

~ Poetry NI ~

# FourXFour

## Poetry Journal

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Featured Poets:

Billy Mills

Anne Casey

Ian Heffernan

Azeem Lateef



## Contents:

### Featured Poets

3: Billy Mills

8: Anne Casey

17: Ian Heffernan

24: Azeem Lateef

32: Michael Sands : *Older Children*

34: Attracta Fahy : *Our Lady of Medjugorje*

35: Bernard Pearson : *Adrift*

36: Nathanael O'Reilly : *Road Trip I / Road Trip II*

38: Gráinne Daly : *Yin Yang*

39: Lorraine Carey : *Life Underwater*

41: Edward Lee : *The Door Of The World*

42: David Toms : *At Roa Station*

44: Nancy Graham : *Tiny Ancient Animals*

45: Paul Robert Mullen : *it's all come down to this*

46: Joan Carberry : *Dust*

47: David Morgan O'Connor : *Corpus*

48: Betty Baxter : *Doing the Rounds*

49: Scott Lilley : *Memory on the Alston Moor*

52: Roisin Browne : *Morning Commute / Flat Grey Ropes*

54: Siobhan Atkins : *Little Bird / Honey and the Stinging Bees*

55: Bob Shakeshaft : *Galimatias*

57: Lukpata Lomba Joseph : *Where Is Home?*

59: Orla Fay : *One Afternoon by the Sea, Green*

60: Adrian Fox : *Before Basho There Was No Basho*

## Featured Poet : Billy Mills

Born Dublin, 1954, Billy Mills has lived and worked in Spain and the UK. Now living in Limerick. Founder and co-editor (with Catherine Walsh) of hardPressed Poetry and *the Journal*.

Books include *Lares/Manes: Collected Poems* (Shearsman, 2009), *Imaginary Gardens* (hardPressed poetry 2012), *Loop Walks* (with David Bremner, hardPressed poetry 2013), *from Pensato* (Smithereens Press e-book, 2013) and *The City Itself* (Hesterglock, 2017).

Since 2007, he has been a regular contributor to the Guardian Books site, including the popular Poster Poems series:

[www.guardian.co.uk/profile/billymills](http://www.guardian.co.uk/profile/billymills)

Blog at [ellipticalmovements.wordpress.com](http://ellipticalmovements.wordpress.com)

*four extracts from Uncertain Songs*

if you can at all                      go outside and look at the moon

air crisp                      night cold      sky clear

nobody put it there

nobody owns it

no one can sell it to you

it simply is                      which is its value

because the world is broken  
because we broke it  
unthinkingly  
& let the light flow in

there is too much light  
& we are blinded  
to the cracks  
that we have made  
unthinkingly

& cannot adjust  
cannot return

in the heat  
of summer  
to remember  
the fall of words  
the slow descent  
of signs

a seagull  
in the street  
a new element

lost & assured  
& just a little  
ridiculous

what is the sound of words on the page  
the sound of rain unheard birds  
in an imagined tree silent as speech  
the mind unfolds in measure

is inexplicably the world wants nothing  
happening slowly which is the sound of words  
in the air distinct against us  
small point in a long sentence

articulate floats marks relations  
as even as language in time rolls out  
on to this line silent as thought  
which is a moment engaged

with the sound of everything settled happening  
here the page resonant & strange  
these marks make no sound nothing  
that is not is not heard

## Featured Poet : Anne Casey

Anne Casey's poetry has won/shortlisted for awards in Ireland, USA, UK, Canada and Australia; she ranks in *The Irish Times* Most-Read. Author of *where the lost things go* (Salmon Poetry 2017), her second collection is forthcoming in 2019. For 25 years, Anne has worked as a journalist, magazine editor, media communications director and legal author. She is Senior Poetry Editor of two literary journals for Swinburne University, Melbourne. Her poems feature in *The Irish Times*, *Entropy*, *apt*, *Murmur House*, *Quiddity*, *The Incubator*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *Stony Thursday Book*, *Into The Void*, *Autonomy* anthology, *Cordite* and *Burning House Press*, among others.



