



FourXFour
Poetry Journal
Issue 8 Spring 2014

Erin Halliday
James Meredith
Lesley Martin
Tom French

Editorial

Welcome to issue eight of FourXFour. Within, you will find four more examples of fine poetry being produced within Northern Ireland. Each is further testament to the high quality of work that this small country yields, punching way above its weight, but being able to contend with the best of them.

I first discovered, and greatly enjoyed, Erin Halliday's work from her collection, 'Chrysalis', from Templar Poetry (who publish some excellent work from NI themselves). It is a delight to have her featured here. James Meredith's writing first came to me through *Speech Therapy*, a poetry zine of old edited by myself. The four poems included here are a great sample of his casual yet rather sombre approach.

With Lesley Martin and Tom French, as with a lot of poets I'm blessed to meet, their work was first encountered with the ear, having heard each read at many open mics and other events over the years. It's quite a difference to sit down and read someone's poems after hearing them, but a pleasure to revisit the joys brought forth by each. I hope the reader experiences the same sense of joy, of poetry and of life, from their work.

Regards and happy reading,
Colin Dardis, Editor

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Erin Halliday

Erin Halliday was born in Belfast in 1982, and educated in Classical Studies and English. After a brief career in horticulture, she returned to the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry to gain a Ph.D in Creative Writing; for which she researched theories of translation in relation to Latin poetry of the Augustan Age and modern rewritings of such.

Her poetry has appeared in *Cyphers*, *Poetry and Audience*, *Poetry Proper*, *The SHOp*, *The Stinging Fly*, and *The Yellow Nib*. Her pamphlet 'Chrysalis' is published by *Templar Poetry*, having won the 2012 *Templar Poetry Pamphlet & Collection Awards*.

She is co-editor of the first issues of the relaunched *Honest Ulsterman* literary journal. In 2013 she received a *Support for the Individual Artist Award* from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. Erin lectures in *Contemporary Poetry* at *Queen's University*.

Piccadilly Line

When we took the boat from Argostoli
to see the dolphins,
Mikos told me I'd good sea legs.

That first winter together,
I'd hip-distance my feet and look up at you
on the Tube as the long trains swung and keeled.

When I went back to the Kefallonian quay
after I lost you, the picture you took of the alpha male
was still up (sun-bleached) on Mikos's board.

This afternoon, I'm going to the Blue Zone
in the Natural History Museum.
I hold the overhead bar, widen my stance;

have no-one to steady my gaze.

In the Moon's Absence

The new moon spells out all the words for trouble.
A spider greeds along its wire in the open window
of the upstairs bathroom where the taps whine.
I look in the mirror then turn off the light.

It's the day they diagnose ovarian cancer
and I have begun to look different:
I have parted my hair in the middle,
the rings under my eyes lour.

In the blue-blind bath I cough
and bleed between my legs.
I unfill my lungs and sink
so my hair slurs black and rolls

like Salomé's in the Guggenheim atrium,
her half-closed eyes, her head loll, that cobalt.
My chest fills again and lifts
so my tattoo bobs the glass surface.

Eighteen, on Avenue of the Americas,
a man with a name like *tomorrow*
unbuttoned my fly to lean on my groin,
prop his elbow on the bony rise of my hip.

He stroked the gun in a line
over that soft cave
that basins between pelvis and ribs.
He was gentle with the needle,

wiped my blood with his wrist,
dragged the buzz like a hot knife pushed in slow.
When it was over I was bellied with tiger.
I breathe out and plunge under.

Freezing water streams down my foot
arched on the tap.
Maybe that emblem
can protect what's under him.

Prayer in Bath Abbey

after Matthew 6:9-13

May my greed for this love weaken.
Since no longer he will bend to my promises
may my heart be as his heart.

Undo the debt in me.
Give to me a new sun
and I will reset my dial.

Pchelà

after Virgil, Georgics IV

A little rest from work
when I settle in the heat
of spring,
spring that belongs to the bees —
the bees droning
in the pinched throat
of the honeywort,
bunting the lip
of the vetchling,
singing
on the peppery Turk's cap,
on the pea-like broom —
the bees lobbing
from the strawberry tree
to the creeping thyme and *Pulsatilla*,
filling their honey sacs with lungwort
and lemony balm,
bibbing from the cups
of the camphor tree
and creamy linden.

