

~ Poetry NI ~



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Clare McCotter

Clare McCotter won The British Haiku Award 2017, The British Tanka Award 2013 and The IHS Dóchas Ireland Haiku Award 2010 and 2011. Her haiku, tanka and haibun have been published in many parts of the world.

Her longer poems have appeared in *Abridged*, *Algebra of Owls*, *Boyne Berries*, *The Cannon's Mouth*, *Crannóg*, *Cyphers*, *Decanto*, *Dodging the Rain*, *Envoi*, *The Galway Review*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *The Interpreter's House*, *Iota*, *Irish Feminist Review*, *The Linnet's Wings*, *The Moth Magazine*, *A New Ulster*, *Poethead*, *Poetry24*, *The Poetry Bus*, *Reflexion*, *Revival*, *The SHOp*, *Skylight 47*, *The Stinging Fly*, and *The Stony Thursday Book*. She has also published numerous peer-reviewed articles on Belfast born Beatrice Grimshaw's travel writing and fiction.

Clare was one of three writers featured in *Measuring Dedalus New Writers 1*. *Black Horse Running*, her first collection of haiku, tanka and haibun, was published in 2012. *Revenant*, her first collection of 'longer' poems will be published in April 2019 by Salmon Poetry. Home is Kilrea, Co. Derry.

Memorial Deer

after visiting Inga-Maria Hauser's memorial

This evening
from the bracken margins
one seemed to clock me
standing beside the date
your tiny hand
first plucked
starfish from the air
that other
etched beneath
when you scratched
and clawed
and bled
but if turned to stone
like the fawn
when a shadow stoops
in long grasses
or the listener
with dark news
pointed at his chest
you might still be here
and loved less
asked to tell
why no bruises
were ever seen

why you didn't scream
the cedars down
why you couldn't read
scent messages on the wind.
That night
the deer fled
hill mist in their eyes
their hearts snow-drenched tulips.

Triptych

in memory of Inga-Maria Hauser

Back Packer

She is a swallow
on the heart hammering
brink of blue
for weeks her sleep
silvery with dreams
of maps and moons
and magnetic fields
now her bright brown eyes
on the edge of flight
the leap the drop
the rise the rise
the jolt of sky
the swoop the curve
the turn
her maiden voyage
a practice run
wound down at dusk
on a telephone line
her throat full
of sorrel and stars and sun
and miles
and miles of blue

and the miles and miles
of blue to come.

*

Solace

In her bedroom
she is a student of song
practising
guitar chords
before pressing record
not knowing
every time
her mother presses rewind
the gold crocus
on her child's tongue
candles the night.

*

Self Seeding

Left broken
in the place seed fell
they brought
their corn haired girl
back home
thinking of those
she might
have brought to them
her mother
smoothed the earth
out over her shoulders
and yet
still in the forest
her dark eyes
blent with theirs
she waits at dusk
among the sika deer.

Communion

in memory Annie Bradley (née Rainey)

Her knife is a planet orbiting stone
till the pan fills
with well-ripened halves, then water
added slow as dewfall
brought to a roiling boil
breaks down flesh and skin
and the cane sugar
stirred in with a birch wood spoon.
Its roots fanned across the heart of her hand.

Early autumn the tree in her hand
started to shed recipes
tried and trusted
down the years
wedding cakes and plum puddings
dark fruit loaves
even the attar of summer
she stored in sundry jars: sweet benediction
ministered to all leaving her door.

Plum Jam the last to go
in a present vanishing minute by minute
then that other too.
For years she counselled
no talk of cancer, yet so calm
in the thin thrum
of their words: size and spread and scan.
Vascular dementia, a shaving of God
on her tongue?

The Philosopher's Horse

'Pity thwarts the whole law of evolution'

~ Friedrich Nietzsche

Was it the winds
speaking of things to come:

the room where he'd lie
a side show prophet robed in white

talk from her soirees
drifting up during lucid hours

the iron tones
of the bit battenning his tongue

his words twisted
out of shape in her throat?

Or was it
the heaviness of being

a self he never knew –
some kind of pity

undoing all he'd ever done?

That day in Turin

finding water and stars

in the dark vanquished eye of a horse.

Andrew Roycroft

Andrew Roycroft is a graduate of Queens University Belfast, where his academic interests lay in English Literature, Medieval Studies and Theology. His work has appeared in a variety of poetry journals in Ireland, in the 2017/18 Community Arts Partnership Poetry in Motion anthology, and has been broadcast on BBC Radio Ulster. He serves as a Pastor in a small church in Co. Down, and is currently working part-time towards a PhD in theology.