**Anne Casey** : *out of a thousand cups*

one warm morning when my soul  
defies all twenty-one  
of its grams  
carried away like a whispered prayer  
on a sunburst, flimsy-radiant  
drifting high on all-but still air  
into green-golden crowns  
of softly swaying boughs  
to wonder  
at the unknowable —  
what if  
i had first poured forth  
into another cup  
a different skin  
other sex  
alternate state  
or into a tiny egg  
swelling in the soft round belly  
of a feathered form  
spearing through the clear  
blue air of  
one warm morning in  
some other time

*Note: In 1907, US physician, Duncan MacDougall attempted to measure the weight of a human soul by calculating the mass lost by patients at the moment of death. Although largely regarded as flawed, the experiment popularised the concept that the human soul weighs twenty-one grams.*

## Anne Casey : *singularity*

*"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."*

— Martin Luther King

*i:*

when i wake  
she is lying next to me  
*don't you see?*  
eyes shining in the semi-dark  
tiny limbs writhing  
a blinding flash  
she is floating above me  
outlined against the intense glow  
white dress ballooning behind  
like billowing wings  
piercing hyper-bright holes burning  
glowing atoms soaring away  
into pitch

*ii:*

tumble-turning in the pool  
feet pushing off the wall  
an icy rush *don't you see?*  
two piercing orbs pleading  
snow-furred fins flailing

at the noose snaking  
round his swelling neck  
plastic bag i dragged  
home just yesterday  
when i reach to rip it off  
water simmers as another  
morning swimmer  
cuts through the churn

*iii:*

walking down the street acid rain  
starts to wash away the edges  
of every  
thing soaring glass shining  
steel slips into  
shimmering scintillas  
concrete  
unfolding into nothing  
but history-infused atoms  
floating time  
and space stretching into  
one unending question  
*don't you see?*

**Anne Casey** : *Need to know*

*It was you* she says  
*I felt you take it*  
every face in the room turning  
she is staring me down  
and I am suddenly aware  
of a rhythmic sound  
somewhere  
close by  
the salt-prick of cheeks  
slick with tears

*But my father is not dead* I struggle to focus  
*Mine* she says *Mine, My Dad*  
She is saying other words *Cancer, So Bad*  
*Too Late, Too Soon*  
but her eyes are full of light  
blur-bright like cat's eyes through fog  
on a lonesome road  
leaping out of the dark  
hemmed  
between winter-stark trees

craniosacral therapy  
after months of sessions for pelvic displacement  
seeing colours dancing in the  
mid-space

over the treatment table  
feeling muscles, sinews, bone shift  
under the lightest touch  
I have signed up  
for a weekend introductory  
needing  
to know more

a morning of theory and we are let loose  
there would be other levels to master  
realms to explore  
planes to traverse  
but first  
the group circle—  
*I felt you take it*  
I am trapped, rigid, stricken  
inert, held within a cat's gaze  
*This black ball of loss*  
A rhythmic shuddering  
sobbing [I realise] coming  
from inside of me  
but I feel nothing  
—experience

I never went back  
stashed my weekend certificate  
with its embossed lettering in the back  
of that box bulging with

forgotten once-important things  
sandwiched between  
the shock-faced fold-out  
snapshot of the plunge  
from the top of the largest gravity-fed  
rollercoaster in the Southern Hemisphere  
and the fused pages of my  
Great Wall of China climb  
Teaching English as a Foreign Language  
and weekend barista course  
credentials

not now—if ever—needing  
so much to know  
whether  
my soul had really reached out  
across a clouded room  
to touch a random stranger's  
or if  
it was all just  
some excruciating  
hope-fuelled  
hoax

**Anne Casey :**

*to be at once within & outside of oneself*

as a bird takes in the sky  
as the earth sustains a body  
as a cup holds its contents  
as a tree releases its leaf  
as a speck drifts in space  
as the shore receives the ocean  
as feet wear a path  
as a heart carries love  
as light cedes to darkness

as darkness cedes to light  
as love carries a heart  
as a path wears feet  
as the ocean receives the shore  
as space drifts in a speck  
as a leaf releases its tree  
as its contents hold a cup  
as a body sustains the earth  
as the sky takes in a bird



## Featured Poet : Ian Heffernan

Ian Heffernan was born just outside London, where he still lives. He graduated from UCL and SOAS and works with the homeless. He has been published recently in *the High Window, Ink, Sweat & Tears, Cha, Antiphon, South Bank Poetry, London Grip, Under the Radar* and elsewhere.

**Ian Heffernan** : *Bedford Square: London At Xmas*

In Bedford Square, a drunk man dances,  
His legs a mess of angles  
And his face a mess of smiles.

