Community

POETRY COMPETITION 2016
Introduction

In 2016 Harmony Community Trust organised a second poetry competition to follow the success of their fortieth anniversary venture into this field. Writers were challenged to imagine Community, a subject relevant to our work. The competition was open to school children and to adult poets. By the rules of the competition poets entering the competition were free to interpret the theme in any way they liked.

Harmony Community Trust is a Northern Irish Charity, best known for its work at Glebe House in Kilclief, Strangford where, over the years, thousands of disadvantaged young people and socially isolated older people from around the world have joined in projects to raise awareness develop their confidence and sense of well being as well as improving community relationships.

The judge for the competition in this second year was the distinguished poet Leontia Flynn., a Fellow at the Seamus Heaney Centre for Poetry, Queen's University Belfast, since 2005 and currently editing the journal *The Yellow Nib*. Leontia Flynn has published three collections of poems. *These Days* (Jonathan Cape, 2004) which won an Eric Gregory Award in manuscript, and the Forward Prize for Best First Collection. It was shortlisted for the Whitbread Poetry Prize. *Drives* (Jonathan Cape 2008), won the Rooney Prize for Irish Literature and *Profit and Loss* was Poetry Book Society Choice for Autumn 2011. She received the 17th annual Lawrence O’Shaughnessy award for Irish poetry in 2013 and the AWB Vincent American Ireland Fund literary award in 2014.

We were delighted with the number and variety of entries from Ireland and England and were grateful to the Newry Mourne and Down District Council for contributing to the sponsorship of the event.,
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Basil and the Air Scoop

*Kathleen McCracken*

Wise beyond your years
& mine
put together

Basil the cat
was born with sheaves
of blue prints

in his elegant, attentive
head
has already
designed
constructed
flown

the ideal prototype
(P-47 Thunderbolt, 1941)
you are building

bsun & moon
& lanternlight,
knows its compound curves

its fins and ailerons
intimately
can read its canopy

& cowling
like a book,
but when you set aside

the balsa air scoop
you have spent three days
shaving to a slick

tight fit
to stroke his supple spine
his ears

you notice how a flat calm
steals into the studio
& how, inscrutable

maestro of the silent meow,
he is saying
nothing.
High Fidelity

For Celine and Daniel

Kathleen McCracken

Seven swans, six white, one black
taking their leave of Lough Erne

stir up an unpredicted blizzard
on highway 93, Banff to Jasper

where I’m driving when your call comes in
to say that yours will be an Easter wedding

high noon at Dunamore, the twenty-second day
of April, two thousand and fourteen

and ask if I can be there, witness to
your pledge and consecration.

I can barely see the centre line, this storm’s a norther
as they’d call it down in Dalhart

but I tell you yes, I wouldn’t miss it
for the world or all its husbands.

Sunwapta Pass, a glimpse of Snow Dome
the glacier a glitter, sun-shock bright

then suddenly a pair of Trumpeters
clear the crest and climb

their reedy, hollow honking a wild jazz
broadcasting ivory vows –I will, I do-

long range, high fidelity
godspoken seal on the unbroken blue.
An Eurasian Magpie sees the coast of Lesbos

_Glen Wilson_

Amongst the others it is all noisy chattering,
black and white plumage for the show,
every one bringing back a steady silver flow
of coin, crumpled foil and tarnished ring.
All that we have is stolen from those before;
We built roof nests like our mothers, prey
like our fathers, beaks twisting the day
into having a little something more.

_Hello Mr. Magpie how’s your wife and kids_
a stranger says to me as we are brought ashore
clutching the cross and chain you once wore.
I could curse him but instead close my eyelids
to see the settling of your iridescent skin,
long green gloss tails, parallel to the wind.
The Ropes

Annemarie Mullan

A still life hangs on the dry-stone wall – bashed billycans on a twisted grape and yellow seed-potato, sprouting out through coils of mud-clagged rope. Dust motes rise then, as I prise it loose – and just with that –

recall the February bullock trapped in the flooded drain; dad's calls to the rallied work-force –

a flagged-down van of bandsmen and some nearby folks –roped in together on a flood-bank tug-of-war;

how icy muck-slides from the start would thwart their shouldered grip; hands slid off flailing hooves;

the rolling whites of bovine eyes, "No slack, lads. Get a grip, young sir! – 3 - 2 - 1 - Heave!" Then easing off to let the gasping creature gather strength – though not for long –its high-pitched bellows keep the pressure on, for the guts of an hour, till, with a mighty squelch of steamy earth, they all – at the very last –collapse in a tangled spume of beast & men.

