

~ Poetry NI ~



FourXFour
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Jacqueline Rock

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

She strives for raw honesty in her work and is deeply influenced by the human body, mental health and wellbeing and the natural world around us. Jacqueline believes spending time in nature with yourself for company brings a deeper connection, appreciation and love towards yourself and towards the earth in its entirety.

She has read her work at the *Purely Poetry* open mic nights held in the Crescent Arts Centre, the *Funeral Services NI National Poetry Competition* Belfast launch, *The Blackberry Path Art Studios*, and for *Women Aloud* as part of *Aspects Festival* in Bangor

Finger Paint

My body is a paint tube
The mind a twisting white cap lost
Under tools that sculpt a fleshy landscape.
I wash the canvas in acidic pink, collage together
Scabs of childish humour.
Fold.
Press out my primary colour:
Blue.
I'm stuck to the cotton like tissue on wet fingertips.
I give up on the brush;
Instead, I finger paint.

Mountains

I am a mountain

Blood and water flow the same

My voice held by trees

Exposed

I stand as the sea breathes
My chest follows the current,
My toes feel the gentle pull.
The wind, a lover's tongue, explores exposed skin.
Footprints pimple the sand.

Vertiginous Trance

Water trickles down your skin, dear mother.
Drink it, you seem thirsty. Let me see the face
I am trying to find.
Wind pirouettes past your body, you do not surrender
to the cold.
Arms thrown high, dancing and branches plucked like
cello strings.
Alone you dance.
Let me dance with you
Bathe my feet naked in mud puddles. I'll welcome
Cool, wet dew to fly from my pale skin as I spin into
a vertiginous trance.
Eyes sewed shut by the sequins of rain,
My lungs expand
with the air butterflies bring.
I'll drum on my belly
faster
until I fall back into the womb of my mother

Rachel Spence

Rachel Spence is a Belfast-bred regular of Purely Poetry's open mic nights. Throughout her past year of attendance she has started to find her footing with poetry, after years of only ever dealing with prose.

She began writing poetry at fifteen, starting off with haiku, before gradually moving on to free verse and slam poetry after discovering the work of Michael Faudet and Neil Hilborn.

At the time of this editions release she is a nineteen year old student in Belfast met, and has never previously been published.

Opposing

My languid moon
Sees not
Her sordid sun
But loves the ache
Of her repulsive
Tongue.

a magnetic poetry kit (age 17).

Juxtaposition

It is the breathless anxiety
In the questions you mumble,
Lips pressed to temple:

“Is this okay?”
As the chill of your fingertips
Seeps into my bare skin.

It is the flash of fear,
As you tear yourself from
The teasing embrace you began:

“I should have asked.”
Cold spots burning my thighs
Where your hands once curled.

It is how you lurch away
Foot catching on the drain
With distance catching fire:

“I’m sorry.”
Water running down the holes
Of my tights – facet leaking.

But it was your lingering gaze and half
Risen smile, that melted away any doubt
When I caught your eyes at last:

“Stop making me want to kiss you.”
Your hands were so soft -
Your lips, forcefully sweet.

The Cycle

When I woke up today I realised two things:

One – that I was awake, meaning I was alive.

And that fear alone hadn't suffocated me in my sleep.

And two – that part of me regretted that I had,

Because if I had died in my sleep then I wouldn't have to be awake

Because being awake is infinitely worse than being asleep

Because being awake means that I am still not dead.

(And I think that's what I want: to be dead, that is.)

When I finally left bed today, I realised two things:

One – that being alive was terrifying, so terrifying

That it numbed the idea of my mother's disapproval.

And two – that being alive and in bed is better than alive and
outside of bed.

Because in bed, there are infinitely fewer things to fear

Because I only have myself to fear in bed

Because I am the only person who will ever be in my bed.

(Alone. Which is fine: I'm happy alone, I think.)

When I lay in my sofa watching *Friends* for six hours I
realised two things:

One – that *Friends* is a happy show best enjoyed

By happy people and I am not a happy fucking person.

And two – that my job will probably fire me soon
Because I can't count the amount of times I've called in sick
Because I don't know how to force myself to be happy like this
Because I don't really remember what being happy even is.

(At least, I don't know what *'happy'* is for me.)

When my stomach started aching hours later I realised two things:
One – that I haven't eaten anything proper all day
Bar the dry piece of toast I choked down to take my meds.
And two – part of me wishes that I hadn't eaten anything at all
Because there's no point in fuelling a body that has no purpose
Because it's a waste of food for people out there who could need it
Because I know that all resources are wasted on me.

(As watering a pressed flower, as if it would flourish.)

Matinée

Mental illness poses as our puppeteer,
Making marionettes of the strong.
Depression raises her hand:
A wooden mouth opens, smiles -
Flashing splintered teeth.

THE BANGOR LITERARY JOURNAL

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Open for submissions on a quarterly basis.

Rowan E. Madden

Rowan E. Madden was born in Belfast and raised in smoky bars and cross community arts projects. She is a graduate of the University of East Anglia, where she studied English Literature.