Beside him on the pavement  
A lone, arthritic pigeon stops,  
Then seems to try to dance along.

Both man and bird absorb the moment,  
Or are absorbed, and each remains  
Unfazed, unhumbled by the rain.

Alcohol or feathers shield them  
From the worst the weather offers  
As the year prepares its end.

**Ian Heffernan** : *Geriatric Ablaze*

Convinced I'd heard a cry I stopped,  
Looked round, then tensed and jumped the gate,  
Picked my way along the timid path  
That picked its way across a lawn  
Thick with mallow, dock and yarrow,  
Caught the faint coconut smell of gorse,  
Saw tansy, teasel, toadflax sway,  
Scabious clench, red campion reach,  
Then finding the door an inch ajar  
Snuck in without a knock or shout.

The hallway held the scent of underwear  
Half-washed then left to dry, and high  
On one jaundiced wall a clock  
Ticked to pass the time, ahead  
Two mirrors stared each other down.  
I stilled the urge to turn and leave,  
Throat tight and mind a line of zeroes,  
Then stuttered forward till I reached  
The threshold of the living room,  
And going in I saw him seated there,

Barefoot but in suit and tie,  
His eyes and mouth aghast with flame,  
A silent, smokeless blaze which gave  
A light as thin and sour as loss;  
And knowing myself somehow to blame  
I ran through hallway, garden, street  
Until I reached a little park  
Where mothers stood in busy clusters  
And children like drunken dogs  
Reeled and tumbled through the grass.

**Ian Heffernan** : *Lights Out*

I cracked an egg and watched the yolk's fire blaze  
Into the bowl, but stooped with lack of sleep  
And almost retching, changed my mind, turned round  
And let it fall into the open bin.  
I'd spent the early hours wide awake,  
Tracking slowly backwards to the time  
Before the world devoured its own rear end  
And met a 1970s montage:

Usurping armies, mattoids at their head;  
A TV show contracting to a dot;  
The candle-scramble, hardware stores sold out;  
A children's street game rendered in grisaille;  
The adults prophesying twenty years  
Of Tory rule...

Unnerving decades on  
To lie awake like that in noiseless dark  
And see the lights go out, go out, go out.

**Ian Heffernan** : *Night Flight*

The smell of woodsmoke fades,  
The darkness huddles round,  
The cold begins to chafe their blood.

Here in this French courtyard  
Under the faint algebra  
Of the stars, they have gathered:

Male and female, young and old,  
The strong, the sick, the rich, the homeless,  
Those with purpose, those without.

Unprompted they have tried – and failed –  
To sing ancestral songs,  
Drunk foul-edged wine instead.

Now as they form up and move off  
The stragglers sweep away their traces,  
Seal the world behind.

And, half-awake, they press forwards  
Into the Mediterranean night,  
On country lanes at first;

Then down an empty stream bed  
Where, in a width of stones,  
They lurch and wheel like clowns;

And up a wooded hillside,  
Sunk in mud, legs dumb as weight,  
Using trunks to pull themselves along;

Or on a path that skirts a drop,  
Probing out its course in silence,  
Over the thin chatter of water;

And continue over forest tracks  
For hour after hour as their names  
Cling tightly to them like a curse.

Until, just after dawn, they re-emerge  
Below a ruined chateau,  
Climb to sit within its walls

Where their eyes hold the pain  
Of the deeply-wronged, and their sweat  
Goes cold in the morning air.

## Featured Poet : Azeem Lateef

Azeem Lateef (aka Icarus Prince) is a writer, poet and MC. He is currently working on his first novel and debut album as one half of hip-hop duo *Social Interaction*.



**Azeem Lateef : *Human***

I sit in my cage to  
find words to describe  
what it feels to be human  
without ever actually feeling human:  
is that what a human is?

My room is cluttered with books,  
all half read yet  
spoken of  
with the utmost authority.

A girl I like calls me Tarzan  
and it makes me feel  
like maybe the yank  
in my gut is not an anchor  
but the plug for a sinkhole.  
sometimes  
concrete jungles  
are only placeholders.

My bed is a floor  
and my walls are  
the Amazon.  
I've bought too many  
posters to beautify naked

I've drank too many promises  
and I'd feel a lot better  
if they didn't remind  
me of wisdom.

I wish so many  
things but human

**Azeem Lateef** : *Abandon*

I loop. Next song; refresh page. Repeat.

