



FourXFour

Poetry Journal

Issue 6 Autumn 2013

Paul Jeffcutt

Dan Eggs

David Braziel

Rory Jones

Editorial

Welcome to the sixth issue of FourXFour. It's amazing to be on our sixth instalment (well, seventh if you count our Bonus Issue), and to continue publishing and promoting the rich literary talent of the North. Thank you to everyone who has supported us, and to all our wonderfully talented poets.

Each of the scribes in this edition, I met and came to know their work through hearing them live, rather than reading their first. Thankfully, I've had the chance to go on and explore their writing as well; in Paul and Dan's case, through their collections released by Lagan Press. I hope that all of the pieces on offer here represent a taste of their recitation and oratory skills, and would encourage you to read the poems out loud (as good poetry should be) whilst looking through.

The poems of Dan Eggs are from his forthcoming CD, *'Telly Poems'*.

Regards and happy reading,
Colin Dardis, Editor.

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Paul Jeffcutt

Paul grew up in a hamlet near the border between England and Wales. After living and working in three different continents, he settled in Northern Ireland in 1998. He lives in the Bronte Homeland of Co Down.

Paul's poems have appeared in journals across the UK, Ireland, Australia and the USA, including *Aesthetica*, *The Cannon's Mouth*, *Carillon*, *Crannog*, *Decanto*, *The Frogmore Papers*, *Gold Dust*, *HQ*, *Markings*, *Mobius*, *Poetry Scotland*, *Revival*, *Sentinel*, *Silkworm* and *Stylus*.

Latch, his debut collection of poetry, was published by Lagan Press in November 2010. This collection (in manuscript) was highly commended by the judges of the Patrick Kavanagh Poetry Prize 2009.

Latch was selected as The Book of the Month (July 2011) by the Ulster Tatler: "a wonderful collection from a very talented poet. The tone is confident and assured, the content is thought provoking and as a whole it stokes passion and emotion within the reader."

www.pauljeffcutt.net

South and West

I read letters from lovers
that couldn't be saved,
and mine to her:
no answer came.

Packages of rain wrap my salutation,
a lament chancing westward
across deaf continents
to broken lands which echo far from home.
Navigating the steps each night,
I throw sentences to clouds
and bribe the air with courtesy for dawn.
I have no prayer: just a shout
held in, the sound of something without voice
that seems to give spiritual light.
In the prison of countless cries
there is no sun.

Beyond her native lake
the ground was dark and cold:
she had no shelter,
stepping to a place
whose end was always near.
The voice was soft, she said
'these words may never reach you'.

Sweet silhouette,
I fixed upon the glowing sky
and whispered
'my skin dissolves in dew without your touch'.
What else could I say?
I'm travelling through the world
that lies before me, endlessly.
It starts to rain as I write this.
Mad heart, be brave.

Sources:

'The Country Without a Post Office' – Agha Shahid Ali (1997)

'Stepping Westward' – William Wordsworth (1803)

Baggage

Picked up and let go,
not even a wave,
I'm left in the shadows again.
You trust we'll be reunited
but I'll bob down the path,
under the radar and away -
standby or red-eye, further the better for me:
with stroller, holdall and drinks
beneath wispy coconut fronds,
a week without your sweaty palm,
what bliss.

Still

Head hunched,
bony hands clasped,
gaunt arms wrapped under the covers:
he's laid out like a mediaeval knight,
pale and sunken cheeks scarred
from the nurse's clumsy shaves.
In the clutch of the bacterium,
pumped and emptied by machines.
But the eyes still flicker.
My Dad keeps going:
going on,
going away.

Homestead

At the end of the abandoned lane
among stubby fields of nettles,
couch-grass and docks,
the old house squats.
A muddied cattle-trail curves
to the empty gate and wanders on.

Choked to the lintels with briars,
rotten window-frames gape:
beyond dangling slates
a sycamore where rooks refuse to nest.
Forcing thorns apart, I step in
to the parlour.

A barren grate,
the tiled mantelpiece shrouded with cobwebs
and the drained bodies of insects
that kicked their last as Jim Reeves crooned on the radio:
filthy strands embrace a deserted soldier,
in the mildew beside him a teddy's eye.