Hanks of grass scoop muddy slabber from its mouth. A hessian sack rubs down its heaving flanks –

"Close call there, lads!" back-slaps on sodden dung-streaked shirts, with awkward guffs of disbelief at this communal drench of kith. Then, handshakes for all the men who'd stopped and stood their ground.

I lift the rope again to jig its weight and marvel how these dead ends dangle limp and useless – unmanned;

where once some passing strangers knotted arms; pooled heart and heft into every fraying strand.
The bus to Cookstown

Michael Ridgway

time and again
she stood by the door
fretting rubbing
her hands her old coat
a dog-toothed straitjacket
miss-buttoned to the throat

she clutched the polished
straps of her crocodile handbag
like a tenuous lifeline
imploring each of us in turn
to let her go to catch her bus
to get home to her mammy

she'd be wondering
where she was
couldn't we just let her go please
the bus to Cookstown you see
was just round the corner
she'd be late home for tea

but we couldn't let her go
she had brushed her hair
with a tooth brush again
and there was no bus
not today nor any time soon
so how about a wee cup of tea

come on in
back to the fire here
let us take that old coat
it's cold in the hall
you'll catch your death
sure you can stay a while yet

there's no need to stand and fret
there will be another bus tomorrow
yes we really are sure you'll see
it goes all the way to Cookstown
This one was taken at the peace wall

Nancy Graham

The journey west is sometimes beautiful. Always the hills appear, looming between rows of terraced houses, sudden and gratifying as the first glimpse of the Colosseum, ancient, impervious to the race at its flanks of traffic and people which, all unheeding, persists. Thus, giving way at the lights, an enormous lorry rolls gently to a halt, lamps along its rigging blazing blue sapphire, and down below a woman smooths her son’s hair, studying his face before sending him safely over. Before them the cyclist imagines each crossing to come.

What she cannot stop has happened before. Somewhere in Tokyo maybe, in a sleek apartment lined with windows or a fatly cushioned den in Pennsylvania, a tale’s being told to the folks back home, she and her bicycle part of it. Passing through the interface each day it is bound to be repeated if not this morning then another, whirling onwards past the figures on the pavement capturing the muralled length of the street while the coach-drivers banter and smoke on the corner. Only the experienced know about perspective, and she can tell these ones, they lift their cameras, get ready for her to enter the picture – she’s caught even as she flashes by, giving depth to a painted wall, intrinsic to a story which will be told in another country. Someone’s truth. From here she’s almost at her place of work. Mornings when the sun is dazzling olden panes of glass illuminate the way.
We don’t read the same books anymore. I look at the young brown haired girls on the cover of yours, say aloud, “that looks good.” You agree, “it’s a great read.” You haven’t yet encountered the bookshelf, filled with my infinitely expanding to-be-reads alphabetically and chronologically coded by author then date of publication. You and I never needed a system we just read, our memories agile.

I recall the summer we moved into No. Six: it was hot enough to remove men from their shirts, every front lawn became a beer garden, dogs lay full stretch on shaded tarmac, every day we ate Magnum ice creams.

On four chairs – two for our bottoms, two for our legs, we devoured Maeve Binchy novels. Our back garden became a settlement of make believe characters; the sun cradled us - the village gossips - as we laughed and cried, passing stories and theories long after we had pitched our bookmarks, lifted our chairs, still trying to settle them into our new home. I don’t recollect another summer like it.
The Sally Army

Mel McMahon

Night raids on our estate
found compensations
in the day-time visits
near Christmas
by the Sally Army.
Whatever we were doing,
one the band struck up
and music silvered the air,
we stopped and looked out
at the soldiers’ shining buttons,
the glossed peaks of their caps,
their instruments’ stellar sparkle,
the shiny, ripe metal
pregnant with the music
casked inside.