A prisoner swings from my ribcage and beats my chest. I pretend my reaction isn't as oppressive as a colonized mind in a blue uniform. I lock my tongue and crucifix my lips to my cheeks; sacrificing heart for mind because love is too blind for me to let it take the lead.

I did once.

She didn't need keys when her heartbeat was a thunderstorm. Freedom is fine until the costs rise. She didn't want to pay the price and I'm still paying the debt.

I vowed not to break anyone like she broke me but I did. I became everything mama warned me not to be. Sorry wasn't enough for me; I know for a fact it isn't enough for you.

My eyes don't close like they used to. Narnia no longer opens its doors to me every night and I'm no longer sure on which world I prefer. The one where I can't sleep or the one where I can't wake up. My alarm is birds singing. The first thing I do in the morning is switch them off.

Then I loop.

## **Azeem Lateef** : *Conversations with Plants*

I set fire to my lungs to cool down. I know one day the clouds won't entertain me and my parachute will fail. But it's the only way I feel the Holy Spirit escape my mouth. I imagine this is what John designed a baptism to do. I like drowning in the smoke until I gasp for life, like I am searching for a God's breath on a Vielha mountain. My gut acts the defibrillator and reminds me that I am not afraid of life but living. Heaven didn't seem so far last night.

Religion is not a sport but we treat it as such. Winners do not exist outside the human mind. My sin is not your salvation. We all tread water like lust in an Islamic household. I told the imams to hold their verses and grip an ocean instead of warning me of hellfire. There is a reason why my lungs are black.

Pain is universal but only humans self-inflict. When my ex told me I was self-destructive, I tried to explain it wasn't myself I was trying to destroy. I only know my soul when this vessel leaks. Maybe when it eventually bursts I'll witness the nothingness these sages always spoke of.

Sufi tradition tells us of God through the love between a man and a woman. Maybe this is why I searched for God in you. Maybe this is why I search for you in God. You never made me float; you broke gravity. When I dance with the stars I ask them about you. The mornings remind me why I shouldn't.

In the morning, kiss me like I died in your arms 10 hours prior.  
Hold me like a mother's smile. Lull me like a cigarette after a meal.  
Baptize me all over again.

Can someone please pass me a lighter?

I'm trying to find the Path.

## **Azeem Lateef** : *Descent Into Madness*

Minds exist. Their contents don't.

Lips

part to piece rehearsed proclamations to reinforce perceptions. If we admitted doubt, no-one would know truth.

Arms

carry burdens that we didn't pick with our Hands but accepted at knifepoint. Under Sharia, both my wrists would have been cut long ago. I have stolen so many prayers that I can't tell the difference between asking for forgiveness and taking it.

Chests

don't exist. Their contents do.

Stomachs

twist with every mention of a world too preoccupied with appearance to fill bellies with anything other than beasts. The butterflies are bloated. The soul is starving. We can't be what we eat if we feed the wrong existence.

Legs

would always choose to run if they had the choice, but Feet stumble over tightropes sold as stable pathways to salvation. I

don't like falling. Especially when the last rope disappears and I enter a new bottomless pit.

What can exist if we won't.

**Michael Sands** : *Older Children*

Australian splendours passed below  
and we gorged on adventure.

Our long awaited chance to go  
'up the coast'; Cairns, the azure

waters of the Great Barrier Reef.

Our rendezvous - the Woolshed Bar,  
pre-promised, in the old belief  
that 'we are Ireland where we are'.

Reunion left us ill prepared for  
Groote Eylandt, plane-paused.  
On tar, aligned by dust red air,  
the faces white men had caused

chaos for. The epochal eyes  
of aboriginal youth; dark skin,  
here as long as blue skies  
have held a sun. Warmth within

sustains the Carpentaria.

Ears that know ancient songs sung,  
shared down millennia.

Smiles overcoming the wrongs



brought with cold ferocity.  
Then they giggled. Next a stare.  
Children enthralled. Curiosity  
questioned new strangers there.

We left behind a window glance  
fathoming this island blend.  
A wondrous mix of circumstance  
on which knowledge can depend.

## **Attracta Fahy** : *Our Lady of Medjugorje*

dropped from the top shelf of my dresser  
to the first, leaned against a vitamin bottle,  
looked straight at me, pale-faced, as I ate  
breakfast.

I stared back,  
wondered what it meant,  
a warning, or perhaps just coincidence?  
With no breeze evident, she moved again,  
this time flew into the air,  
as if she had grown wings, breathe life  
into her paper thin body,  
then swooped in a curve, fell to the floor,  
face up.

