

**Tory Campbell
Patricia Devlin-Hill
Jenny Cleland
Gerry McCullough
Olive Broderick
Paula Matthews
Erin Halliday
Lesley Martin
Kathleen McCracken
Stephanie Conn
Ruth Carr
Lynda Tavakoli
Heather Newcombe
Shelley Tracey
Lara Sunday
Rachel McCrum**

FourXFour

Poetry Journal

**International Women's
Day 2016 Compendium**

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Foreword

What better way for us to celebrate International Women's Day than to dip into the works of some of the most exciting women poets Northern Ireland has on offer. The sixteen poems here (as we also have sixteen poems per issue) are just the editor's personal selection. Beyond these, we encourage you to delve in and read *all* the poets – women *and* men – from our back issues.

When I started writing poetry in my teens, there were very few established women poets. I never encountered any on our syllabus along the way. When I started interacting with the Belfast scene online in 2008, and later in 2010 at open mics, guest readings, slams and festivals, I found a profound lack of women participating, and even less pursuing publication. It seemed I was one of only a handful of women reading in Belfast at the time.

Thankfully since then, as you will see from this special all-woman edition, that women poets are now flourishing in Northern Ireland. Some had been quietly working away in relative isolation, while others have grown within the new Belfast scene that offers a variety of open mics, workshops, retreats, writers groups, etc. Social media has also allowed women to seek out opportunities that would have evaded them in the past. It has let women see other writers on their doorstep, women who will encourage each other and ignite imaginations.

This issue hosts a range of voices both of those who have lived here all their lives, some writing of a simpler rural Northern Ireland, while others who have made homes here talk of the difficulties they have encountered, of exiles and the longing for home. These are women who have stepped beyond the 'Troubles' and found a commonality with the rest of the world, in the way they talk of family, the rearing of children, how crisis slips into everyday humour, the passing of family members, and the losing of them to illness such as dementia and the diagnosis of teenage cancer.

This is just a taster of what this edition holds in store. It is a tack in your toe on the way to the bathroom in the middle of the night, enough to wake you up and make you think.

Regards and happy reading,
Geraldine O'Kane, Poetry NI

Tory Campbell: *Mother*

My mum has never learned to swim.
Now fifty-six she claims it's far
too late, there's nothing she can do.
She washes in an inch-deep bath
and likes to use a dry shampoo.

I've tried my best to understand
what makes her mind shut mollusc tight.
Her dry-lipped smile's not fooling me –
I take her to a shallow pool
to show how easy it can be.

I dress her up in floats and plugs
and challenge all excuses as
I try to gently splash her skin.
Our common tongue dissolves until
I'm tempted just to push her in.

from Issue 1

Patricia Devlin-Hill: *In a Crisis*

you do not need
to say anything
profound:

just say that
the apples on the
crab apple tree
look like radishes;

that the rain
huddles itself
in the concrete
furrows of the road;

that that morning
you flung into the garden
a long-legged spider with
body-stemmed eyes from
a glass tumbler with
a paper floor
that you had

slipped under
and put over it,

as it made itself small
in the corner of the
step of the stair.

Just say that
you had toast,
with butter,
for breakfast.

from Issue 2

Jenny Cleland: *Breaking Point*

I see now that you are made of glass.

My father dropped a whiskey bottle once
Onto a tiled slate floor
And it bounced
And he caught it.
“That’s strong stuff,” he said.

You could have reached out and touched the emotion,
Taken some for yourself,
And we all did;
Relief and delight.
We all laughed hard.

When you fell into soul-breaking cruelty,
You bounced
And I caught you.

But now when I hold you,
I know you’re getting thinner.
You are no longer a sturdy bottle
With a rim that can dent slate.

You are a delicate wine glass,
Glass so fine
A breeze could breathe you into fragments.
We are scared to touch you
Without gloves or cotton wool.
We don't know how to make you strong again.
We don't know
 what
To do.

I see with growing fear,
 more than ever,

How beautiful you are.

from Issue 4

Gerry McCullough: *The Field in Winter*

Ugly, naked old bodies,
Stretching and shivering.
Mostly pines, pining for the Spring.
Ashes, too, not quite cremated
And sycamores earthbound without their aeroplanes.
Quick, cover up the ugliness,
First with the delicate see-through green of April.
By the twelfth, they'll wear thick suits,
And sashes of concealment.

from Issue 5

Olive Broderick:

The Difference Between Hope & Optimism

In his watercolour of a Tall Ship close-up,
the artist uses gold for sunlight on crossbeams.
On my windowsill, pink roses in a glass carafe, wilting.

Outside, against the sky, a couple of pigeons
intertwine throats, step back to face each other,
twist to face in the same direction on their stone gable.