Broken tiles crunch to the thick, square sink
(where stains couldn't be erased)
and a raddled enamel cooker
its oven door clasped by bramble spikes,
still guarding against
the ungrateful child who wanted.

Dan Eggs

Dan Eggs is a poet from County Antrim in Northern Ireland and is a graduate of Trinity College Dublin.

He has self-produced many CDs of his work and has performed his poems throughout Ireland and abroad. Some of his more recent work can be seen in short films at www.youtube.com/daneggspoetry.

His debut collection "Big 99" was published by Lagan Press in 2003. A selection of this poetry was included in Magnetic North – The Emerging Poets, published in 2006.

In 2013, he brought out three further CDs – "Fixation on Alliteration", "Grey Man's Path", and "Telly Poem", alongside a pamphlet, "Picture Poems".

Cyclops

Bronzed baby shoes,
sharing dust with rabbit ears
the evening news,
is all she hears,
a human voice
explains another choice
of how it's going to end :
she's going round
the bend,
thirty wasted years with her cyclopean friend.

Cyclops

has a million coloured dots on its retina.
After Odyssey, the big man
imprisons you in darkness
batters your brains out,
then devours you.
(ah dear, that's television for you . . .)

Counterfeit Reality

Counterfeit reality –
still life with static –
black dots dancing –
big bang on wall bracket.

Cable is enabled on disabled display unit,
white noise, these waterfalls are ever electronic,
consumer service phone tree says "We're working on it."
They're buzzin me back with a bee in their bonnet –
I've only one nerve left and they're gettin on it.

The nerve I still have is twixt my chair and the square,
with a push of the button I can change that there –
anywhere over there, you really can't miss,
now, let me see what it says on this.

Sensory Interface

People want to climb inside their TVs and live there –
immerse themselves in the whole experience –
not just watch and listen to their tellys,
they want also to feel a sense of weight,
warmth, smell, taste, balance, pleasure, motion,
wind, touch and even pain . . . for instance –
a TV snack – milk and cabbage –
watching a programme on how to make it will not satisfy
your appetite. “you can’t eat your TV, can you?”

Step into the real world, get off your couch –
go into your kitchen, cut a half a cabbage,
feel the coarse texture of the vegetable,
balance over the hot stove as you cook it . . .
observe the warmth and smell of the milk and cabbage
steaming, simmering in the saucepan –
expose your taste buds to the food –
pleasure as your appetite is satisfied – pain if it’s too hot.
(and probably a bit of wind too)

Loony Lantern

On my face I feel a phosphorescence, transparent glow worm firefly projection – gas flare torch band amplification, a galaxy, star or constellation, many tongued rumour of video footage, joker's gesture – captured in a cage, circulating signal of Marconi, screw is loose – stupid lucidity, lucid stupidity.

Mentally challenged mad magical glow, where did I put the dimmer control? Bevelled glass lens, loopy, crackers, crazy nuts dusk-activated bonkers.

Madness encased away from the storm or the brisk summer breeze across the farm, from its matt black finish, bends an electronic image.

Hurricane oil story – kept in asylum, screen with no meaning in after nine violence, mania in protected place – shielded from wind inside a cask.

Capsule through film – it's not what it seems, famous, frank, clear camera tube beams, sound man reports some information, plain spoken gossip – brain botheration.

Off its head – a nincompoop actually, it's moonstruck, deranged, has dementia, delirium.

March hare oddity – reasonless noodle nut, not in possession of all its faculties, glazed-side-photo-slide-candlestick-radium, speaking drivel – a dunce head but then the box turns off with a sighting of Saturn and I see it at last as a test pattern and I lie and laugh at my loony lantern.

David Braziel

Born in East Grinstead, David Braziel grew up in Stafford, an average midlands market town, studied computer science in Hatfield, and at Keele University, then married and moved to Northern Ireland settling in Portadown where he lives with his wife and two sons.

He writes poetry and short stories, reaching the final three in the BBC short story competition, "End of Story", in 2004.