She was certainly trying to get  
my attention. Unnerved, I picked her up, read  
the prayer inked into her back, and placed  
her once again where she belonged,  
against  
the crystal bowl.

**Bernard Pearson** : *Adrift*

'I am in the whale,' said Jonah.  
'I am in Jonah,' replied the whale.  
'I am free,' exclaimed Jonah.  
Upon being expelled  
Out into the deep  
'So am I', sighed the creature  
Upon this realization,  
They both began to weep.

## Nathanael O'Reilly : *Road Trip I*

On the Urana-Lockhart road, slow  
to twenty ks per hour when negotiating  
road works; pass a worker wearing  
a Green Bay Packers beanie and nod  
as you glide by; gently spray fresh dirt  
from borrowed tyres. Pass a grader  
artfully smoothing the surface, sending  
dirt curving into a berm. Acknowledge  
the worker with the Ned Kelly beard  
as he leans on his GO SLOW sign,  
obeying orders. Reciprocate  
when the local cop raises two fingers  
on his right hand from the steering wheel  
as he passes in his four-wheel-drive.

## **Nathanael O'Reilly : *Road Trip II***

Take the long way from Jerilderie to Wagga via Griffith. Listen to Aussie hip-hop on Triple J until the reception fades somewhere west of Leeton. Read LUV U CHEEKIE spray-painted on the back of a road sign beside the Newell. Don't stop to take a photo at Turn Back Jimmy Creek. Count dead roos on the shoulder, including skeletons. Drive past uncovered haystacks, irrigation channels, vineyards, mandarin orchards, cotton fields, grain silos, crows perched on fence posts. Stop for a break in the Murrumbidgee Valley National Park at Berry Jerry where parrots and gallahs burst from the bush like confetti.

## Gráinne Daly : *Yin Yang*

Runny egg drips over a  
hard boiled offering  
that comes from somewhere  
else somewhere unknown  
alien space where white is  
greenish-black and black  
is opaline-sage and yes means  
no, or maybe eadame beans  
perhaps or pea shoots whatever,  
whatever it is you want to  
believe, take and add a  
sprinkling of maybe then  
leave to set for a while  
before accepting it is  
unfathomable like the  
O in airplane you want  
to believe but it is just not  
there. There is no way  
of knowing why some things  
are better boiled than fried  
the reasons are all scrambled  
anyway any way

## Lorraine Carey : *Life Underwater*

His last years were spent  
in decline on a leather recliner,  
staring at the fish,  
deciphering noise  
and the giggles of grandchildren.

These strange girls and boys came to play  
with the Hornby track and dolls house.  
Toddlers preferred the slow close of drawers  
and the unknown of cavernous cupboards  
in the new fitted kitchen that Gran

didn't get to potter in for long.  
One child was drawn to fridge magnets,  
rainbow segments of fruit on the door.  
In chubby, wet fingers they'd drop to the floor  
startling Granda from cosy slumber.

He'd count us in slow, whispered numbers  
thumbing the fabric of his jumper's cuff,  
his watery eyes spoke the unspoken stuff  
watching his fish, dart and dance  
a mesmerising trance in the tank.

Weaving through fronds and plastic weeds  
sky blue pebbles and coral, they swished  
and fanned their diaphanous tails.  
Each day, a different theatre,  
the aquascape, Granda's haven.

Gurgles of bubbles and the filter's hum  
took us all into the blue.  
We too drifted into daydreams  
in the hustle and bustle of kitchen,  
over tea in unfamiliar mugs.

Repeated ourselves with gentle smiles,  
named the children knelt in corners.  
Simon sprinkled fish flakes  
then tucked his father in,  
and as Granda thumbed his woollen cuff

his teary eyes conveyed  
what his broken brain could not.



**Edward Lee** : *The Door Of The World*

There is blood on the steps  
leading to the door  
of the world,  
and small footprints  
leading nowhere.  
An imaginary murder  
occurred here,  
before the door of the world,  
with imaginary witnesses  
and imaginary statements  
taken by imaginary policemen.  
But the blood is real,  
its lead smell  
proving itself to the nostrils,  
and the back of the throat.  
Yes the blood is real,  
leading up the steps  
and under the door  
that opens into the world,  
when it isn't locked,  
as it is now,  
  
its keyhole a nightmare  
of cobwebs and rust.

