



FourXFour
Poetry Journal

Issue 17 Autumn 2016

Emma McKervey
Cherry Smyth
Jo Burns
Glen Wilson

Editorial

Welcome to a belated Issue 17 of FourXFour Poetry Journal, bringing you four more poets from within Northern Ireland.

Our enclosed poems are concerned with delights of nature, meteorological wonder, the distance between youth and middle age and human curiosities. Within you will discover 'lenticular strata', 'the closed head | of a white tulip bought at a service station', 'l'esprit de l'escalier' and 'plastic sheets... like a scientific model of smoker's lungs'.

As always, we showcase great poetry not only from within NI currently, but those originally born here and now residing elsewhere. With Cherry Smyth in London, and Jo Burns in Germany, it is a pleasure to have them here alongside Emma McKervey and Glen Wilson, and recognise the extension of the Northern Irish lexicon into other realms.

Regards and happy reading,
Colin Dardis, Editor

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Emma McKervey

Emma McKervey is from Holywood and studied at Dartington College of Arts.

Her poetry has been published in numerous journals and anthologies including *Abridged*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *The Linnet's Wings*, *Skylight 47*, *The Compass Magazine* and *The Emma Press Anthology of Urban Myths and Legends*. Emma can also be heard reading her work on the Lagan Press website for International Women's Day. She recently took part in the daily blogging project *Project 365+1*, affiliated with the University of Melbourne as guest blogger, as well as reading in Westminster Reference Library at the start of the summer. She was a winner of the Translink/Poetry NI competition in 2015 and longlisted for the inaugural Poetry School/Nine Arches Press Primers poetry competition in 2015 also. She was recently shortlisted for the FSNI National Poetry Competition, and is currently on the shortlist for the Listowel Writers Week Poem of the Year as part of the Irish Book Awards.

Hamilton Graving Dock

In Belfast the sleech was hauled from the banks of the Lagan,
grey sodden heaps of post mortem flesh, flaccid with the
weight of itself.

Water seeped through every pore of that sand and mud
as fast as it could be pumped away by wheezing engines
spewing steam and fire, and dredgers which yawned their
metal jaws

to scoop, heave and retch the marled muck
whilst around the terraced graving dock 450 men
erected their Lilliputian struts about the vast form
of some vanished, vacant beast.

Lenticulate

Lenticulae is Latin for freckles;
my arms are lenticulated
as are my nose and forehead
and there are lenticular strata
scattered about the horseshoe
pause in my collarbone.

I imagine your fingertips there
studying the pattern and joining the dots,
articulating the ancient constellations
rendered on my skin.

You are alchemist and astrographer -
you read the Jovian calligraphy
of my lenticulae and understand.

I am the moon Europa and
you are Galilei.

You've named me for a lover of Zeus
regardless my frozen oceans,
you wait for my elliptical orbit
to complete day after day,
can trace the lines of chaos
when they break through.

You watch and wait and I feel beautiful
framed in the lens of your gaze.

Lenticulae is Latin for freckles.

My body is the chart of your touch.

Crossdressing

My last pair of knickers are made of black lace and silk
and I wonder how I let them end up amongst
the sensible cotton of my packing, the prettiness
and bows seem incongruous with the heat
and isolation of this place, and I realise
how untouched I am - no caresses from my usual men
singing earnestly to me to displace any need,
as there is no radio here, only the urge to repeat
folk songs and laments from childhood on the stumble
home from the bar, the girls laughing at the tee-shirts
they have stuffed into their shorts in imitation
of a masculine bulge; they swagger down the road,
legs apart, a seafaring roll, and I drift behind
crooning partial verses of half remembered lost loves.

Blue Barrel

The blue barrel sits slumped, leaning
at a slackened angle into the laurel hedge
topless and stained, it's moulded plastic in
sharp contrast to the mesh of daisy and dandelion
pushing up around its base -
a lurching drunk supported by vegetation.

It came from the other half of my semi,
kindly donated when I requested
by the developer's builder; well, more a labourer;
he appeared unskilled, always given the donkey work.
The lugging, the hacking, the shifting and shunting
and in confabs remained unconsulted.

The contents barely sloshed over when hoisted
by the diggerish machinery he drove.
They had already dug up a tremendous
patch of rhubarb and dismantled and disposed of
the garden shed which had twenty years of
Woodwork Magazine packed neatly inside.

I had been out that day.
But I was in time to get the blue barrel
filled with an elderly compost, thick crust on top

and when broken through, a rancid liquid festering beneath
that had once been grass cuttings
From a lawn that had once been mown.

