



FourXFour  
Poetry Journal

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Issue 12 Spring 2015

Maria McManus  
Shelley Tracey  
Anthony Ferguson  
Lara Sunday

## Editorial

Welcome to Issue 12 of FourXFour. For those readers familiar with our set-up here, you will know that our approach is simple: to deliver great, new poetry from within Northern Ireland. Our approach has always been solely on the poetry; in setting up the journal originally, we felt a platform was required that cuts straight to the poems, with minimal fuss.

We wanted to give readers a taste of what quality of writing is out there, feeling that four poems (or in some cases, four extracts) from each poet would be an adequate portion to chew over and enjoy. We're not overly concerned about where this fits in to the larger scheme of poetry publishing in Ireland, although we support and appreciate many other publications and websites here. We just believe that good poetry will stand up on its own. Continuing that theme, we're delighted to give you four more poets of varying voice, experience and style, each creating beautiful work. Enjoy.

Regards and happy reading,  
Colin Dardis, Editor

*Back issues available for free download at:*

[www.poetryni.com/fourxfour.html](http://www.poetryni.com/fourxfour.html)

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## Maria McManus

Maria McManus is a poet and playwright. 'The Moon. A Plane. A Crow' was written in October 2014 in homage to Georges Perec. Residencies include The Tyrone Guthrie Centre, Inishlacken Project Connemara, Koldemo Sweden, Antibes, France.

Maria's poetry collections are 'We are Bone' (Lagan Press 2013), The Cello Suites (Lagan Press 2009), which has been recorded with an original score composed and played by the cellist Tom Hughes. Reading the Dog (Lagan Press 2006) was runner up in the 2007 Strong Awards at the Poetry Now International Festival and was also short-listed for the 2007 Glen Dimplex New Writers Award.

In 2008 & 2012 she was awarded an Arts Council individual artist award. In 2005 she was awarded the inaugural Bedell Scholarship for Literature and World Citizenship, by the Aspen Writers' Foundation, Colorado USA. In 2008 she co-wrote Bruised for Tinderbox Theatre Company. In 2006/07 she was playwright on attachment to Tinderbox.

Previous theatre credits include His n Her's and Nowhere Harder (2006) for Replay Theatre Company, and The Black-Out Show (2006) for Red Lead Arts. A screenplay adaptation of the sequence 'Aill na Searrach; The Leap of the Foals', was developed in 2013 with NI Screen.

## The House That Stood for Happiness

*i.*

Where upon these feathered paths, is rest?  
Where the sweet spot,  
in half-light, dappled, flickering,  
green and airy,  
is that sure instinct?  
How can we know at last  
the place called home?

The blackbird fled her shelter;  
her confidence, her trust  
in the world came to nothing in the end.  
The nest she fashioned, pressed out  
in urgent tender heartbeats –  
abandoned.

The setting bird took flight,  
her memories, dreams  
of the home of 'then'.

*ii.*

I palmed her cold blue eggs,  
her latent intimacy:  
here, a childhood unlived,  
here, a childhood lost.

*iii.*

This threshold offers its lips  
to the sky. Blades of grass  
imprinting against the limits,  
fresh as linen. The house that  
stood for happiness was lost –  
but the heart beats countlessly  
for that which curves  
and holds,

returning its call,  
its sound.

*iv.*

Where there is light,  
I want this place –  
between heaven and earth,  
a high place for dreaming,  
a marriage of moss and down  
cupped just out of reach,  
given form from my breast,  
pressed out with my body,  
a dress to fit,  
breathed into.

I made good  
the wretched unhelpable  
palpitations – put them to work,  
searching out the place that knows  
the choreography of forest-love,  
where the world and its hostilities  
are muffled, suffocating, far away,  
beyond the trees' cordoning –  
and found a place  
to sing.



## Shelley Tracey

Shelley Tracey's writing has appeared in journals such as *Artemis*, *Abridged*, *North West Words*, *Quantum Leap* and *Ulla's Nib* and in anthologies *Alchemy*, *Lonely Poet's Guide to Belfast*, *Ringing the Changes*, *Moment*, *Making Memories*, and *Stories South of the Sun*.

Shelley's scholarship embraces creativity in teacher education, and the use of poetry to enhance the learning identities of adult literacy students and their tutors. *The Art of Poetic Inquiry*, Backalong Books (2012), included Shelley's chapter on the process of composing textpoems.