**David Toms** : *At Roa Station*

the furthest north this  
body had ever been

looking  
up  
I felt the  
pole star  
would be  
                would lie  
direct                above me.

Better  
I thought  
to flatten myself  
against the ground  
to catch its light.

Reaching, I put a hand                out  
stretching /                grasping  
but —

my effort made  
the welkin ring.

North remained  
unreachable

the hour too late  
underneath a winter-clear sky.

**Nancy Graham** : *Tiny Ancient Animals*

Not that we possessed wisdom  
but at times  
we moved in unison,

I mean all of us,

those with delicate tendrils,  
the scuttlers,  
the shelled ones:

whenever the moon cut  
like a torch  
through the sky we clustered

together, translucent, pulsing;  
in salt water  
and mud, tracing our origins.

**Paul Robert Mullen** : *it's all come down to this*

let me tell you  
how this goes down . . .

i pack my life up  
    into two cardboard boxes

mail them to england

stick a t-shirt or two  
    some shorts, three pairs of boxers  
    three pairs of socks  
    flip-flops  
    one thin jacket  
    a notebook  
        and a baseball cap  
into a rucksack

i withdraw the little cash  
    i have  
        carve a hole into a  
        hardback book

leave my apartment for the last time

i take a taxi to the airport  
    check in

*check out*

**Joan Carberry : *Dust***

You kept your wedding dress,  
Un-white and crumpled,  
In the cubby-hole under the stairs.  
Hacked off pieces from the hem  
To make bad dusters.

Once, in a photograph, I saw it -  
Floral, long, an easy elegance -  
On The Big Day.

Light-suited, colonial,  
With one hand he held his white fedora,  
With the other reached back to you.  
But you fixed on the steps,  
Did not extend your hand.

Were you thinking  
What have I done?  
Or perhaps -  
A day will come  
When I will rip this up,  
Use it to make bad dusters  
Skimming the surface.

## David Morgan O'Connor : *Corpus*

Dear Father, it's been 41 years since my last confession. I want to tell you things I haven't figures out yet. I cry on airplanes. I never step on ants. I give everything away as soon as I can. Every time I put my brother's Honda in gear I see him crossing the Atlantic as hurricane, Dundalk headed, El Paso. Borders are never easy to cross. I'm ready for my penance now.

I trapped porcupines and used their quills for darts. I let air out of cop tires. I was the first to find Mrs. Stebbins's body. When she hadn't picked her fourth *London Free Press* from between the real and screen door, I opened and entered. Arm dangling off chesterfield. Mouth stiff in full yawn. White as fresh powder snow blankets. I opened the fridge and took a can of cream soda pop. Took my monthly tip from her purse. Altar-boyed her funeral.

**Betty Baxter** : *Doing the Rounds*

*After 'Last Look' by Seamus Heaney*

He leaned into the old barred gate,  
blushing sky stretched before him.

His silhouette, stooped and still  
amidst lush growth;  
fuchsias topping the cliffs, potatoes  
blooming in the field.

He saw none of it-  
nineteen, in Donegal,  
doing the rounds in the grocery cart,  
Gallagher and Son.

He could feel the hard, knotted wood  
of the seat beneath him,  
the smooth leather  
of the reins in his hands.

Looked forward to teasing  
the wee cutty in Maguire's,  
seeing her blush and smile.

He smiled now at the thought.  
Some shift of wind brought  
the smell of fuchsia.

He saw the white potato blossom,  
felt the cold wet of his trouser bottoms.



**Scott Lilley** : *Memory on the Alston Moor*

This was the place born the Tyne,  
'the meeting of the waters', where the south  
kissed the north, swirling legato  
before brine.

This was the place where his mother had died,  
a speaker-phone phone-call  
her grandkids heard  
before the car swerved aside.

And memory rose up, crescendo  
on the Alston Moor,  
the bubbling, frothing  
source in sticky verdure,  
Angel of the North,  
an out of tune piano  
playing only Heart and Soul,  
the soft smoke her clothes carried  
from bacon grease and morning cigarette,  
refusing to watch The Titanic  
because she knew the way it ended.

The Tyne carried me cluelessly  
before its ritardando,  
the place where regret  
kissed grief, I asked after the piano  
-they staccatoed it down  
to fit it through the door.