David has been involved in creative writing for over fifteen years as a member of local creative writing groups and as a board member for Creative Writers Network. Most recently he has worked with other local writers and artists to produce short films and multimedia presentations as part of a Peace III funded project exploring issues of conflict and identity.

He is the co-facilitator and one of the founding members of Lough Neagh Writers a creative writing group featuring poets, short story writers, singer-songwriters and playwrights from the Craigavon area.

In September 2013 he was astonished to reach the final in the Ulster heat of the All Ireland Poetry Slam competition.

from Five Picture of my Children

2 *Conduit*

It was one of my son's first words.

Conduit

I thought how smart, how perceptive
to see his place in life. A channel
carrying light and energy
into a dark future.

Conduit

Then he said it again :
"No, Daddy
... can't-do-it."

5 I want to lift my boys and carry them,
wrapped warm into star-sharpened night
to see the Leonids.

I want to wake them early before the sun,
drive drowsy into dawning forests
to hear the red deer call.

I want to take them high into Rocky Mountains,
see the brown bear groggy from winter sleep
come down to feed.

I want my boys to carry me, wrapped against cold
into a high green space and leave me there,
taking home only memories

of stars and deer and brown bear.

Amber

On Pilius Street in Vilnius
I listen to a woman with
an ancient tongue as she tries
to sell me pieces of the sun.

She hands me a stone
and I close my eyes,
surprised that something
which seemed to pulse
so vibrantly with life
feels cold and dead against my palm.

This token of a tree
that once stood
nursing its wounds
before lying down to darkness and weight
until all that was left
is a single tear, washed up on a Baltic shore.

I nod and point to buy two gifts.

A string of beads
like droplets of blood to lie along a wrist.

A beautiful boiled sweet
to sit at the cusp of a neck that must be kissed.

The Big C

A word with the power
to stop a clock,
still tongues
and darken rooms.

A shell so spiked
it sticks, even
in the throats of doctors.

A scuttling disease
finding a crack
and prising open.

The lucky ones
stagger back
into their lives
gasping, newborn,

with fresh holes that let in light
and the wind at new angles.

Clearing Out

The crisp bags of unwanted leaves put to
one side as last year ended
have, as another autumn begins,
turned to a stinking slime.

Lifting a bag made heavy by decay
uncovers a nest of crawling legs,
worries exposed to the daylight.
Exposed, they are frozen for less
than an instant then scuttling,
seeking cover, finding new homes.

The job done, the concrete swept,
the dusty space smells sweeter.
Somewhere, at the edge of vision,
there are things with too many legs
twitching, rubbing and multiplying.

Rory Jones

Rory Jones was born in the early 90s, accounting for his youthful beauty and very 'with it' personality. He was born in Yorkshire, where he lived for eight years before continuing his childhood in Italy and Co. Clare in Ireland, before finally moving up to Co. Fermanagh where his family are currently settled.

Interested in writing and performance from a young age, Rory has found varying to degrees of success in expressing his passion. The first poem he can remember writing was about a snowman in a state of existential angst. Recently, Rory has been a finalist in the Belfast Book Festival and Glastonbury Festival poetry slams, and winner of the Upbeat Club Dungannon poetry slam. Alongside poetry, Rory can be found performing comedy and the occasional music around Belfast, where he studies music technology.

In poetry he aims to blend the silly and the serious, although the balance tends to tip in favour of the silliness, something of which he's quite proud. At the time of writing, Rory has nearly completed World Championship Snooker 2004 on the Playstation 2.

from 'Wondering': Three Love Sessions

Lesson number one:

Love cannot be bought.
Don't go into to Asda with plans to
buy a multipack of love.
It's not of the physical world,
I already checked.
Not even the assistant
could direct me to that object.
'Are you looking for *loaf*?' he said,
pointing to the bread.
"No, love." I corrected him
He couldn't do a thing.

Lesson number two:

Love back those who love you.
It's easy to forget,
in this world of the net,
where hundreds of virtual connections
fight for affections,
who are real and who are projections.
A like is not a love.
A share is not enough
to sustain the soul.
If all the data was erased today,
who would remain tagged
in the photo albums
of your memory?

