses,  
3 for a euro,  
and wine,  
7 the bottle. the new place  
is pretty well settled;  
just I need bedsheets  
and some coathangers;  
things you don't notice  
until you're opening your suitcase  
and thinking  
hell  
where do I put my coat.

moving to a new city is easy,  
until you realise you haven't learned what bars to go to  
or where the coffee  
comes plain  
and hot  
and fast.

moving to a new country  
where you haven't learned the money yet  
and people speak  
like something out of a movie.

my neighbours have already caught me twice  
smoking by the fire alarm  
and none of my walls  
have pictures.

*DS Maolaláí : Brass bells*

she came in  
angry, banging at 1am,  
and things didn't get better  
even after she'd knocked over a chair  
thrown away her coat  
and kicked closed  
the oven door. she never  
normally  
wore shoes in the house,  
so keeping them on  
you could tell  
she'd been planning  
to kick things. I'd been on the bed  
but had to get up  
and say something,  
try and stop her  
before she put her hand  
through a painting  
which was drying in the sink  
or deleted from my computer  
any more poems.  
might as well  
try to stop  
brass bells from clanging  
by rattling them.

*John L. Stanizzi : 4.22.19*

4.22.19

11.40 a.m.

65 degrees

Prelude to all night rain, the day grays, the showers begin.

Object of greening, reed-grass has begun its emergence. I will  
name this grass, and the surface of the pond that throws itself north

– I will

declare it motion, colour, warmth, growth, occurrence, patience.

*Paul Connolly : Claggart*

Thin smurs dust  
Suffolk's gorsen rape-field  
glows, dull the gloss

on boots, like spat chewies  
last year, licked  
sun fresh with dew,

and dead-nettles' wicks  
aren't primed, lamps out,  
their bruise purples blackening

on green flesh. Forget-me-nots  
tiny-faced kiddies stare,  
vacuous and slappable. Boks

of fleet, antlered hares  
and matronly partridge waddles  
are downplayed to blur

and the lopsided homunculus  
scarecrow is cloaked. Even  
the hawthorn avalanche is

matt. The petals are beaten  
    blush, contuse, and scabs  
    of algae jade the stems,

    though wet blackthorn branches,  
    slicked jet as wrong 'uns'  
    hearts, or lungs, are cancered

    beauty. Growth is tumour.  
    The passion of hallow stitchwort  
    won't perdure, veronica's

    won't. Leaves maraud,  
    surround the bluebells in leathers,  
    are towels ready to waterboard

    the penned primroses,  
    though a spear thistle's rosette  
    is silked celestial, a fungus

    supernova, threads  
    of light death. A fortnight  
    since the news. By then,

    I'd killed you many times  
    stuttering injustice, moaned  
    and struck through taut nights,

rambles, but far below,  
beneath sound, beneath  
a villain's bass tremolo

you'd rumble unreachably.  
You've mouldered for years. These blights  
are you, the scars of beauty

still you, parasite  
and soiling spray that your  
unreachable ones spiked

you with, fag-fragrance spores  
you spread today in breath  
across the land, across

my eyes, a bible pestilence.  
Or endlessly malign, without  
cause, you exact vengeance

for nothing. No doubt  
they offered, but you seized,  
and perfected, belched out

the fog. Or the sweet disease  
is mine. Before the drink  
consumes me, I name and release

you here. Unstuttering, I'll sing  
and heave myself aloft,  
and sway and sway and swing.

*Joe Cushnan : Black Mountain Mist*

It is too easy to allow mountain mist to give permission  
At times of grief, in grief, because of grief, to influence  
And encourage thoughts of God's winter breath, of angels  
Forming a shroud of gauze, of spirits on pilgrimage, of  
wisdom  
And poetic nonsense, when it is simply mountain mist.

But, you know,  
Mountain mist is not the only mist.

*Anita Greg : What are we like?*

We have soft beaks that gape like frogmouths;  
wee stumpy legs that canna walk or run - but  
our toes - in sideways pairs of two - are strong -  
with clasping thumbs just like  
Chameleon

With a fair wind, we live long,

Us athletes that sleep upon the wing  
We build our nests with spit and thistledown -  
And living butterflies - whatever we can find up  
in the air

Are we the fastest creatures ever hatched?  
A hundred miles an hour - that's on the level -  
Hawks may swoop at greater speed  
but we are born to travel far  
as Zambia and Mozambique

and fledged -  
we head to Africa

*Yvonne Boyle : I Was With You In Kenya,*

*You Know*

*For Jennifer*

That night,  
on our weekend in Newcastle-upon-Tyne,  
I got up in the night,  
sleep walking,  
looked out the window  
at the streetscape  
and thought  
'where the hell am I?'