After spending her formative years in the company of authors, slam poets and various other vagabonds, writing seemed to be the only option left to her. Rowan performed in her first open mic night at Arcadia Coffee House, aged 3.

She has only recently returned to writing poetry, after taking a 17 year break to focus on her prose fiction. After completing her degree, she quickly fled back to Belfast, where she currently works as a freelance editor. Contrary to local speculation, she is not a ten year old boy.

Home

If you would take my hand
I'd bring you to my green heart
And the red bricks that enclose it
I would let you walk my mountain paths
To visit the caves where we were kings
I would tell you she was my hill
And be so earnest you believed me
And I would take your soft fingers
And pull you down the alleys of my youth
We would sit under the electric starlight
Listen to the music of the gab
And I would show you the tiny cubby
And the back room of my dreams
Then we'd cross the street to the shell of infancy
And I'd explain the sheet and the agony
And remember the world on fire
And let you put it out
I would link arms with you
And take you to my river
The heart of my heart in my own backyard
We could sit on the hawthorn throne
And I would ask Them to love you too
And They would kiss you
Because I kissed you first

And I would show you the castle they locked me in
The claws growing under skies of every grey
The stones that ground me
The churches on every corner
And I would take you to the matriarch
So she could teach you the ways of tea
A drop in the hand, a drop in the sea
I would pull you to the shore
To the wild waves that can't hurt giants
The winding paths and the ice cream dance halls
The painted spider with her pride
Her legacy of death and chippy teas
If you would take my hand
I would give you my whole world
I would love you, I would love you just as much
I would give you my greens and golds
To illuminate your map of me
And make the home I love your own
If you would take my hand
I would give you me

My Pride Flag

Sisters crossing hearts at the sins of bleach and beauty
Tongues slipping sweet behind flower petal lips
Sticky gloss smeared over the best and worst of history
Cheapskate deletion from the tapestry of ne'er-do-wells

Eyeshadow smear campaigns, the deliberate accidental
Blame victim bruises from the bottles, bags and bricks
Storm cloud fury, strike the rules of the binary

Cold statistic faces blame you for being lonely
Self-imposed agony when a heartrate dares to quicken
Numbness to rejection, the acceptance of incompleteness
Will the skies be clear tomorrow? *Will the skies be clear tomorrow?*

North Street

Like a phoenix from the concrete I shall rise
And from charred bones, leaves will bloom
No liar windows cloud my eyes
I bare my brickwork to the world

How long could I keep the cordons up?
How long before the walls came down?
A fortress to keep the whole world out
Sagging stones to become my tomb

The glass ceiling has been burned away
Those grand façades have lost their meaning
Flames and fortune to keep potential at bay
But legacies rise through the iron railings

Like a phoenix from the concrete I shall rise
And on wings built from a city I shall fly
Take the bricks and mortar, throw them down
We've stolen fire, and dawn has come

North Street Arcade was destroyed in a fire in 2004 and has stood vacant ever since. 'The Angel of North Street', a graffiti phoenix made of Belfast landmarks, adorns the former North Street entrance.

Death of the Heroine

When I die, forget my name
Don't mark my grave
Don't cast blame
For I will be long past my prime
A heroine's death?
I have no time
I will die my castle's queen
A scourge the seas
Have never seen
Remember me for decades long
Not a few tall tales
Or shanty songs
I will die fourth of my line
Forgotten sister commits no crimes
The city stands for me to rule
While fanatics rumble I hold true
My father's crimes?
Not mine to bear
I close the play
But leave an heir
I will die as the year ends
Not doused in fire
Embraced as friend
A country stands, tall in my wake
The sword of mercy, I do not take

Borne to the clouds
While the forest screams
And the conqueror dies
By my means
I will not die my father's fool
Nor will I be my brother's tool
No man's complex will I feed
I will live by the huntress' deed
Live my life to aid my friends
Serve a purpose, not an end
Women standing by my side
My one sacrifice?
I do not hide
I have lived to cast my vote
To see the pattern is unwrote
It's no longer BCE
A heroine's death is not for me
My sisters' sacrifice, not in vain
But men, do let me explain
We have value when we breathe
We have strength and we have needs
So with my death, I will not give
Because I did that as I lived

Rainbow Ashwood Jamaican

Using poetry as a platform for social commentary, but also for exploration and self-expression, Rainbow's poetry has been influenced by contemporary poets such as Maya Angelou, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Louise Bennett, and classics such as Rudyard Kipling and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Her writing style bridges genres, in as much as her life bridges continents.

A graduate from the University of the West Indies, Kingston and more recently, with a Master's from Queens University, Belfast, she writes in both the language of reggae music - Jamaican Creole - and English. Some of her pieces have strong musical influences - typical of Dub Poetry.

Her awards have included ACNI SIAP award, a JHSS Bursary and ACSONI Arts Entertainment and Music awards. Her poetry performances have included BBC Radio, Culture Night Belfast, and Poetry Society of Jamaica. She is currently participating in the *Irish Writers Centre XBorders: Transitions* project.