A little rest from work
when the candied wax, treated
and set,
is set aside in cakes —
wax cakes blanching

in patty moulds and dishes
in the half-lit kitchen,
leavening the air
with the buttery sapor of the hive,
cappings
rich as butterscotch
spooned from the pan —
wax cakes drained from the gum
of honey and comb,
kneaded and mashed
in the pot, elbow-deep,
wrung between palms
and fingers slick
with the lucent,
gluey syrup.

A little rest from work
rinsing my feet,
shoulders prickling with sun,
sun that flavours the honeyflow —
honey kissed, spat, and ripening
from the nectar
of the hills
fringing Zlatna Panega,
where Iliya, across the garden fence,
is calling
from his whitewashed orchard,
dobùhr den —
fetching me honey,

govòrya ... tozèè vècher ... touk
we talk ... this evening ... here;
and later,
we are nodding, laughing,
talking of Iov, Luka,
dooshà: the soul;
vèchmost — eternity.

*For one and all one work-time,
and a like rest from work.*

James Meredith

James Meredith lives in Belfast on the island of Ireland. He has had stories and poems published in Ireland, the UK, Europe and the USA.

He has also had poetry and haiku published in translation in Romania in the literary journals 'Acolada,' 'Contempuranil' and 'Confesiuni,' by Iacob Olimpia.

James is a past winner of the Brian Moore Short Story Award (2002), as well as a runner-up in the same competition (2003). He has also been shortlisted for the Flame Books Short Story Award (2006) and highly commended in the Bluechrome Award for Poetry (2005).

James is also the author of two short plays, 'Shadow & Light: a monologue' (2013) which was performed at LunchBox Theatre in the Black Box, Belfast, and 'Don't Get Me Wrong,' (2014) part of Arrivals from Terra Nova Productions, which ran for 6 performances at the Crescent Arts Centre, Belfast, before touring around Northern Ireland.

<http://jamesmeredith.wordpress.com>

The Lost

She had bruised
arms & a broken
stare, nibbled at
her lip without
looking you in
the eye. You could
hear her silent
scream in every
breath.

She sat in the
shadowed bar
drinking fast,
smoking fag after
fag, next to her
fella who was smaller
than we had imagined.

At night's end he'd
hold her by the
forearm as she
struggled from her
stool &, shaking
herself free, staggered
off to the bog while he
waited patiently for
her return.

& then they'd leave,
arguing as they went.
The next time we'd see
her there'd be another
fading bruise, & her
hands would shake a little
more as she lifted her
first drink of the day.

& none of us ever
said a fucking word.

Phone call from an ex-lover

She phoned to say she'd heard he was unwell, & that although they'd parted on bad terms she hoped that he would recover soon from the debilitating illness that she'd heard that he had.

He told her that he was fine, that she'd been misinformed: life was good. He was happy for the first time in a long time. He was enjoying his job, had met a girl, & had even started to write again.

"Oh," she said. "In that case, go fuck yourself. I hope you fucking die, you prick!" & then she hung up.

What Remains

I touch it, trace the scar
with my finger, press
my lips to it, lay my
head between your belly
& your pubic bone. This
is all that remains. The
clothes we saved for,
argued over in shops,
accepted wrapped from
friends & relatives, are
gone now to charity
shops. The room we
painted blue like the
sky on a spring morning
we can't bring ourselves
to enter. Somewhere
within lies our hopes,
our dreams. Somewhere
within our future died.

Big Men

The explosion was timed for 10:43. I wonder what they were doing at 10:42? Were they boiling a kettle, worrying a hangnail, or taking a solitary shit in a farmyard outhouse?

& how were they feeling at 10:44? Did they feel like soldiers, like heroes of their time? Did they feel like men?

Lesley Martin

Lesley Martin is from The Moy, County Armagh and is a graduate of English and Creative Writing at Queen's University Belfast, where she studied under Ciarán Carson and Sinéad Morrissey.

During her time there, she hosted the Poetry & Pints events under her role as President of the English Society. She is currently studying for an MA in Arts Management and completing an internship at the Belfast Book Festival within the Crescent Arts Centre. She has previously been published in *And Other Poems* and *wordlegs*. Lesley is also a member of the Belfast Writers' Group.

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Electric

To test the electric fence I hold
a few blades of grass
by their stems and touch
them to the wire.

If the current has grounded
I pace the line to find the place
wire touches the metal
of handmade posts.

Adjust it so the wire rests
on the plastic insulator,
check for more earthings,
then test again.

Wait to feel that familiar jolt
powered by old car batteries and the flick of a switch.

Goldfinches

I.