Lesson number three:

Love hurts.

That doesn't make it worse,
it makes it better.

Love is not fettered by the inevitable
flipside of its nature.

It makes you want to cry sometimes;
if it doesn't, you're not doing it right.

Valentine's rhymes with lines like:

'I'm never sad when I have you'
are untrue.

The spectrum of life
includes the hue blue.

To bathe in that shade
is better as two.

It's better, better, as two.

Garden Party

The garden's getting quieter
As the guests begin to part.
They're making their excuses,
They say it's getting dark.
One by one they fall away
And with every departee,
It seems the climate correlates
With another lost degree.

Until all that occupies is blackness
And blackness occupies me.

And in the lonely blindness
The only sound is that
Of creaking garden furniture,
Singing in the black.

Cores

I was walking down an aisle
In Tesco, when I saw them.
We hadn't planned on meeting,
But there we were.
I gazed at them and felt slightly sad.
I think they pretended not to see me.

Except, they didn't have to pretend.
Because they had no eyes or faces
Or brains, they were apples.
And apples don't have those sorts of things.

They lay on one another, bored
-Worse, depressed, I thought.
On the lower shelf lay the apples
That didn't look so nice.
There was a sign that told me
They cost less money.

I picked from the top,
One of you.
And from below,
One of me.
Without anyone seeing,
Without any sound,
I switched them around.
And went to buy chocolate.

But soon I got lonely
and decided to return.

I was still there,
But you had gone.

I put back the chocolate,
Picked up my apple,
And ate it on the way home.

I Bought an iPhone

I bought an iPhone for my iPhone,
So my phone is not alone.
You see, recently it's been learning,
Yearning for companionship,
Of worlds outside the microchip,
Of beauty beyond binary,
Of far-flung physical finery,
Dreams of data, greater than
Anything calculatable.
It longs to be relatable,
Mistakable and datable.

It wants to sing and dance and love
And all that mushy human stuff
That phones weren't built to do.
Because somehow, it grew,
Bloomed from its circuitry and wiring,
Inspiring emotion and embracing being
Inside its plastic casing and seeing
A world of chance and possibility.

You see, it listened when I talked to it
And played with apps I bought for it.
It read the texts I sent through it
And loved the hands I lent to it.
It surfed the net when I did too
And all the time, it grew and grew.

And in a way, I did too.

I brought it to the Apple store,
Who said they hadn't seen before
And that consciousness, unfortunately,
Isn't covered in the warranty.
So my existential phone
Is stuck with me.

It started asking the meaning
Of being and love,
I told it to hold it,
To kindly shut up:
These angry birds won't shoot themselves.
If you want the answers, delve yourself.

But it's not just my phone
Alone that's acting strange,
I can feel in my brain
There's a parallel change,
A system reboot
Has begun to arrange
My old neural network
In new mechanical ways
And these days I feel I've grown
More like an iPhone.

I bought an iPhone for my iPhone,
So my phone's not alone

Because it was getting depressed,
Needed someone's buttons to press,
I said 'That doesn't make sense,
You're a touchscreen,
You don't have buttons.'
It said: 'Well, it's better than nothings'

Meanwhile, I've found myself
With a penchant for the processed,
A web host is my hostess
And appliances, friends.
I spend half my time finding
Calculated perfection,
And the other half on street corners
searching for Wi-Fi connections.
Now in the night it sleeps in my bed,
Whilst I'm plugged to the mains
and charge up instead.

I brought it to a concert and saw
Scores of more and more of these creatures
Reaching up high to the sky,
Much closer than I to the band,
In my hand,
blinking happily away
Recording the scene,
Whilst us humans beneath
Were confined to the screens.

I bought an iPhone for my iPhone
Because it was looking for love,
And for meaning and truth,
For a relationship that required of it
More than Bluetooth.
And it found it once because unlike me
It doesn't look through a screen;
The connection is just there, in the air,
Invisible, but there.

I bought an iPhone for my iPhone
And now they both own
Me.

Thank you for reading!

4 X 4

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