Fabulous stuff, even though
the kids ran from the smell, shrieking,
then darting back again to confirm the stench.
And several years on the blue barrel still sits -
a strange memorial to have
to Jack who had lived next door.

Cherry Smyth

Cherry Smyth is a poet, writer and art critic. She is Irish and lives in London. She has published three poetry collections, *When the Lights Go Up* (Lagan Press, 2001), *One Wanted Thing* (Lagan Press, 2006) and *Test, Orange* (Pindrop Press, 2012).

Cherry's work was selected for *Best of Irish Poetry, 2008*, Southword Editions and *The Watchful Heart: A New Generation of Irish Poets*, Salmon Press, 2009. She is the former poetry editor of *Brand Literary Magazine* and was guest editor of *Magma*, Winter 2012.

Her debut novel, *Hold Still*, was published by Holland Park Press in Autumn 2013.

Holes of sunshine

are hitting the white wall
between the shadows
leaves leave

The spaces
are not leaves, but leaf-made,
stretching and compressing

the plane tree
as light scraps
on to the wall's screen

the house replying
to the tree
via the sun

where yesterday
in the endless rain
they did not speak

So, it's a conversation
That's why we watch it
An address of sunlight

broken by early autumn
and repaired by it
the surface seen

the seeing seen
the surface
appearing to pass

The best part of an opening
blurs light and shade
through a window

looking for the start
of someone's story

The inter-leafing flickers
draw us in
to a stroked wall

the way words can:
fractional, transient,
moving in and out
of their own shadows

Out of Dazzle

The slope eased its summer limb into
the lake only to feel a drowned February.

*

A 13th century poem laid peace in two voices,
the book passing as gently as sieved flour.

*

Cardboard boats ferried words like 'your love
of adventure' towards the lost village.

*

A wagtail left a branch, jiggered
along the shore, pecking like rain.

*

We watched each boat float out of dazzle
caught in the personality of the wind.

*

Longing stayed light as the closed head
of a white tulip bought at a service station.

*

You could make that lake in bronze as a body
with a hand outstretched and it would not be sad.

*

Carboots opened for the market traders overcome
with substance and a scorching possessiveness.

*

The car snatched the sunset in a gold bauble
fast down the chorus of my loud motorway.

Barber's 'Agnus Dei'

The music went where
something older and slower
than moss was
and made me cry
as though the eyes
must be washed of
the living image before
belief in death can begin.

It wasn't the last time
I saw her that mattered –
the doorway of number 18,
a bench where she had
to rest, a wave – but the
her fingertips happening
upon on my face,
unmistakable, which I –
I hung in for longer
than I should have
to lend her my body's time.

I could not meet her with
all my yes, but her desire to
quicken in the trembling

of skin's good heat
leaves each capillary
with Jo's reach for more.

Bareskin

I didn't expect to see skin hanging
in the Motorists' Centre, with its clean
smell of plastic and oil, before burn
and dirty weather. One skin was small,
almost rubbery, the colour of warm butter,
a rip tended in cross-stitch. Another, medium,
more golden, four-legged, a billy perhaps.

I stretched it out like a tailor, this bone
and blood bag, once awash with viscera
and wanted to drape it, a shaman mantle
of the mountain life, led by instinct.
It was as soft as the kid gloves nanas wore
to keep hands sunless. There was no stink
of goat, only the distant squeak of my father
twisting his chamois into a bucket in a sixties'
driveway. Later I couldn't place that
shrivelled, grubby, patch of hide.

Then a street away, that wet afternoon,
you showed me the Zoological Museum,
where a pounce or hover poised in artful
overcrowding. Down those glassy corridors,
we entered the rainforest, marvelled at peak

pelt and fleece: there the quagga stood,
its prime unmarked in each hard eye.

Which pose would I save you in? One hand
splayed on the screen, the other reaching
for me, distracted, urged midway between
your solitary self and the selves we've made
from both our skins. (You swear we rub
bareness into its own perfume.)

As we passed into a showcase daze,
I wanted to counter stasis with feral
play or a ducking scoot to outwit
the predator. Everywhere a love, too curious,
had cut short the glimpses that foster myth,
the blade indelible. I was glad to move
into the rainy, disintegrating air.

Jo Burns

Born in Maghera, County Derry, Northern Ireland, Jo Burns is a 39 year old biomedical scientist and mother of three. She has resided in Chile, Scotland, England, and now lives with her family in Germany.