'Are you alright?' you said.  
In the morning  
I apologised  
as I often do  
for my night wanderings.

'I was with you in Kenya, you know'  
you said smiling.  
Our 1980s safari and beach holiday.

That weekend  
we read out loud and laughed at old postcards  
we had sent each other.  
Our friendship archived.

After dinner,  
walking back to the hotel,  
it was the first time  
someone, in the night club zone,  
had called out  
'Eh, look - old people out walking!'  
even though we were only 60.  
'Maybe it was our flat shoes?' Lorna said.  
We noticed you walking more slowly.

Lorna rang  
later that year.  
Steve, your husband, had called.  
'Jennifer has died suddenly'  
she said.  
We later heard  
it was your heart.

And I wonder  
how it was  
you went so quickly.

*William Doreski : Futakawa*

Here on the Sarugababa Plain  
a flimsy shack beside the trail  
offers the tastiest rice cakes.

With hunger honed like a scythe  
I eat as many as I dare, crumbling  
extras into my pack for later.

A few other travellers also pause  
to savour the famous snacks.  
The plain beyond sports distant pines

that look calligraphic, a text  
as natural as the ideograms  
Hiroshige has added to his print

to label and explain a scene  
that needs nothing to express itself  
but a whisper of steam from the teapot.

I can't read his characters,  
but the distant lines of trees seem  
literate enough to inform me.

*Jack e Lorts : Ephram Pratt Listens to a Silent  
Conversation*

Forced into silence  
by silence,

the cacophony  
surrounding the

forest of emptiness,  
is hidden

beneath the bark  
of eucalyptus trees,

hidden in the pupils  
of the eyes of barn owls,

buried deep  
in the ovule of a hyacinth,

tendered into silence  
by silence.

Listen with both your eyes,  
reacting to voices

reaching, listening into  
the conversations of

moss on the rocks  
in the garden,

listening to the dialogue  
of thunder eggs,

small talk  
from a billion years past.

*Paul Butterfield Jr : Me and writing at a fight*

Will you hold me  
In death  
While the moon sinks  
When eagerness outweighs wit  
Realise  
It takes time to master  
Longer than you may think  
Longer than television time  
More  
Like a mourn  
More  
Like living in a bitter reality  
You believe  
A rose is handed to you  
In hindsight  
It's a pen  
The lines will be the death of you  
But  
God wants this  
But  
I don't think you did

*Alison Ross : Four Seasons Haiku*

## Spring

Confetti petals,  
sun kissed breeze swept reminder  
ephemeral spring

## Summer

Still green dove-cooing  
peacefulness, warm droning air  
scented heavy with bees

## Autumn

Dying sun landscape  
slumbering, mist painted with  
fruit and memories

## Winter

Frosted leaf damp earth,  
nights dark woodsmoke scented stars  
sung lonely by owls

*Linda McKenna : In the Utility Room*

In troublesome times find sanctuary;  
round tower or pit, the bottommost  
cabin of a ship. Take to the empty road  
with your empty purse, your suitcase  
full of the wrong season's clothes.

In troublesome times hide yourself,  
in the narrowest room of the house;  
barely space for the ironing board,  
the sweep of your arm over blouses,  
shirts, the line's companion pieces.

Consider the black and white cows  
considering the sky; the blueness  
of the world, its greenness, the nearby  
yellow whins, the fading memory  
of the last cries of their calves.

Concentrate on the smell of clean  
cotton rising with the steam, the speed  
with which you whip through pillowcases,  
the arms of the shirts neatly folded over  
the place, where their hearts might be.

*Jess Thayil : Wing | s*

you have no idea what happened to you / *keine Ahnung*  
 are you his wife or a bird / *keine Ahnung* / hiding  
 under the table all morning lying beneath blankets  
 until evening / just run you must run / your voice

is its whispers when you want to say *bitte hilf mir*  
 and what help do you mean / *keine Ahnung*  
 six months resident yet you can't form another sentence  
 are you his wife or a bird / *keine Ahnung*

your whole language is he hurts me *er tut mir weh*  
 but try danger *ich bin in Gefahr* / too serious? too keen?  
 too soon? / the walls so sure this marriage is cold business  
 you want to turn every stranger into an uneasy eyewitness

are you a wife and don't you have wings / *keine Ahnung*  
 cut into the dance slice up his smooth routine worry his nerves  
 until the neighbours listen / let all the world know now your  
 world  
 is new they cannot say they don't know how / *keine Ahnung*

broken all broken but your wings strike crimson  
 pound blue in vibratos: *Weil ich brenne*  
*lass Ihre Ohren brennen* / you have no idea what got into you  
*keine Ahnung* / *Let your ears burn because I burn*

*Karen Mooney : Vegetable Soup*

We worked in silence using her recipe;  
brought the shin bone to the boil  
drained the fat off; in went the barley,  
lentils and split peas.