We stood, arrested,
the very routines
of our lives questioned,
as if all that we had been doing
since they last braved our streets
had not been wrong but had somehow
been below par, had not been enough
to give our starved hearts
the buoyancy they needed,
to give our days a small sense
of what it meant
to celebrate such happiness.
Our Pup - A Peacemaker

Bernard McLoughlin

“"I’m shouting; I’m shouting
What are we shouting about?”
No. Not a scene from “Coronation Street”
But one from our allotments.

On an earthy spring day
The sounds are those of spades on stones
And the banter of men and women
As we tease the man who won the
Prize at the local show.

Then; two loud voices in anger!
Nervously, but with ears pricked,
We work
Conscious that both
“dug with different feet”.

They got louder, then were joined
By angry barks
Its decibels ever increasing.

Suddenly; the two rants stopped.
Looking down at the little dog
Both laughed; shook hands
Embarrassed at what
They were shouting about.
Of Cars

*Jack Sweeney*

Those who live
By a main road
Often find it
Hard at first

To get used
To the sound
Of the cars
From morning to night.

Some years later
In a hotel bed
Lies longing
for
The regular breath

Of cars
Drawing nearer
And fading off
In the distance.
Will you do a wee message for me?

Gaynor Kane

In those days, you saw your neighbours; they did a daily shop and just as you could recognise them by their bag, or stride, or snide remark, you knew their hardships as well as your own. The messages that connected a community. It was the days of borrowing a cup of sugar, in between the comings and the goings. Or the potato chipper, lent out for Friday night fish and chips but never returned and a Mother scarred from the loss; her crinkle cutter, gone.

In those days, the dogs walked themselves patrolling the neighbourhood, as the tartan teenagers did. The salt and pepper Scottie called Haggis, had a taste for tyres, from bicycles to buses. One day the wheeled machine won and he lost an eye. It was the days of knowing that Mrs Bright hadn’t walked into a door, or fallen on the floor. Her friends cleansed her cuts and dressed her dignity, whilst agreeing that he was a great fellow without the drink, it was unfortunate that the Crown was on his way home.

In those days you played catch or kerby, swung on frayed rope round lampposts, until they lit up beacons signalling home-time. Tried to light fires in the alley with safety matches, succeeded, got caught and skelped around the legs. Sent to bed, supper-less, then did it all again. It was the days of blistering summers spending 5p each Sunday in the corner shop on a Captain Quencher. Then spending September scratching from hives and new wool. The days of delight at hearing the old dears ask: Will you do a wee message for me?
A Glimpse, that’s all

Nancy Graham

If this city life is getting you down
look upwards.
The streets are littered, it’s true:
crisp bags, plastic bottles, someone’s homework
ripped into a hundred pieces
that woman who sits on the doorstep,
a widening circle of stubbed cigarettes
round her part of the pavement.
Her view, car tyres and the gutter.
Don’t be down-hearted.
Let your gaze wander
to these pigeons on a washed blue canvas,
with a shining throng of seagulls making
clear Escher patterns above the rooftops.
A wave of black, a wave of white
falling in two curves together
a moment of symmetry
dissolving as flocks drift outwards.

Or a noisy summer evening,
kids on every corner and the constant
thud of a football
that’s hit your window too many times
an angry mother at one door,
before her a protesting audience of twelve.
Slip on your shoes and take a walk.
Now see what’s there on the main road -
yes, these terraced streets join it, the new school,
the old shirt factory, a stream of cars.
But all down the long length of it
a million heart-shaped leaves are shimmering
pale green and white, fluttering in the breeze:
an avenue of lime trees thrilling to the sky
planned and planted over one hundred years ago
so this very scene could take place.

Touch the burred trunks as you pass by.
Better still, pause to explore
the deeply-fissured bark with gentle fingers.
This is a way to find solace
and you will not be alone.
Deliveries

Mel McMahon

Milk

Afraid to offend the two milkmen on our estate, my mother doubled her daily order. We listened for the streamline purr, the unworldly gear changes of the Creamline float, its ridiculous slowness that we felt we could outrun

or McAlinden’s rattled crates and Basil’s sunny whistle no matter how early, how dark.