Two Pamphlets *Picasso's Women* and *Vermächtnis* were highly commended by *Munster Lit: Fool For Poetry Chapbook Competition 2016*. Jo has also recently been selected as one of Eyewear Publishing's Best New British and Irish Poets 2017

To date, her poems have been published by *A New Ulster*, *The Taj Mahal Review*, *Greensilk Journal*, *The Artistic Muse*, *Poetry Breakfast*, *The Galway Review*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, featured in *The Irish Literary Times*, *Poetry NI P.O.E.T Anthology* and *Dove Tales Anthology Identity*, and are forthcoming in *The Litterateur*, *Lakeview International Journal of Arts and Literature* and *Poetry Pacific*.

Twitter: @joburnspoems

The meaning of oceans

The Pacific with its screaming sixties,
erotic, every sailor's wet nightmare,
shouts *Adventure!* for adrenaline seekers
and discoverers taking on the Humboldt.

Whereas the Indian is all about arrival,
not departure (that's the grey Atlantic)
De Gama's rigged stasis and suspension,
lashing foreign flotsam into metre

where parrots gossip, with dance in their throats,
the crows are vernacular, without decorum,
sparrows serenade aubades to the sun,
anklets jingle at sea, *you can hear Tagore.*

The Atlantic, the one I know by heart,
cliffs and mists, it's filled with longing.
A cliché of old myths. I'd have to start
at the beginning, so I'll move on to this:

It's just one water of failed trajectories
and unsailed *vendée globes*. We're saline stars,
buoyant, blind—same old compass and desire:
to sail smoothly through love. It's an art.

Untranslatables

Do you think, when the contours of the planet
 have left no spot for us to explore any more
 as our confines shrink from the five bedroom home
 to *old people's home*, coffin, atoms

that some words will stay ours, untranslatable?
 The ones we dusted on Sundays, and never used,
 like *tsundoku* for example, which merely served
 to justify my slim volumes from Amazon

(and know the postman by *du*). Do you think
 you'll still know *l'esprit de l'escalier*, how I
 recussitated fights, one night in two,
 with comebacks like the kiss of life?

Torschlusspanik, *Mono no aware*. *Litost*,
 all the transient forms of despair we felt,
Eudaimonia was often there, unspotted
 for happiness is rarely a conscious event.

Will we remember *Saudade*, over pisco sours,
 after drilling tenses in *Escuela Violetta Parra*,
 Imaginary return flights, longing for Europe
 before touring another of Neruda's houses?

Or me teaching English, (the *Schadenfreude!*),
to stockbrokers and bankers in Berlitz,
Frankfurt, explaining the subtle differences
between all the past progressives?

Through my *depaysement*, you were my *Vade Mecum*,
we've seen so much, *Fernweh* became each other,
but when we scratch through dementia to *dustsceaung*,
and we lose words (worse than just *tartle*)

and forget what they mean, returning to babble
or even ape grunts. They were never ours to own,
but to pass on uncrumpled, in strange tongues
to our children. But husband, in our personal Babel,

do you think we can squirrel away just the one?
Can we keep *querencia* for us, alone?

The alchemist's sideboard

There's me,
the porcelain dealer,
I've travelled far and deep,
searching like Santiago,
for *that* piece
to make this set
of bards completer.

Next the heirloom Rabbie,
heavily fingerprinted,
red rose chipped veneer.
A heavy jug to carry,
burned in Mossgiel,
poured over hands of time,
romantic yet ragged.

Then the silver lipped beaker.
found in Bellaghy,
six miles from here.
The curve of gold it pulls
as I arc it through sunlight
spotlights
my shy, shiny father.

Warming to the solar plexus,
modest, always giving
more than was put in,
with the gift for brewing
hot streams of pictures,
the burn spilling strong
down phalange
and through his fingers.

I take care not to drop
these delicate fragments,
molecular, precise,
formed to fine china,
A mosaic journey
of earthenware treasure.
After all, they are here,
and I had been sure
I had lost them.

Octaves of rain

Late Spring 2016

The thunder booms Mussorgsky tension
under the corrugated iron roof.
Tight lines of silver fall from gullied grooves
and notes are stretched to strings from crystal.
The garden cathedral rises up, gothic.
Grass incense swings its *botafumeiro*,
Petrichor weaves through this vertical opera.
Nascent bass plays it all dark indigo blue.

