



FourXFour
Poetry Journal

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John Moynes
Jacqueline Rock
Anesu Khanya Mtowa
John Harding

Contents:

p.3 John Moynes

Anonymous

The Waste Years

On the Economic Implications of the Continental
Breakfast

Imposters

p.8 Jacqueline Rock

What it is

Stumps

Appointment

Mother's Scarf

p.14 Anesu Khanya Mtowa

I Cry For Humanity

Drowning

Steps

Black Girl Magic!

p.24 John Harding

Shut Up

The Playground

Holding

Off the Rails

John Moynes

A scriptwriter and comedian by profession, John Moynes eventually turned to poetry in an attempt to earn even less money. Since 2012 he has been writing *A Limerick A Day* for broadsheet.ie, which makes him the most frequently read living poet in Ireland.

He was the 2013 Leinster Slam Poetry Champion, and the Festival Laureate at the 2015 Lingo Festival. His poetry reflects his interests in history, trade unionism, science fiction and laughing.

Moynes has no children, but one of his poems is framed on the wall of his local, which in his eyes is a far greater achievement.

Originally from Armagh, John now lives and works in early twenty first century Dublin, but is looking to move to a more peaceful era.

Anonymous

First we admit that we are powerless over literature, that our lives
have become meaningless.

Then we came to believe that only a power greater than ourselves
could restore us to clarity.

And so we decided to turn ourselves over to the care of an editor,
as we understand them.

We made a searching and fearless inventory of our vocabulary.

We admitted to our editor, to our ourselves and to another poet the
exact nature of our typos.

We prepared our poems for submission.

We humbly asked our editor to remove our clichés.

We made lists of all persons we had harmed.

We wrote verses of apology to our victims.

We continued to draft, redraft and start to write again.

We sought through reading and reciting to improve our conscious
contact with Heaney, Joyce and Yeats as we understand
them.

Having had a literary awakening as the result of these steps, we
went to Grogan's, and told everybody.

The Waste Years

A century since Kipling wrote
Epitaphs: Common Form.
A century since we mattered.
A hundred years of dancing
After Eliot, into the Wasteland.
A hundred years of wanking.
We had an audience once
We have professors now.
But we had an audience once.
You've studied the classics?
Well done. I've not. I won't write poems
For people who've studied the classics.
We had a crowd once
Now people are paid to understand us.
We have whores now.
Don't question why our market died
It was murder, and worse, suicide.
And no one fought and no one tried.

On the Economic Implications of the Continental Breakfast

In civilised locations like Belfast or Rathkeale
A gentleman can wake up and eat a decent meal
He'll start with half a dozen eggs and then begin to dig
Into a dizzying array of things made out of pig.
His cousin on the continent, Pedro, Pierre or Fritz
Begins his day not in this way but staring at some bits
Of sliced up fruit, a little cheese, a small cold square of meat
A thimble of espresso is his meal's only treat.
So Paddy's cursed to start his work already satisfied
His mind at rest, his belly full, his urge to strive has died
While European industry, fueled by a tiny meal
Is why they make cars by the Rhine, but never in Rathkeale.

Imposters

I once gave myself to Failure
To her kiss, her skin, her hair,
And I always will love Failure
I'm just having an affair.

You know that sometimes fools like me
Let lust dissolve our continence
But never fear a fool like me
Just trust in my incompetence.

For sometimes in my line of work
The best laid plans blow up
I did my normal kind of work
And saw Success show up.

So just for now I love her
This sexy, sacred cow
But I will not always love her
Or forget my sacred vow.

That I gave myself to Failure
To her kiss, her skin, her hair,
That I always will love Failure
I'm just having an affair.

Jacqueline Rock

Based in County Down, Jacqueline is a graduate of Fine Art whose writing influences her paintings and installations.

She strives for raw honesty in her work and is deeply influence by the human body, mental health and wellbeing and the natural world around us.

Jacqueline has read her work at the Purely Poetry open mic nights held in the Crescent Arts Centre, The Funeral Services Northern Ireland Nation Poetry Competition 2015 Belfast launch, The Blackberry Path Art Studios, and for Women Aloud as part of the Aspects Festival in Bangor.

What it is

Distraction is playing with white elasticated flesh
Stretching chewed gum around fingers,
Watching them swell as bouncy castles deflate.

Loneliness is being held by porcelain arms.

