



FourXFour
Poetry Journal
Issue 2 Autumn 2012

Patricia Devlin-Hill
Ray Givans
Geraldine O'Kane
Adrian Fox

Editorial

Welcome to the second issue of FourXFour.

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 second edition. Please subscribe to us on issuu.com as we release future instalments.

Happy reading.

Regards,

Colin Dardis, Editor.

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Patricia Devlin-Hill

Patricia Devlin-Hill was born in Belfast. The first poem she remembers writing, in Primary 5, was inspired by the book she was reading at the time, *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*. The poem (long lost) was about the owl in the grain of the wood of the wardrobe that shouldered against the bedroom door, when that door lay open at night to let the light from the landing in.

After that, her mother bought her a little notebook to write her musings into. That first spell of poetry writing earned her a place as a school girl amongst *The Young Irish Writers of the Irish Times*, when that column started up in the early seventies. The poetry faded then for a while, with physics taking its place, and taking Patricia eventually to CERN as a Fellow, before moving into more engineering roles. The poetry however was never that far away.

Today Patricia is published in several anthologies and is often to be found at the Purely Poetry evenings in the Crescent Arts Centre.

In a Crisis

you do not need
to say anything
profound:

just say that
the apples on the
crab apple tree
look like radishes;

that the rain
huddles itself
in the concrete
furrows of the road;

that that morning
you flung into the garden
a long-legged spider with
body-stemmed eyes from
a glass tumbler with
a paper floor
that you had
slipped under
and put over it,
as it made itself small
in the corner of the
step of the stair.

Just say that
you had toast,
with butter,
for breakfast.

A Book of Yours

I take the book
within my hands.

It is no
ordinary book,
for you
are within it.

You held it
and turned these pages,
and I turn them now,
in vain pursuit of you.

Pompon – L'Ours Blanc, Musée d'Orsay.

He self-confines,
in broad fluidity
held in lines,
the smoothed horizons
of the sculptor

His eye is inner;
his space looks out,
his muzzle in serious study
beneath the smooth
taper of channelled eye.

His hind is held in hurry
like a striding short-legged man:
his back left foot turned out
and pushing off,
his right leg stretched forward,
bumping to the one in front,
that stands with its partner
in a halted, readied, timid stance,
with paw flat and slightly turned in,
in deference to the other,
standing together as
as a child might stand uncertain
beneath the boule of eye and snout.

I choose my steps, quiet
about you, Great One,
never having been so close;
never having been seen
by a bear.

Of a History Through a 100 Toffees Streamed

After the BBC Radio 4 Series 'A History of the World in a 100 Objects'

They are reached for,
like toffees:
to be slow savoured
one at a time.

The taste already with me,
my fingers smooth
the buttons and menu of
the phone to 'Play',
as they might
release a
soft-edged toffee brick
from its bobbin wrapper.

The taste is
measured and timed,
and explodes the saliva of my mind,
a synapse-thumping massage,
kneading context into relief.

I reach for it again,
then for another,
this eternal toffee
of deepening taste.

And so I listen,
to this sweet box of
downloads on my phone
in pocket buried;
or in the insomnia of the night,
to the rivulets
of words merging
from a hundred objects pouring,
this quantised continuum
of connectedness.

Ray Givans

Ray Givans was brought up in the village of Castlecaulfield, County Tyrone. He was a student at Stranmillis Teacher Training College, later teaching English in County Down secondary schools. He studied for an M.Ed at the University of Bath, developing an interest in dialects, including language and dialects of Ulster.

Ray's poetry has been published in four pamphlet length collections, including two from Lapwing Publications, Belfast. His first full poetry collection, "Tolstoy in Love" was published by Dedalus Press, Dublin. This collection was shortlisted for the Rupert and Eithne Strong award for best first collection, 2009, by an Irish poet. The book was also published in a bilingual English-Italian version by Kolibris, Bologna. A second collection, "The Innermost Room" will soon be submitted for publication consideration.

In many of his poems, Givans writes about relationships; about love and its consequences.

Mother to the Bride

Those hands would knead a child's stooped head
as if applying carbolic along ribbed beads
of singing washboards, or stoking quagmires
of steaming clothes, doused in froth and suds,
while lip-reading through the steamie's fog
and chattering chorus.

Those hands would rise for you at 3 a.m.: break
the ice, snap sticks, light the outhouse
boiler, stoke and pummel a mass of clothes
in a seething cauldron, peg and raise, criss-
cross a yard, enclosed, in shade. A wash
that flapped against the unktion of dark clouds
slow moving over uniform tenements.

And now those hands grown gnarled, arthritic,
have watched her body lose a pound each week
since the engagement. And yet, determined,
fumbling, drawing blood, she tacks the hem,
stitches and smooths with steaming iron
her daughter's gown.