Shelley is a community arts facilitator with a wide range of experience in facilitating creative writing workshops. She organises annual events in Belfast to celebrate the international 100 Thousand Poets for Change festival. Shelley's Minority Ethnic Artist Award from the Arts Council NI explored experiences of migration to Northern Ireland (2013/14), and her current Artist in the Community Award is developing intercultural communication through creative writing.

Creativity blog:

<https://journeyspace.wordpress.com/>

## Welcome

Welcome, migrant.

Here is your resident's flatpack.

Follow the instructions closely, to the letter,  
to make this box and put yourself inside it.

You have to fit exactly,  
with no margin for error.

And when it's all completed,  
please don't make a noise;  
it might disturb the neighbours.

Don't wear bright pink or sing in public.

Post to us a photo of your box,  
with everything you owe us,  
and a full-face picture of you.

So we can see the shape of your eyebrows  
and if your dominant eye looks right or left.

It tells us who you are,  
what you might be thinking or believing,  
where it's safe for you to go.

It's all for your own good, you do realise that, of course.

You are very welcome.

## Mesh

And did you imagine  
when you spread the jagged mesh out to entrap me  
that all the dross would fall  
into the pit and drain away?

And did you know  
that alchemy refines and purifies  
what envy would destroy?

And did you sense  
that I had made an armour of the wire  
and fenced you out of here?

I see you standing at the gate,  
just begging for admission.

## Explaining Guavas to a Northern Irish Friend

First we need to find a frame of reference ....  
but not in childhood – yours in a cheery Irish seaside town,  
mine in the suburbs of Johannesburg,  
a long dry journey from the shore  
And not in anticipation,  
like for you some snow at Christmas,  
or for me the first miraging glimpse of rising waves.  
Trying to catch a perfume hovering like an ectoplasm,  
a knowledge in your body with no language and no form.

You know how you are gifted with potatoes here,  
with the crisp and fluff and melt of them?  
Well, imagine how your mouth might know  
their textures and their nuances,  
while your tongue has exclamations  
but no adjectives or verbs.  
With guavas, there's a depth that might be earthy,  
and a liquid underlayer, with nuances of sound.  
A skin unlike crisp apples and even less like nectarines.  
The colour undefinable, pink made of oranges and browns.  
Colour in your land is simpler: classification,  
not suggestion.  
Red and white and blue: they tell you clearly where you are.

Memory and wonder weighed inside my palms  
for subtlety and presence; seeking explanations  
for what we're still to share.

## My Grandmother Always Cheated at Cards

In Great Aunt Frieda's kitchen, the corgi's nails  
clicking on the draughtboard tiles,  
the sisters played cards, ageing slowly as cactuses.  
My grandmother always cheated.  
Not trusting her skills or serendipity,  
she had to be devious. Life had not taught her  
the advantages of losing or of yielding  
to the gods of fortune. Every victory  
was a stone gathered to hide away in a purse  
yanked tight at the neck. Game after game  
she maintained her watch, dark brown eyes  
shifting like marbles, outdoing her kin.  
Sipping Russian tea from spoons  
clotted with cherry jam, the sisters played on  
through the empty afternoons.

## Anthony Ferguson

Anthony Ferguson has been writing seriously now for almost six years after accidentally enrolling himself into an English Lit A-level in high school. It was there he found poetry and from then on he's been on a mission to make people read his work and give him the attention he sorely craves.

He lives in Belfast and has performed across the city and up the country to his native North Coast, hoping one day to bring his poems to another country or, better yet, another planet. He fights daily against the need to earn a wage and have the time to write; scribbling down ideas when he really should be doing something else, and doing something else when he should be writing.

You can find him easily online and he'll love you forever if you follow his blog: <http://middlemanofhistory.tumblr.com/>

## Boy in a Bookshop

Closing my eyes for long enough brings me to Jerusalem  
a city made from someone else's memory.

Up the road is Constantinople, to the right is Rome and to  
the left is Thebes.

My chest, ribs, lungs ache under the pull of these places,  
my atoms want to let go and spread back into history, into  
the world

to be a part of it all, to exist all at once.



*extract from 'Portrait'*

*i.*

Island Child

born of rain and the chill of night;  
you can never find peace in the sun,  
the heat of the waking world.

Instead you are still  
in the shadow of the mountain,  
valley of the river,  
the grand silence of wild night;  
in the dreaming,  
the misty dreaming.