Dad suggested that we use  
the pressure cooker.  
Back up to the boil as we washed  
and chopped, added the vegetables  
and waited.

I was glad that he did the onions,  
I didn't want to cry in front of him.

He tried to release the pressure.  
The soup stained ceiling was evidence  
that he was in unfamiliar territory.  
The little that was left tasted good;  
Mum asked for seconds; I felt her approval.

Later he told me that the Doctor had said  
that was how it would go, something tasty  
whetting her appetite, then...

I hadn't realised that we had just  
prepared her last supper.

*Mel Bradley : Petitions*

In the tiny breathing spaces of rock  
The gaps of in between where prayers sleep  
Those in need of comfort, of solace, flock  
In memory of loved ones lost, gone, weep  
Offerings made through precious items left  
A devoted act of faith in Mary above  
This desperation felt by those bereft  
That these tiny fragments would yield her love  
Holy Queen in heaven to you they do pray  
Balm to salve, sent down in comforting gaze  
Ease their burdens, heavy on shoulders that weigh  
Hope held in heart and soul, renewed in praise  
Sorrow hangs thick and saturates the air  
The remnants of grief, petitions in prayer.

*Imogen Darling : Quiet Child*

The quiet child keeps an ocean inside her mouth,  
So she does not speak, even when spoken to  
Too afraid to let a single drop spill,  
Terrified, perhaps, of the torrent that would escape engulfing  
everything around her,  
Or, perhaps, scared that nothing would come from this  
That the pouring out of those flood waters would go unnoticed, no  
witness or anything to mark its passing,  
That nothing at all would change,  
The quiet child has been holding back the flood for so long she does  
not remember a time before this  
She does not know there is anything other than the salt water sting,  
She wonders sometimes if other people hold such deep dark waters  
like she does,  
Wonders if they hold the same terrible drowned things inside  
themselves,  
She does not ask,  
To ask would be to spill and she can't let that happen so she sits,  
quiet, alone with her ocean and the things it contains  
within,  
The quiet child wonders if she was born like this, wonders that  
even if she did let loose the flood would the stain ever come  
out, would she know herself if she was not the one holding  
the dam from breaking,  
The quiet child will spend many years like this,

I should know, I was once a quiet child, family breaking secrets  
held always just on the verge of spilling,  
And there came a day when the ocean poured from my mouth,  
messy and engulfing, on that day I decided that even if no  
one else stood witness to its passing that I would,  
Because somewhere inside I am still a quiet child, but now she does  
not dwell in salt water deep dark, no, now she finds home  
in a garden,  
A garden planted by all the ways I have learned to heal myself,  
Tended by all the ways I am trying to make this body safe again,  
Building home and innocence like this is the way it should have  
been all along

*Imogen Darling : Womanhood*

My womanhood hangs from me like a beautiful necklace,  
Something like the one my mother wears,  
Moonstone set in silver,  
When I was a child I wanted to grow up and be my mother,  
Or at least a woman like her,  
And I suppose I am, or, sort of, maybe, a little bit,  
We share so much of what makes us who we are,  
The strength she used to kick out the man and raise two children  
    on her own is the strength I used to walk away from any  
    man who thought I was his property  
The love she could not give to herself but instead gave to her  
    children is the same love I use to walk in the world as a  
    woman like me  
The power to fight her demons back, maybe not forever, or for very  
    long at all, is the same power I use to keep living despite all  
    the darkness inside of me, My mother and I have not always  
    seen eye to eye,  
And there was a time I would have cast all of her out of me,  
But I will no longer deny the gifts she has blessed me with,  
She is the one who taught me how to take the shame and turn it  
    into pride,  
How to spit, kick, scream and keep on living in the face of all the  
    hurting, So,  
I will wear my womanhood like a necklace,  
Something like the one she wears,  
Moonstone set in silver

## Submission Guidelines

For Featured Poets, send 6-10 poems.

Four poets will be selected to showcase in each issue, with four poems each.

For General Submissions: send 1-3 poems.

We're particularly interested in poets from the island of Ireland, but will happily consider poets from elsewhere.

- Send submissions to **thepenpointsnorth@outlook.com** with 'FOURXFOUR' as the subject.
- Please format submissions to the following:
  - Palatino Linotype font, size 12
  - Spacing 1.15
- Send all the poems in one attachment (either .doc or .docx), along with a third-person biog (max. 100 words).
- Include a cover letter in the body of your email, along with your address and contact details.
- All submissions must be previously unpublished (either print, online or broadcast).
- Please note we do not accept simultaneous submissions.

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