Lower Base Camp 2010

The last time I heard rain pound so hard,
I lay near Buddha, under a bursting cloud
As mudslides shrouded our tour-guide's *mantra*.
It never rains in Ladakh he'd said over and over.
We'd chanted it so often it became our rosary.
We must have angered, on the way, Chang La gods.
Stok Kangri and Indra let loose in fury,
shooting peaks in crescendo down the pass.

Leh 2010

Morning mud, borne of Markha dust.

Innocent sky, baby blue, palest orange.

Silent, but for one lonely radio playing
on repeat: *Om mane padme hum.*

Whirrs of helicopter blades approached us
as soldiers dug up hospitals, airports, buses
to lay their lost in striped Tibetan blankets.

The yak wool – soaked and bleeding.

Glen Wilson

Glen Wilson lives in Portadown, Co Armagh with his wife Rhonda and children Sian and Cain. He has been widely published having work in *The Honest Ulsterman*, *Abridged*, *The Irish Literary review*, *Southword* and *The Incubator Journal* amongst others. In 2014 he won the Poetry Space competition and was shortlisted for the Wasafiri New Writing Prize. He was shortlisted for the Seamus Heaney Award for New Writing 2016. He is currently working towards his first collection of poetry.

Twitter: @glenhswilson

In the Shade of a Western Sky

i.m. George Donaghy

Taken close,
you
fill the frame,
sun hat, brown braces over
white and tan striped shirt,
sinewy strong arms
crossed over like oak roots.

Aviator sunglasses protect
the eyes, mouth impassive
but standing fully at ease
on this hill, the breathing Colossus
of County Tyrone.

You were happy
to let others do the talking,
seeming to have everything
resting
in that deep lined face.
When I think of you
it's like this;

a straw cowboy hat
haloed by the sun
like Holmes's deerstalker,
Caesar's Laurels,
the crown of Christ.

Blue Strings Easton

The bicycle wheel's click clack progress
along Tirnascobe road told us he was passing by,
tweed jacket, tweed flat cap, a biblical beard.

I don't recall who told me his name first,
as if it too appeared from nowhere like the blue strings
that were tied to everything he owned.

He didn't have much, off the electric grid
his house had a simplicity to it. We reckoned
He would be away for at least an hour so sneaked inside.

Stood to attention along a solitary cupboard
were clear bottles with a strong smelling drink,
Potcheen we would find out later.

In the corner a dusty wooden crib, above it
a painting of a wren in flight, a forest in the distance,
wings never destined to reach a nest.

The windows had no glass just murky plastic sheets
to keep out the wind that billowed it inward
and out like a scientific model of smoker's lungs.

A fire glowed low, calmed by the piled up slack,
the only other furniture was a plain table and chair,
a still life disturbed by the oscillating light.

On the table sat a chunk of wood and a whittling knife,
sharp enough to birth some image solid. On its handle
yet another blue string, edges strained and frayed.

He's coming back!

I was the last out the door and there he was ;
Legs resting on the road as he sat on his boneshaker
watching us flee. I caught his gaze, eyes of blue weight,

circled with a deep knowing red.

We kept turning round to see if he was following,
always expecting but never seeing him again.

Stable Vices

There is little give in the curve of your flank
as I run the brush through your sorrel hair.

You step back when someone enters the stable,
nickering and weaving figure eights in the straw.

Is He there again? I ask knowing you can't say,
only continue in your dance of anguish, a shiver

in your gaskin. He has left us both this way, you
a broken horse, me an accomplice to his will.

He let me name you and he said I was a curse,
the runt of his empire, even near the end

when all he could move was his mouth,
his riding crop lashed out. It hangs here still,

my self-destruct button, it is him condensed down
to a mere thing, an avatar lingering.

I know where his previous winners are sleeping,
How he often left the stable hands to say goodbye,

the tang of cordite, how many struggled to bear
the weight of their blinkered strength –

I stroke your thick crest, soft as a whole
But so easily torn strand by strand.

Newcastle Promenade

For Sian

We stand at the top of the play frame
holding toy binoculars, steering wheels
that turn no physical ship .

Silver slides and climbing ropes point to escapes
yet I linger on the horizon, the high grey swell
- rumbling as if ready to swallow whole.

Behind me seafront guest houses sleep,
generations that faced the mighty sea
over tea, toast, a morning paper,

all of them gone now, stories, moments,
going out as new souls come in, unlearned
but willing to acquire the taste of salt..

Gulls hover above us, as if by God's
invisible strings, waiting for prey,
the dive into the blue to eat.

I lift you unto the see-saw: we go up
and down, each time the weight
shifts more to your side.

Thank you for reading!



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