*ii.*

Packless pack animal,  
rightfully frightened:  
not every shadow conceals a hunter  
but enough do  
that caution rewards with life.

Proud and tall,  
your antlers crown you  
King of Beasts,  
Prey Uncaught,  
Lord of the wheel of Sun and Moon  
Who bows only to time.

## Today I'm Wearing Mostly Black

As it's pretty much all I own.  
I try to dress lighter, more cheerfully,  
but those well-worn t-shirts  
keep rising to the top  
and maybe I'm just not feeling turquoise today.

Sometimes I do feel like it:  
I feel like bright shirts  
and adult shoes with lights in the heel;  
like dying my hair green  
and wearing big silver rings;  
like wearing a cape to add an air  
of wizardly mystery.

Instead, I wear mostly black,  
because I like to be left alone:  
I enjoy the peace of having no one  
notice me, look at me and think  
they know me  
because of a colour.

I loathe to be known  
by anything out of my control,  
so I confirm with the dull, the unremarkable.

Out of that black comes the accusation,  
a voice resounding with tidal power  
that calls out "*Live!*"

*Your soul is a shining soul  
and the body should not hide it.  
Make it a lens, not a mask  
made from dust and dirt."*

His sword stares me down  
to pull the truth out of myself.  
but watch him ground down at his ankles  
leaving behind the message:  
*"You shalt not live  
a safe and shining life."*

*The Celtic sea god Manannán mac Lir, according to legend, had a magic sword that when it was pointed at someone, they had to answer truthfully to any question. A statue of Manannán was cut down at his ankles and replaced with a cross, bearing "Thou shalt not have any other gods before me."*

## The Crescent by Night

The dimpled street glimmers like a gold seam under the  
halogen light.

Gutters chorus with the clicks and bubbles of slowly  
draining rain.

The neighbourhood cat prowls its rounds, silently circling  
supernal territory.

There are people in these houses but I do not know their  
names;

Some of them are still awake or at least have left their  
lights on.

The rest of the city shines beyond the terraces, blazing solid  
light into the low floating clouds

A solitary car passes far away, wet tires sliding on  
tarmac

The air is cold and gentle, brushing garden plants in  
waves of subdued motion.

Only my window is open.

Night and day are little different in the city.

Only one is much quieter.

## Lara Sunday

Lara Sunday is a Belfast based poet driven by her interests in sustainable living, politics, sex, and food and the places where these topics intersect. 'To say that she is fierce, strong, and bold may be an understatement.' (Shawna Cooper, Dollarton Records)

Her short poems pack punch. Lara recently became active in the poetry community and regularly attends the Purely Poetry open mic night in Belfast. She read at the Funeral Services Northern Ireland National Poetry Competition 2014 recital in Bangor, and won the Curious Cat Poetry Competition in March '14 by public vote. In an effort to grow public interest in poetry she is working with her local library to implement a poetry project creating new opportunities for people to access poetry and for poets to write and share.

Concurrently, Lara is a full time mature student, pursuing a degree at Queen's University in Humanities. She shares her home with four children, two dogs, five chickens and a lovely bearded man.

## I am to keep quiet

And not speak a word,  
At least not certain words.

Some words I can speak:  
I can shout and I can call.  
Photos, thoughts and feelings  
Put out for the good of all.

Put out for the good of all,  
We must not have any secrets  
Or strain to convey our opinions over certain walls.

Self-confessed didactics  
Spouting for the good of all;  
It is for the good of all.

The all being white,  
English-spoken  
And most convinced of all.

## As alone

Skin bare, creases and hairs:  
The accruements of all these years  
Suddenly all there.

Trying to find the well of youth  
That sat inside of me,  
Unappreciated.

Feeling not yet a husk  
But on the very edge of despair.  
Not wanting it all to be lost.

## Wool

Strands of success  
Waulked together between  
The joyous, voices of women

Hands soapy and stung  
Producing sturdy threads  
That hold off all cold and night  
Soaking in sunlight and care

And then woven with love  
Into a pattern  
Not ever wished to be seen,  
On cold and barren beaches  
Once storms have fled.

But to be worn and made bare,  
With time and work  
And then stowed with care  
In remembrance of a life well led.



This body gets softer as the days get longer

My belly swells, children and cakes are not kind.  
Sometimes this gentle mound feels sensuous and strong,  
At other times, just wrong.

**Thank you for reading!**



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