Coal

Not always there during the day to see him heft the bag over his shoulder, unbouldering his burden into the darkness of our shed, the sleep of the hamsters razored by the scrunch of sliding coal, the chunkle of tumbling nuggets or the silky slippage of slack gliding on its black drift,

I would hear the gate unbolted on winter evenings and rush to get the pile of change assigned on the fireplace, open the door to someone who seemed to be carved out of the very night, his colliery greasepaint the skin’s livery of hard knocks, his shoulders leathered for work, his cap at a friendly, unkempt tilt.
‘Come in’, she says, ‘Sure, I’m on my leaf alone.  
No one wants you when you’re old!  Here,  
Get a shovel of coal from the yard  
When you’re on your feet.’

I took the shovel and filled it, heavily  
And invisibly, in the black-nighted yard.  
With a scrake of coal on metal, the fire choked  
And coughed sparks and smoke up the chimney.

‘Do you know who’s pregnant?’ says I.  
She loved the gossip and a bit of scandal even better.  
‘Wee Annie Murray and I could tell you who the father is,  
Only I don’t like to spread gossip.’

‘Sure, who the hell would I tell?  
I’m here my leaf alone most nights,  
I hate knowing half a story, hate it,  
I’d rather know nothing at all.’

She huffily poked the fire then decided to make the tea,  
There was a clatter of cups and saucers from the scullery,  
And she returned with home-made cake and thick brown tea  
Made from tea leaves, tea bags having long been denounced  
As ‘the sweepings aff the factory flure.’

The cake, as always, was topped with creamed icing,  
With the same cream and raspberry jam in the centre.  
Between sups, she says, ‘And who did you say the father was?’  
‘Mickey Mason, the butcher’s young fella,’ says I,  
Allowing her the triumph, which she secretly enjoyed, from behind her tea-cup.

There was a rap at the door and in comes big Bella,  
Having just finished her shift at the hotel.  
‘Jesus, Bessie, that’s a wild night.  You’ve a brave fire on  
And it takes it, sure it would founder you out.’  
‘Here, sit down and have a cup of tea, it’s just made.’

‘I’ll see you again,’ says I, getting up to go.  
‘Aye, sure you know where I am.’  
As I let myself out I could hear her saying,  
‘Do you know who’s pregnant?’ and whispering,  
‘And I can tell you who the father is, forbye.’

I smiled, closed the front door, and left them to it.
Leaving home for Belfast

*Wilma Kenny*

I did not look back
when I left the idyll,
where sheep roamed
on the mountains.
My friend came too -
her dad one of the last
working shepherds.

I ran carefree
to the popping
corn of gun fire
where boys paroled
the streets with guns
as big as themselves,
while we practised the art of living.
Summer days spent with cousins holding tea parties inside the tractor tire steadying the whirly line, making tree houses and hedge tunnels. Exhausted, we would clench our twenty pence pieces tight in our palms as we headed to Matthew’s shop for Tip Tops, Ice Pops, a Joker if it was a scorcher and my favourite, the 10p mix up. If we were lucky enough to be collecting granny’s pension, that would earn us each another thirty pieces of silver. My treasure was chocolate Ice Cups, their coloured foils catching the light. Removing their ribbed casing revealed chocolate tastier than Nutella from the jar. Sweeter than slipping into pyjamas just after school, superior to your team scoring a goal in the championship!

Mrs Matthew’s opened and closed the post office-cum-shop at the same time each day. She ran a snug establishment, no children beyond the counter top – ever! A shrewd eyed older lady in pink two-piece cardigan, grey below the knee skirt, imitating her cropped hair. Never in my time did I manage an extra flump or penny chew: if one ever strayed into the paper bag it was instantaneously plucked to the safety of its container. Someone must have been thinking about all those saved pennies, one day Mrs Matthew’s was mugged whilst closing the steel shutters on the shop front. She never darkened the door of her shop again. Selfishly, I thought of it as a robbing of the childhoods still to come.
Chopping wood