**Roisin Browne** : *Morning commute*

Now when I'm crossing Merrion Gates  
trying to get under the rail before it falls  
to beat the blasted flexi clock,  
I think of your death

I'm not within your last living week  
month, year, anymore  
I'm not even one away

some gabardine Tuesday  
someone will say  
*God twenty years has flown*

I'll turn the wheel for Blackrock  
stuck in St Brigid's Day  
sipping in our shared warm air.

**Roisin Browne** : *Flat Grey Ropes*

Flat grey ropes gripped in four sets of hands  
torsos hold  
breathing tight inside  
the watching crowd hold also  
soft coffin swings as she is eased lower  
novices fast becoming experts  
letting the ropes do the work  
Sons setting her into place  
an earthen settling  
returned ropes  
released.

**Siobhan Atkins** : *Little Bird*

He fed little bird  
every day from his own hand  
his ragged gloves  
seeking out the fattest grubs  
from the mire and filth

little bird stretched and grew  
in the pocket of his ancient overcoat  
each new day found  
a little less room to turn a little more longing to fly

On an orange lit morning  
over the bridge, at the canal  
he tenderly cupped little bird  
and, squinting against the sun, released her

**Siobhan Atkins** : *Honey and the Stinging Bees*

Oh he wasn't like other men at all,  
to start with his stature was Olympian  
and then there were the bees  
which resided somewhere and forever in his head.  
They came and went as they pleased, his bees  
and the honey they made ran down his back  
pooling deliciously in the small of it.  
Now, humans and bees have a long shared history  
and the adventurous,  
drawn by the sweet promise  
will endure the occasional sting.  
Until the swarm comes,  
and venom stops even the hardest of hearts.

**Bob Shakeshaft : *Galimatias***

wind stole our words  
muffled our ears  
in discord

susurrus sweeping  
our ankles fall  
in tandem pacing

psittacism speech  
kites on the wind  
freely

we acknowledge  
each other's  
nodding heads

hoping we have  
a grip on the string  
of words thrust

what they are  
and suppose  
were right

until the wind  
no longer claims  
our chitchat

unravels  
the gist  
sensibly

tidying  
misspent  
gabble

embarrassed  
nudge  
giggle



**Lukpata Lomba Joseph : *Where Is Home?***

Time is a distance travelled through  
The multicoloured track of memory.  
I lurch as I traipse on wrecks of  
Broken culture  
And went deaf from the clashing sound of  
Broken pieces,  
Debris of history and  
Broken guts  
Knocking as they are pummeled by the fist of time.  
Where is home?  
It's yellow sand and yellow sky.

I could gulp down  
Pain and let it explode  
And sprawl  
Like shrapnel,  
Leaving bruises that will last for years.  
I look up the north,  
A mass of plump grey air and a fog,  
A cascade of red tissue on ground  
And a white dove in a cage.  
Where is home?  
It's yellow sand and yellow sky.

It takes a miracle to bear the twisted tune  
Of a crying dove in a cage;  
The fall of  
Ice on a sunny day,  
And what other enigma is unknown?  
That the silent stream whispers despair  
To fern-kissed rocks? A romance with dejection is when  
Death  
In his grandeur and charm lives with man.  
Where is home?  
It's yellow sand and yellow sky.

**Orla Fay** : *One Afternoon by the Sea, Green*

The rocks are covered in seaweed as green  
as the grass that covers the limestone land.  
Never before the sea so glossed in sheen  
as the clock moves expertly across sand.  
Over rich brown to more lively umber  
the cry of the seagull carries a hurt  
permitted by the band of blue rubber  
horizon, yet the waves falling in dirt  
crawl in cotton-capped, sealing the contained  
from release, the scalding salt of pity;  
love cannot be held, love cannot be tamed,  
love is a rinsed word, love is only free.  
To begin is to end, the hazed mountain  
rises above falling water, green, green...

**Adrian Fox :***Before Basho There Was No Basho*

A simple tree branches  
an active imagination.

I feel like someone  
from the 12th century.  
Bare, raped, pillaged,  
twisted and torn.

The computer is my insulted  
Quill, a blackbird visits me  
and two magpies touch  
and touch me, above  
the mini daffodils.

Is rhyme what I'm searching for  
I don't think so. Before Basho  
there was no Basho, beyond  
poetry, words have an inner  
rhyme, I seek feeling  
not meaning.

## 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 bio (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 next round of submissions is May 31st, 2019.

**Thank you for reading!**



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