Fear is a mother's wet crotch from a child who never wins
at hide and seek.

When a thinning mane is rubbed into eventually detaching
hair balls.

Exhaustion is a head pushing under the naval wanting
to start over.

Stumps

Hello, It's nice to meet you.

I would shake your hand however I must apologise
but mine are bitten raw.

I should say that my eyes may dart
to the giants whose shadows drape veil like over me
and my cheeks burn from the volcano that simmers between
my lungs.

It thaws my exterior.

I may seem wordless,
the observer of the motion picture
where late night showings bruise the skin black
at the thought of an unknown visitor.

Do continue on.

If my mouth opens but the words hide back into the cave too
many pass by,

know that I am trying;

I have seen the weather too.

The hands meet

as do ours and glances race down our exit paths.

The air awkwardly still.

You'll leave with a half-smile
And I'll worry like lukewarm, milkless coffee
Remembering a child whose sharpenings filled the pencil case.

It was nice to meet you.

Appointment

An ocean uppercuts my stomach in manipulative kindness,
distracting from the scrap bronze crushing my toes
and writing the story across ankles.

Duct taped rocks sculpt my breasts,
the numbers shoot up on the scale and I wonder
why do you not insist on barefoot?

Mother's scarf

Inhaling,
she smells the merging sky and seas
smudge the horizon.
The armoured salt air coats
and strips her lungs.
winning the war of waiting in cities.

Lapping
temptingly, the water's edge teases bluing feet
while barnacles cement
on a static ship.

Quietness
pimples with the world not feeling far.
A mother's scarf,
protecting open eyes from sea spit,
blinds with a linen's comfort.

Pull
it back quick enough and
she'll break her neck.

Anesu Khanya Mtowa

Anesu Khanya Mtowa is 14 years old and currently attends Portadown College.

Anesu is a member of the Executive Committee for the Northern Ireland Youth Forum, and her first poem was published by NIYF in October, 2017 for Black History Month.

I Cry for Humanity

Last night,
I cried for humanity.
Staring at baby photos,
wet with my own tears.
'I wish I could still be like that.'
I wish that when I looked at the world,
I saw kindness, and starlight, and sunsets,
and love.

I wish that someone would've told me about this world.
Because if I had known,
I would've kept my eyes closed.

If I had kept my eyes closed.
I would never cry.
I wouldn't cry in the street,
watching the homeless man slip from our hands.
I wouldn't cry at the school gate,
watching the children rip away at heart.
I wouldn't cry at the foot at the church
while they preach love at me,
but hatefully.

Where they say 'God is Love'
but not if you're gay.

Where they say 'Love thy neighbour'
unless they're Catholic.

Where they remind me that I came from Adam's rib,
but forget to mention that one day,
he will come from my womb.

Unless I don't want him to.
Unless I don't want to be torn from inside,
by a man who will one day grow,
to hate me.
Or just someone who looks like me.

I refuse to raise a son that looks at a woman
but does not see me in her reflection,
because,
what if that was me?
like, how so many times, that has been me .

I refuse to be the son who was born to die.
I refuse to take another bullet from an officer's pistol.
I will not watch him walk out the door,
for the last time,
every time.

Except,
I will
because to you my refusal is nothing.

Like my body,
you'd rather I keep it silent.

Keep my mouth closed,
and my words folded into a box in my back pocket.

Because 'Black is beautiful'
but not on me,
because my blackness is not for me.
My blackness is your exhibition,
my hair your national treasure.
My skin the world's thickest pin cushion
that you will not pierce.

And as I stand here,
looking up at a glass ceiling,
that I will never see,
I cry for humanity.

I cry for a world that will never love me,
or any other little black girl.
Instead of loving me,
the world will rub my face in the mud,
stand up,
and smile.
'Good,' he will say.
'Now you have found what you deserve.'

Drowning

Lungs filled with air,
Gasping, Gasping, Claspings,
Alone.

This is what drowning feels like.

An empty panic.
Swirling round into the blackness of your own thoughts,
too dark to face.
It's the whirlpool of your own mind,
dragging you down like rocks around the ankle.

It's comforting,
to slip under.
After all the hurt and hurt and hurt,
to be quiet.
There's a peace in drowning.

To be able to close your eyes,
to close your lungs,
and stop.

Steps

Full 7 years, I have walked the hallway,
of my 64 year old house.

Hallway?

Well, not even.