James Finnegan

Billy asks me help him chop some wood
one sunny Good Friday we pull the full
trailer of logs home at five like we’ve cut
down the wooden cross of the broken Christ

on the way we joke with joyful banter
stack the fuel at Billy’s more laughter
on a high trip over words say goodbyes
which time shadow and scythe solidify

the logs turn eventually to ash
nothing matches the marked memory
cheerful voice and bright endorphin face
casting some life on a torn Friday.
hello Shay  how are things in heaven
I imagine John Lennon is surprised
and I’d say it’s a human quandary
for Jean Paul Sartre

have you talked to Fran
I bet he is glad to see you
is he still four or is he fifty-six now

do you miss your Monica
how do you occupy your time
is there time there
is there a there

remember Mr Gunning who gave me
money and a meal for picking potatoes
he rang the cash register out slid the till
*how much do you think it’s worth*
I said 7 shillings and 6 pence
and he gave me ten shillings
tell him I am asking for him

by the way
I sometimes wear
your ESB boots
when out cutting the grass
especially when the grass is wet

talk to you soon  your son
They say our souls agree their journeys
before our human lives begin
that somehow by a chance no gambler
would put money on
we move into the same arena
on some pre-appointed day.

It was summer when the bus from Derry
arrived at Pollan strand.
Willie from the Gaelic League
was chosen for his language skills
to ask for water at the only house.

Her mother at the door was all suspicion
seeing his hard hat his Sunday suit
He has the look of a Protestant on him
she said as Gaeilge
but Brigid’s eye was bright.

No Protestant at all but it’s a Catholic I am.
Would you please let me have some water?

The girl filled his kettle from the pail
she’d lately carried from the brook across the fields
and sealed her fate.

Grandfather grandmother.
And somewhere in some disembodied state
we all lined up for the thrill
of the physical.
John Mc Gahern’s Bread

*John Donaghy*

Coming back across the border
John brought wheaten bread
to an English officer
who offered payment.

*It’s a gift from the nation*
John said. In response
the major sprang to attention
made a formal military salute.

I wouldn’t say it was worth a war
to have humanity and honour
come together
but worse things have happened at Aughnacloy.
Stones In Carlingford

Gerry McCullough

Hot stones beneath my spread fingers.
The sun beating down on my back
As I stand here.

I had time to spare.
Time to wander,
Time to eat some lunch and have a drink,
Time to enjoy the remnants of the old town.
Time to climb the hill to the Priory.

The monks who built this Priory at Carlingford
Lived fifteen hundred years ago.
A community
Worked and prayed and planted here,
Sowed and reaped.

Today I stand,
Touching the stones they used to make this building
And feel their warmth.
Energy and life flow out into my palms and through my body.
I believe what they believed,
Feel what they felt.
Connection.
The Glebe House Community
Children, Teenagers, Volunteers, Seniors and Animals.
Friendships, Wellbeing and Fun
Harmony Community Trust provides opportunities for groups of people from different backgrounds to come together in a unique residential setting where they live, play, work and relax together, and cooperate to create an environment in which differences and distinctiveness are acknowledged, accepted, respected, explored and valued. The Trust caters for people of all ages from disadvantaged and segregated areas of Northern Ireland, promoting friendship, fun, health and wellbeing.

**Brief History of Harmony Community Trust**

and Glebe House

In 1971 the Northern Ireland Group of International Voluntary Service UK, started a programme of cross-community holidays for children from Belfast and Derry. They all came from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds and areas where violence and the effects of the “Troubles” were greatest. By 1973, it was apparent that the need was to work with the children and community groups at a permanent centre in Northern Ireland, on a year round basis, rather than just to organize holidays. The Rotary Club of Belfast was thinking along similar lines, and the two organisations joined forces to set up harmony Community Trust. After a long search Glebe House was purchased with possession on 1st July 1975 thanks to money from Belfast Rotary and a generous loan from the Ulster Bank and the first group of children moved in on the 13th. At least 50,000 children, young people and adults have benefited from their experiences at Glebe House and the fun and friendships made there which would not have been possible without the input of volunteers over the years.

**Today’s challenges**

There is still work for Harmony Community Trust, and a role for Glebe House in the future, changing to adapt to the current needs of society in Northern Ireland. There are also the challenges of recruiting volunteers, the reduction in funds particularly from statutory providers and the declining interest in Northern Ireland issues abroad. We are ready to meet the new challenges as we have done over the years, without losing the sense of purpose and the ethos on which the organisation was founded in 1975.

At Harmony Community Trust, our optimism comes from over forty years’ experience of building trust, cooperation and respect: we believe that children, young people and adults don’t have to be victims of history but can be agents of change and that deeds are more important than words.
Project supported by

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