Sherborne Missal Chaffinch

You have blessed us, our winter wide margin
blushed with your chest not yet matured to blood,
your crown descending, royal to midnight blue.
Eyeing our gridlocked song in sympathy
you, whose throated joy demands a sky to
sound it back, linger long to lend your grace
to our crow black notes. All this while your gaze
will not leave Christ, whose touch turns rich the crumbs
of men. Disdaining our ill-treasured chaff
you take us to the corn's ripe heart again.

Visitation

Cows have broken out at Killycapple
and I, a towny, am helpless to help
except to seek to see them, imagine
myself there among indiscriminate
trampling of bounds, churning of guttered ground,
the angled eye on all comers, and the
shuffled lurching of narrow hindquarters.
She will call them to account, would menace
with the cattle prod, and round her vowels,
before consonantal cut of *"Walk on!"*
Her broad hands work a furrow in her dress;
in this Common Room she sees not a soul
including me, unnerved shepherd, speaking
Psalm 23 to the prevailing wind.

Ulster

In place name and tradition I searched for
Ulster, but found instead an unholy
gulder of old disputes not mine or yours,
drummed into us through blood and thunder.
I sought it out in drumlin swell, landscapes
hewn through harshening winter until
this aeon spring of ours would tell the tale
afresh of a place carved from conflict.
Through topography and theology,
our fractured archaeology,
I looked for where to lay my heart.
Then, in the unadorned halls of my past
it sought me at last; the simplicity
of working folk, not as slow as they walked,
the deepening sinus tremolo
of my Granda's voice as he spun a yarn
about shoring up of the Barmouth.
In these things it came to me:
the gospel meetings, farmers scrubbed for church,
earthy hands flexing the Bible's cover,
a Scripture believed and read, the daily bread
of planter stock; suppers of treacle loaf,
of tea like tar, stewed too long on the hob;
the unsentimental sympathy, sharp
drawn breath to affirm another's prayer

or a neighbour's death; the old men
with landscapes on their necks
and wisdom beyond their schooling.
This Ulster, to take or leave, was ours,
a place composed and catechised as home,
as here, as unconsciously itself.

January

This snow, heaven tendered grace
that takes the shame from
broken ground it falls to meet.

Phillip Crymble

Phillip Crymble was born in Belfast and now lives in Atlantic Canada with his wife and son. A poetry editor at *The Fiddlehead* and a doctoral fellow at UNB Fredericton, he holds a MFA from the University of Michigan and has published poems in *Oxford Poetry*, *Magma*, *The North*, *The Stinging Fly*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *The Salt Anthology of New Writing 2013*, *The Forward Book of Poetry 2017*, and elsewhere. *Not Even Laughter*, his first full-length collection, was released by Salmon Poetry in 2015.

poets.nyq.org/poet/phillipcrymble

Quarantine

— July, 2001

Drumcree and the barricade aren't far away.
This year we've planned our holiday around
the summer marching season. Careful now
of flashpoints like the Ormeau Road, we'll stay
well east, keep to my family's side — a place
where orange lilies grow and wheaten flour
adorns the women's aprons. Not far down
the road Queen's Island and the shipyard cranes
are holding. On the motorway to Leitrim
there are Ulster flags and banners loyal
to the Queen. They say that foot-and-mouth disease
is carried on the tyres of cars. Poisons
are a mystery — the border guards file
records, know the strongest go unseen.

Cut

It's not as easy as it seems to try and parse —
conceits like these are slippery as frog spawn,
beads of mercury, the assurances of gypsies
reading fortunes into tarot cards. Suppose
the Mini-Cuisinart you signed for on the porch
arrived days later — say when you were upstairs
sleeping, folding laundry in the nursery, out,
or bunkered in the attic with your big ideas
and theories. Instead a small emergency.
The world outside allowed to enter, wake
our family from its spell — the blade against
the surface of your skin a kind of burglary.

Plainsong

Frost formed on the dormer in my study
makes it hard to see — the world outside
a composition exercise — the subject
in a winter theme. Roof-space windows
lead us into reverie. The French
don't have a word for dream — delusion,
wandering and error pleased them best.
The mind gone slippery. I don't suppose
it matters what comes next. Could be
the Japanese, their way of making —
Basho's withered fields, the suddenness
of thought. It's all so incomplete. I'm left
alone and cannot see my neighbour, how
she lives — the frost grows old in me.