When first she saw you at the birdfeeder
(the one that replaced the hanging basket)
she thought you were the rarest thing on earth.
Coloured in so carefully, the Crayola-red mask
reaching just behind your eyes, the line
where white cheek meets black crown,
traced with such attention. Soft tan belly,
spatterings of ivory on each flight feather.
Finally the bar of sunlight on each wing
the brushstroke that announced your name.

II.

Where once we sat for hours waiting
for a glimpse of gold, now your charm
flits from tree to hedgerow to telephone wire.
Little seed eater, your beak full of thistle-fluff,
your trilling echoes after us then stops.

Derryscollop

A scollop (not a scallop, as some people say) is what my home is named for.

More precisely it is the derry or wood where said scollops are found.

A spray or wand roughly twenty inches long, bent in the middle to form a curve and two sharpened prongs which, driven by hand into new thatch, fasten it in place.

This is where I come from, two points forced home by nothing more than solid strength and delicate skill. This white-pronged staple, holding it all together.

Orchard County

(Each stanza begins with a line from Paul Muldoon's 'February')

Walking Scollop every day
around the borough takes no more
than half an hour if you don't dawdle.
If you stop and stand at the highest point
of The Grove on a clear day in summer
you should be able to spot
landmarks from all six counties.

Who would break the laws of time and stay
anywhere else than one of these townlands –
Derryscollop, Canary, Annasamry.
Or perhaps Cloven Eden or Derrycaw,
Tullyroan or Annaghmore.
Elsewhere the honeysuckle isn't as sweet
nor the hawthorn quite as white.

Tom French

Tom French, otherwise known under the penname 'tom ffrench' (*sic*), is on the edge of eighty, and is a retired science teacher. He has had poems published in magazines and in various anthologies, and is currently working towards a pamphlet on troubled times and broken rainbows.

Within a Peace III Project, he has produced a suite of poems that highlight the horror and futility of terrorism, by placing himself in the mind of the paramilitaries. He is referred to as a poet of the troubles, basing his writing on real people and real incidents in his beloved Ireland. He is a highly thought member of the Lough Neagh Writers.

Tom served for 16 years as a councillor in Craigavon Borough Council. He also was the President of the Workers' Party of Ireland from 1996 to 2000, and is an ardent supporter of the John Hewitt Society and annual Summer School.

Note

The artiste is never satisfied:
the sung note not quite right,
the breathing gasped or broken,
the violin's tone just too vibrato,
the painter not quite sure
of the brush's final stroke.

I remember playing Chopin;
the last note was single
and very close to silent.
Lingering,
I pushed the key gently,
gave a gasp of annoyance.

The maestro smiled ruefully.
"I've played it like that myself
more than once."

The Brighter Boat

The brighter boat
sails the spiritual sea
seeking the sea god
Manannán mac Lir.

Oars manned
by sixteen women.
Oars rise and dip,
dip and rise

assisted by the
mystic wind,
guiding navigator.

The golden ship
rides high
on the waves
seeking their god.

The tiny boy
at the masthead,
eyes sharp
with youth

will warn
the navigator
as the magic horse
approaches;

then the soul
of the dead one
is delivered
to the eternal

pulsating
ocean.

The Master

i.m. Kevin Lacey

I see you now
almost 60 years on,
your austere face
moulded by your genius
and genius.

Dark pinstripe suit,
pristine white collar,
inch perfect,
tidy as the inside
of your master's desk.

You talked easily about
familiar lands and wars,
of strange tribes,
noble leaders
and fierce foes.

Horatio held the bridge;
Constantinople burned;
Pompeians fled
the glowing lava,
choking ash.

I saw the ruts
of chariot wheels,
petrified bread,
stone seeds,
steamy rim of Vesuvius.

I heard again
your enthusiastic voice
and smelt
the smoke and dust
of destruction.

The Assyrian came down
like a wolf on the road,
the gallant six hundred
galloped madly into
the valley of death.

The lowing herd,
winds slowly
o'er the lee;
the ploughman slowly
plods his weary way.

Here, God rears
His head,
the first cause,
the mystery of who,
what and from where.

Above all, master,
your final gifts
were integrity
and honesty
by example,

making the worker
equal
and precious
beyond wealth.

Absence

The howling wind relaxes.

Ripples on a pond subside.

The vibrating violin strings lie silent.

The searchlight beam is extinguished.

The bomb shockwave dies away.

The dying patient expires.

The poet's voice

is silenced.

Thank you for reading!

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