Of Rest

9 o'clock Satday mawnin

Spring sunshine a stream thru di louver blind dem

An mi a draw mi duvet snug round mi shoulda

Eena mi cas iron bed.

Pickney dem a tiptoe cross di laminate floor

To di cereal cupboard

An all mi cyan hear a wan cyar a rumble down di lane

An di sweet, sweet birdsong eena di hawthorn tree dem.

9 o'clock Saturday morning

Strong April sunshine beating down

On the whites bleaching on the corrugated zinc

And the rhythm of the scrubbing brush

Makes a song for my sweat to dance to

As I stand at the double sink

Under the shade of the back veranda.

The children scrape chairs on the tiled floor

Settling around bowls of cornmeal porridge Mamma's
made

And the Saturday morning sounds mingle:

Grass being chopped,

Music being played,

Dogs barking,
Cars being fixed
Fruit being picked
People greeting as they walk to the grocery shop

So mi mus chide mi lazy hide?

Or appreciate
The blessedness
Of rest?

Di Silver Linin

Creatin a nation
Whe thrive pon alienation
Pon total segregation
In traditions an education -
Ow dat gwine bring community cohesion?
A power-sharin union?

Entrenched perspectives unyieldin -
Not interested in dialoguin.
No room for compromisin -
No chance of hope arisin!
Mi seh we blind if we not listenin,
An we lame if we not talkin!
Mi seh we blind if we not listenin,
An we lame if we not talkin!

If we cyaaan eat together,
Or meet together,
Drink together,
Or think together,
Tek di bus together,
Mek a fuss together...

We cyaaan see the woods fi di trees?!

Is time to bend knees -
To look past ourselves an see
The One content to BE in us
Despite the overgrown cataracts an pointless shrines that we
Have let grow in our lives an cities.

The One who weeps over nations is callin:
'Catch yerself on, with this age-old brawlin!
Away ar that with yer auld petrol bombin!
Stand together and resist like at the Masserene shootin
Be defiant together till you see the silver linin
That I will bring, with your obedience, in my perfect timin!'

Figurehead

Riding hard
Bound hands
Cupping her silent scream
Drowned in the crash
Of financial tides
Regressive strides
And absent pride
But still...
Riding hard...
Above the waves.

Footsteps...

Footsteps in my mind of yestertimes –

Sam's manhood undermined by un-naming, renaming...

His culture raped through disregard, his wife un-wifed through
disregard

Re-wifed by over-regard and him made to watch...

Work stripped of dignity – endlessly unremunerated

Re-paid with disregard

of the infected wound as new lesions meet old

'For hesitating' – having an opinion

These skeletons...

Their door shut tight on the night in my life

Power?

That sweet sugar created, but never touched

Its molasses the hemmed in authority that

Worked the Stony Gut outlying the fertile plantations

Its sweetness thick and bitter

With heady hints of what could be...should be

And intoxicated by the beauty of the Most Powerful jumping out of
the page

Prentice's rage seeded determination to

To fill minds with the power in their powerlessness

Would they see the silver thread, heavily adorned?

... layered?_with white wool?

One bright mawnin when my work is ova I will fly away home!

These skeletons...

Their door shut tight on the night in my life

Morning

Bright morning

Bogle's cutlass slashed a path in fevered unison with Moses

And with George making a way to be heard, to be seen, to be
regarded

This work, sugar hunger's hope, driving...

Ten times more productive than any other morning

The near-white's pseudo power of the National Assembly baiting

...

Enticing them to the governor's lands

To speak man to man of the inequities

Then to be turned away?!

No, FLY AWAY!!!!

Sam's echo on the wind of change-

lessness, haunting

"I'd rather die on yonder gallows than live in slavery!"

One bright mawnin when my work is ova I will fly away home!

These skeletons...

Their door shut tight on the night in my life

Home...

Stony Gut...

This rocky belly

Of resistance... of voice, trampled by supercultures' modern
highway

A disregard as painful as yestertime's lesions

When new can't see the g-old

To be mined in what was lost.

This bastion of promise, drenched in the sweat and blood

Of those whose necks paved the road to suffrage

Un-re-mem-bered by all but the few

Itself the new gallows on which these old dead hang

These skeletons...

Their door shut tight on the night in my life...

They're my backbone!

And so, I stand!

Submission Guidelines

For Featured Poets, send 6-10 poems.

Four poets will be selected to showcase in each issue, with four poems each.

For General Submissions: send 1-3 poems.

We're particularly interested in poets from the island of Ireland, but will happily consider poets from elsewhere.

- Send submissions to **thepenpointsnorth@outlook.com** with 'FOURXFOUR' as the subject.
- Send all the poems as one attachment (either .doc or .docx), along with a third-person biog (max. 100 words).
- Include a cover letter in the body of your email, along with your address and contact details.
- All submissions must be previously unpublished (either print, online or broadcast).
- Please note we do not accept simultaneous submissions.
- Deadline for the first round of submissions is February 3rd, 2019. Submissions will reopen again later in the year.

Thank you for reading!



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