Today, those hands will hold the shaking stem
of a champagne glass, watch the fizzing liquid
froth and bubble over the lip, consent to toast

her daughter's happiness, in a room ablaze
with starched white tablecloths.

Steamie: Public washhouse

Visit to New Hairdresser

I slither into the chair, slouch. You instruct me to sit up straight. Flounce the wrap.

The undercurrent settles on my chest and torso as you discipline the corners into my collar.

Cold spray squirts my head, stirs from torpor like a slap across the knuckles. Your hands tousle

the hair into verbs and exclamation marks before you propose the style of the composition.

You comb the strands of each sentence, abbreviate with the *snip-snip* of scissors. Punctuate

new paragraphs through the scribble of pop from the radio, as I submit to your guiding hands.

'Don't you remember me?' I cut to your double in the mirror. Under a mask of peroxide

I recognise your flame hair. In parenthesis I add, 'Essays always daubed with red biro.'

'The chance to get your own back.' Your face is stern. Fingers correct the line of my neck.

Anna Akhmatova

Let the moon take its bow in the serrated clouds.
Let the sun rise tomorrow with its orange-yellow
mouth aghast at the release of my son. Let his
cold hands and ravaged boots feel the warmth
of the melting Siberian snow. Let this applause rise
amongst these state-worshipping rafters,
their facade of gold stucco gods. Let Stalin
in his high office listen to the whisperers
and let him feel this applause echo
through his ribcage. And let him know, and the agents
who will bug my quarters on Fountain Street,
that the silver willow of my childhood
will rise again from the source of the earth
and soak up these waters of applause. And on
a God-given day, the wind light across the Urals
to Tashkent, it will keen no more, nor be imprisoned,
but will applaud with its own leaf gusto and send out
spores that will raise from my beloved mother earth
the writers with freedom to express her lushness,
or that colourless season, without the fear of the silent,
silent men, with the *burr* of their stultifying buzz-saws,
hacking at your living, breathing, life-enhancing branches.

Travelling

We took our ease that day,
so hot on Ballygawley Road
that tottie stones plumped,
stuck to our soles.

After a half mile dirt
track to Eskra Lough's
dark basin, we sat
on an uncultivated hill

near tufted, yellowing grass,
whins and wind-tousled
broom's hair. My mother
and father lit cigarettes,

wafted smoke at nipping
midges, itching our white
skins. The towels we spread
were skimpy as handkerchiefs.

We looked down at the cut
of a pair stripped off
to trunks and a bikini, brown
as berries and swaggering about

showing off their tan
from somewhere foreign
from somewhere beyond
wrapped drumlin, wet Sperrins.

I tip-toed, as if the ground
would scorch my feet;
weaved around thistles, as if
they were markers for a slalom,

down to Eskra's sour,
sullen lip. She lay
like a dormant animal
presenting a smooth skin

unruffled dark fur.
My uncle, who could
swim her mile stretch,
would tell how she shelved

away, quickened her depths
threw down shafts to an abyss,
clamped the unwary. For he,
on that hot afternoon tried

to prepare me for my journey:
his cupped hands beneath
my back and legs. *Relax.*
I stiffened, resisted,

splattered air and water
from the mouth's blow-hole,
inhaled slime stagnancy, as I tried
to break away from constricting rushes.

Geraldine O'Kane

Geraldine O'Kane has been writing poetry for over 10 years, she has had several poems published in local magazines and online e-zines, such as Black Cat Poems, Speech Therapy, Allo Trope, and Short, Fast and Deadly.

Geraldine is a member of the poetry performance group, Voica Versa, She has previously been part of a local writing group at the Craic Theatre, and has performed some of her work in local theatres and the Dungannon Borough Council Arts Festival.

Her poetry is mostly inspired by observation, and the human condition and emotion.

The Eye of Time

The earring sat at the last step of the stairwell
where they used to kiss voraciously
after days of being apart.

Unsure of when it got there,
she didn't dwell on it,
but they did eyeball each other
from time to time.

The pearl offered its own explanations:
maybe it occupied the carpet
before her feet ever tread there;
perhaps it belonged to the previous tenant-
men vacuum regularly in a men's way-
for there it remained long after they left
and their love died.

Months later she visited his bed,
laid naked in emotions,
when there in the rumpled sheets
stared back at her the earring
accompanied with a hair;
this time it was less placid,
told her straight, they had more right
than she had to be there than she did.

Authoress Envy

She lives the lifestyle:
goes to parties
where music is strummed
on acoustic guitar
to red-wine-infused audiences perched on
soft sofas, flickering in tea-light ambience.