It was a staircase.

A long collection of never-ending steps.

15 steps.

15 creaky steps.

15 steps that held me.

Step after step after step.

Steps painted white every new moon to disguise their
worn out,

dreary faces,

exhausted by my abusive feet;
that beat on their drums daily.

Up and down,
down and up.

15 steps.

15 steps that used to glow with the Sun,
and the moon.

Shining bright with every beginning journey.

15 steps, like the Yellow Brick Road.

Yes!

The Yellow Brick Road,

only wood and white,
And a staircase.
A staircase of 15 steps.
15 steps that I didn't adore enough,
even though they were part of me.
15 steps that I didn't love until they could be taken away.

If you had told me that I would walk away my childhood
on those steps,
I would've slowed down more,
cared more.
I would've noticed the beauty of my 15 steps,
memorised it.
But I can't now.
All I can do is walk.
Walk up and down,
down and up
My 15 steps.
My beautiful 64 year old 15 steps.

Black Girl Magic!

Pocket of Starlight,
glowing brighter than Full Moon.
You, little black girl, are magic.

Like, hidden treasure,
you are the gold dust beneath the coal.
They tried to bury you.
Tried to make you something lost,
but you,
you cannot shimmer out.
You are magic.

Like, a handful of healing stones,
you can mend a broken heart with just your words.
The smoothness of you
melts over sorrows like honey.
They tried to bitter the sweetness of you,
but you,
you will not lose your taste.
You are magic.

Like, a bird's first whistle,
you are the melody behind the song.
The beauty of you,
needs no mirror to be seen.

They tried to hide you under a mountain of glimmering
white pearls,
but you,
you like a lighthouse, demand to be seen.
You are magic.

Don't believe what they tell you about witches.
Don't let them switch off your magic.

When they knock down your door,
do not cry.
Instead, thank them for breaking the barrier.

When they drag you out by ankles,
do not kick.
Instead, thank them for showing you the sky.

When they burn you at the stake,
do not scream.
Instead, thank them for lighting a spark in someone else's
heart.

Never let them take your heart,
little black girl.
because you are magic,
The Brightness of you.
The Melody of you.

The Beauty of you.

It is Magic.

It is your Magic.

Black Girl Magic!

John Harding

John lives in Newtownstewart, Co Tyrone, and sleeps between two women: Bessie Bell and Mary Gray, which incidentally are the names of two hills either side of his home. At school his marks for English were easily surpassed by those who were useless at the subject.

Nevertheless being a slow learner can be of some value in later life, as he now facilitates creative writing workshops for those who need to find a way through the prescriptive educational programmes of those who know how poetry and prose should be written.

He has written two novels - *Dreams, Visions and Voices* and *Sacred Magick and the Shadow-side* - and is in the process of completing the third of the trilogy, *Sleepwalking and Rood Awakenings*. He has also written a book of poems, *Poems for Pilgrims*.

Shut Up

'Children should be seen and not heard,'
so my creaking elders said
when, as a child full of language,
I sought to disregard them
by unleashing a meaningless tirade of silence
before becoming locked in complicity.

The Playground

The whistle shrieks
the chariot race
and squealing wheels
spin the knives
falsetto
in their turning.

Skidding these
dark snorts of foam.
Fists drag the choking scarves
and flailing shirts
The adversary.

Hooves clank
the gates
bruised knees
bleed
with asphalt.
Curriculum Vitae.

Curriculum: Latin for the oval course of a chariot race

Holdings

The nail, tinked and hammered,
holds a portrait on a fissured plaster.
A bruising of borrowed seasons,
creasing further lines upon her face.

The wire, taut between two eyes,
holds a chipped and battered frame,
a cracked rectangular halo,
steeling glasses tinted in wisps of hair.

The paint, dulled and weary,
holds a memory of bloom and beauty
once sabled with strokes of affection,
trembling with colours of inspiration.

Ochre sellotape, curled behind the canvas,
holds an aged receipt, hidden
home for spiders' dust suspended,
now unknown, glanced at rarely, original.

Off the Rails

A bunch of colour
and completely mad,
hanging around and waiting.

You were spun,
or should I say
exquisitely completed

Where you lived
I have no knowledge

We all become worn
or discarded in some
charity shop
suffering from damp wool,
plastic and paperback.

Your bloom had not left you.
You were perfect
for the wedding.

Thank you for reading!



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