For Caleb, Harvey Pekar

— July, 2010

My brother lifts the hatch on his Isuzu — tucks
the unironic Linux T he bought at Open Source
Orlando back in '93 into his trousers. We hear

a squeaking wheel, squint hard to block the sun —
the man I've come to see emerges from the shadows
with a hand-cart — trundles out from underneath

the awning of his shop. To fill the time while
winnowing my books he talks laconically of war,
his tour of duty in Da Nang, reveals in passing

that he's ABD in Lit. — recites quotations drawn
from Whitman, early Robert Bly. Low-balled
on a hundredweight of novels from my college

days, I shrug, decline the cash and take a credit.
Once we get inside, my brother tries to mystify
the owner — keeps him occupied with nonsense

verse by Dahl and Douglas Adams. At the back
end of the store, beyond the cook books, pulps,
and wobbly piles of new arrivals, a score of classic

Sci-Fi 1st editions under glass. No Disch or Harry
Harrison. No Ballard — but a bright and unread
paperback original of *Shrinking Man*, Frank Herbert's

magnum opus, and an as-new hardcased Putnam
Starship Troopers wrapped in mylar on a clear acrylic
stand. Like rare and splendid insects in some sacred

entomology, each specimen is ticketed, arranged,
and cross-identified by value, imprint, marketplace
desire — its price and scarcity. I look at what

I've got to spend, resign myself to something less
collected, browse the nearby aisles, despair, slump
on a step stool, think of provenance, of ordinary life —

mistakes in times of reckoning — what it means
to travel light. Miscatalogued, and weirdly in with Zen
and New Age books on tape, a near fine movie tie-in

graphic novel signed in marker pen to Caleb. Mine
for sixty-five. Not bad. My brother waits outside.
The woman at the register smells vaguely of patchouli.

"Guess you know he died?" I nod and take the paper
bag, walk out into the sun like someone mended — close
the door on all that clutter, try to focus, shade my eyes.

Anna Murphy

Anna Murphy is from Lisburn and helps run the family piano business, she enjoys singing, writing songs and recently has released an album called "Bread on the Water". After the passing of her mother, Anna found a passion for writing poems and in her poetry explores the spiritual life, the beauty and wildness of nature and our interaction with each other. She was placed second in the Funeral Services NI National Poetry Competition 2015, and was a finalist in another year.

Beat the Freeze

I'm abandoned
as the woody stump
of an Armagh apple tree,
thrown in a ditch,
seasoned by frost
and covered in pink-white blossom
falling on time-rings.

The woodcarver comes
at sunrise and
shapes me
into a spiralling
apple-wood seraphim.

Sky Open

I am wild as a Holloway path
all briars, nettles and tangled roots.
No pilgrim sings redemption songs,
no scarlet lips praise slowly

in this sunken labyrinth.
Sunflowers track the path of the sun
as a goldfinch lands and bends
to peck a tender seed.

Come, lift the lead weight from my heart.
You move in me and I am light,
I am soft as ripe plums, dancing on
the camomile lawn and following the sun.

Coney Island

The males arrive first, their bills flushed orange,
sleek grey coat on a white chest.

A colony of herons, their driftwood nests
like a shanty town scattered on treetops.

Under the canopy,
ponds jump to life;
Gallic feast for females;
a drink, a takeaway,
it's time to pick a mate.

From the thick branches of an oak tree
the piercing yelp of a male attracts.

She looks down, like Juliet

from her balcony

his lavish stretch display,
neck swell, nuptial plumes erect,
her black-rimmed eyes shine gold.

Desire draws too close too soon, he might attack slow

down

slow

Her feathers cool
in a light spring shower,
calm now calm
they stand eye to eye.

High in the branches of an old oak tree
a couple take turns sitting on their nest,
a nest with a clutch of five mint green eggs.

The Fisherman's Wife

Walking on cobblestones
burnished by bare feet,
I meet a long-legged woman
stretching as she rises
from a straw bed.
She rekindles

the peat fire
and her hands,
like crinkled paper,
knead dough.
As bread bakes
three children wake
to the smell of flour
on the griddle.

A big fisherman bends
through the door
and gives her his catch
of salmon, she smiles
and hands him a soda farl
with butter melting through.

I'm caught in the dark
of her eyes.
As in an old film reel
we finally meet in this ruin
of a fisherman's cottage
with a cobblestone floor
burnished by bare feet.

Thank you for reading!



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