Wears penniless chic
from second-hand stores,
her pale pallor hiding
feisty undertones
hinted at by vixen-red lips
and earthen hair draping her waist,
a throwback to free love.

Her last home,
some stranger's floor;
at 3am, what stories it told.

It's not her words I envy:
it's a life that soaks onto the page.

Deadly Games

She was ahead of the game, safe in the knowledge he couldn't lift her by the ankles as he had proposed. She wasn't prepared for him to pull her to the edge of the bed; burying her legs in the crook of his elbows, like delivering a calf from its mother, beginning to swing her around; renting a nervous giggle, closely followed by an excited half scream, normally found lingering at fairground rides.

He swings faster and she seems to be floating; an up and down movement, like beating water with a foraged stick. Suddenly he loses his footing from the circle, steps back for balance, hears a soft *thwap* as her humbug head, pale and dark, connects with the edge of the bed. Her giggles stop; body goes heavy and limp, pulling at his arms. He lifts her head from the awkward angle takes her face in his hands and waits for her to stop playing dead.

Effect is the Word

after Seamus Heaney's 'Mid-Term Break'

On the outset, his choice: create or never create again.
Challenged, he stared into the lily-white void,
bricked it up with an army of inky black words

using isochronic images carved from his own eyes
that said: stay with me, discover my depths;
I will tell you no lies, for it is what it is,
there is nothing more behind.

As she left her world to journey
through twenty-two lines of his,
a rabble of butterflies gathered on her skin
forming a mosaic montage of mourning;
every hair on her body responded
in raised waves of salutation,

while with synthetic synchronicity,
a solitary tear sluiced from her
and splattered onto his words:
"a four foot box, a foot for every year".
In perfect recognition of the moment
a "poppy bruise" appears: beautiful and harmless,
like the beat of a butterfly's wing
changing both their lives for ever.

Adrian Fox

Born in Kent, England of Irish parents, returning to Belfast in 1967, Adrian has an M.A. from Lancaster University and The poets house, Donegal. He was taught by the great poet James Simmons.

Adrian's poems have been published by Cyphers, Poetry Ireland, the Honest Ulsterman, and The Black Mountain Review, as well as four collections by Lapwing and Lagan Press. His poems have been translated into Hungarian; In Hungry, Adrian taught in the main university as part of a peace programme in 2003. He has also produced a CD, 'Violets', a homage based on the lost lives of all who died in Northern Ireland.

Adrian is also a painter and teaches poetry online at www.adrianfox.org

Down by the Water's Edge

The rippling water be-
comes the shore-
line engrained in bark
and the wooden stumps
of water we leapfrog,

reflecting the reason why.

the un-barked dead tree
is a prop from Waiting
For Godot; but really it's
a horse riding by.

The waves reflect
the shape of the sky:
it splashing under bridges
like warped rippling time.
The sun jewels on
the water like
a gift going by;
the algae is even
turning blue.

I'm here at the trees,
leaning, loitering away.
I'm here on the pier,
my stage; the lakes
are painting
a picture of you.

Renvyle

for Moyra Donaldson

I took the pilgrim route, past Croagh Patrick and the famine ship. On to the greatest part of Ireland, the greatest bit of land sea and sky. Renvyle on the shores of Connemara. Something happens there: a mirage, an optical illusion between sea and sky. But something also happens there inside you: the geologists can say until they are blue, but how can they fathom the land, sea and sky fossilized in the chemistry of you?

from The Orphic Sonnets/Prayers

3.

I call on you,
The mighty
Splendid light;

Aerial, dreadful
Sounding, flaming
Light.

All parent great
And strong, parents
Of prolific rains.

Wash me in watery
Frames and dry me
In air's wide bosom

Through stormy
Sounding gales.

6.

To you who holds the key
Of chambers weep. Let me
Light my way to the end.

The source of fertile earth,
The all-destroying force.

Fruits of dark
Endless root

Give to take my souls de-
Light, accept the darkness
Of my sight. Draw near
To my prayer.

Head Injury

The Fab Four saved the world
And the Silver Surfer restored
Life to a dead girl and I'm crying,
Blubbering like a fool.

This stroke is playing havoc
With my emotions: I'm crying
When I should be laughing
And vice versa.

I'm watching a fantasy film
And tears trip me; I fly off
To dry my tears while
The ads fry my brain.

Poetry and art might be in
My blood, and stroke in my
Genes; I'm ready for the muse
Of life or the due-

End of death, un-
til then hope
is in my
heart.

A

New

Ulster

Northern Ireland's newest e-zine, providing a door to new worlds through art, poetry, short fiction and photography.

Issue one is already full.

Submissions for future issues are more than welcome.

If interested please send to agreig02@qub.ac.uk

Thank you for reading!



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