Different from spring encounters on roofs and railings:
I don't know where this is going, lower my eyes
to my computer, search for quotations on hope,

only now decide to revive the best of the roses.
Noting that discarded blossoms may be the artist's quarry.
Noting the thorns on their stems are not less sharp.

from Issue 7

Paula Matthews: *Real Wedding Picture*

No calla lilies when we pledged love.
We had a wreath to mark the spot.

The first dark dance –
piper played in mourning.

No photos, no flower girls, no sunshine.
We stood in rows in rain.

Our legs gave way,
but hands were clasped and promises exchanged.

We forged a path through deep dug earth and dust,
lead away from sad tracks formed in dirt.

It was a giving of each other in death's wake.
Chasing shadows in a summoning of light.

from Issue 7

Erin Halliday: *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.

from Issue 8

Lesley Martin: *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.

from Issue 8

Kathleen McCracken: *extract from 'Mustangs'*

Mustang at Melancthon

the wind farms again
a swathe of gentle crucifixions

The Lay of the Land

mustang amazed how when it came
to actual canyons, she'd be first to leap

Freeze Frame

barrel deep between oats and barley
mustang stymied by the lux of choice

from Issue 9

Stephanie Conn: *Enjoy your Stay*

Port Arthur, 1870

Welcome. You have progressed
from the penitentiary
to the separate jail.

Here, we keep the peace –
note the felt slippers covering our boots,
the sea-grass laid out on the concrete floor.

To the right is your cell –
feel free to spend your twenty-three
isolated hours behind this door.

Walking will be done alone –
your remaining time in the high-walled yard.
We will be out of sight, moving like ghosts.

from Issue 9

Ruth Carr: *Homecoming*

A wet, warm Sunday in July.
Turning the corner into my road
I glimpse my long gone father.

For no clear reason
I'm reaching deep into his heart
as into a pocket of silk.

I cup in my hand
familiar, feather-light warmth
cocooned within his breast.

He says he's been waiting for me,
keeping the poor thing right.
Waiting for me to catch the missing beat.

from Issue 10

Lynda Tavakoli: *Moving Day*

I moved my mother
into our dining room,
her presence boxed and waiting
for the final shift
to a shed outside.

black bags remaining empty
of the detritus

I could not throw away -

shopping lists on paper scraps,
repeated phone numbers
written in her tiny
disappearing hand
all about the house,

'just in case'.

from Issue 11

Heather Newcombe: *At the Truth Museum*
In Memory of Ho Minh Chanh

Five days after
they capture him,
he is twenty.
May 8 they chop off
his left foot.
May 12 his right foot.
May 15 his right tibia.
I try to fill the spaces.
June 2 his left tibia.
June 27 his right thigh.
July 15 his left thigh.

I write on paper
that is damp,
cannot comprehend.
My fingers, a painful cluster
around my pen.

from Issue 11

Shelley Tracey: *Welcome*

Welcome, migrant.

Here is your resident's flatpack.

Follow the instructions closely, to the letter,
to make this box and put yourself inside it.

You have to fit exactly,
with no margin for error.

And when it's all completed,
please don't make a noise;
it might disturb the neighbours.

Don't wear bright pink or sing in public.

Post to us a photo of your box,
with everything you owe us,
and a full-face picture of you.

So we can see the shape of your eyebrows
and if your dominant eye looks right or left.

It tells us who you are,
what you might be thinking or believing,
where it's safe for you to go.

It's all for your own good, you do realise that, of course.

You are very welcome.

Lara Sunday: *Wool*

Strands of success
Waulked together between
The joyous, voices of women

Hands soapy and stung
Producing sturdy threads
That hold off all cold and night
Soaking in sunlight and care

And then woven with love
Into a pattern
Not ever wished to be seen,
On cold and barren beaches
Once storms have fled.

But to be worn and made bare,
With time and work
And then stowed with care
In remembrance of a life well led.

Rachel McCrum: *"Bury me at sea."*

She said.

"I left civil twilight a while ago
to hunt for the North.
And isn't that the cosmic kicker,
that it's never a fixed point,
the one you're looking for?"

I tried kelp farming once.
No go.
When I reached the shale,
I kept going,
struck out to swallow the world.
My eyes were always bigger than my stomach.

I couldn't be shot
of the clan quick enough.
In my haste, gob agape,
I let the sea pour in.
My tongue dried out.

I'd heard that sucking pebbles
quenches a thirst
but failed to see they'd
tumble from maw to gut.

The rattle of them capsized me,
turned me turtle.

Then my country,
still shackled to my ankles,
my cannonball and my ship's wheel,
my ammunition and my steerage,
did the rest.

Never even made it past
the harbour mouth.

Remain mistress of your craft,
the vessel yours and yours alone.
This belly's only good for stones."

from Issue 14



International Women's Day

International Women's Day celebrates the social, economic, cultural and political achievement of women. Yet let's also be aware progress has slowed in many places across the world, so urgent action is needed to accelerate gender parity.

Find out more about at www.internationalwomensday.com

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