

DEMAND



CHANCE



I have never written an editorial before, and perhaps this one was not the best place to start: The seven poems in this tiny queer pamphlet could quite easily talk for themselves.

This pamphlet came into existence when I was in the Belfast Pride office discussing the social media strategy for this year's festival. Having established that, yes, hashtags are a necessary evil and yes, last year's festival was a success (not to blow our own trumpets), Seán asked me if there was anything else I would like to introduce to Pride this year and I **jokingly** said "I don't think so, unless you want me to get some poets on board." Famous last words.

What you hold in your hand is just a tiny portion of the landslide of incredible poems from talented writers I received, and I really wish we had room to include more. So my sincere gratitude goes out to everyone who gave us the opportunity to read their work, whether or not they are included in this pamphlet. I hope we will be able to share some of the other marvellous pieces with you soon.

In the meantime, though, we leave you in the capable hands of Conor, Sara, Dawn, Gail, Mícheál, Paul and Carla.

Toby Buckley,
Team Pride

Cover image by Mot Collins.

Glee

by Conor Cleary

there's a virus that makes starfish tear their own arms off and
die and it took us decades to realise

even with a million specimens
even with a seabed covered in starfish arms

at first we thought it might be something
like global warming or depression or a new crab

but it was this virus

it reminds me of this TV show
where all the teenagers in a high school solved their problems,
worked things out, by singing at each other

and instead of having sex they had duets
and sex offscreen and this was fine
because all the actors were really in their mid-twenties

Rathlin

by Sara Falkstad

the delusion of simple life
in a bridgeless land. moist and seal-spitted sand
holding out for the tide.

local youth unloading
supplies for eleventh night. green bottles catching the last light
as they hit the pier. the smell of tar and petrol and the wondrous
recognition of everyone
- the absolute smallness of the place
counting every strange bone in my body.
I stretch it out across the sand
to make the island unafraid.
for it to know that I, too
am salty and ocean-made.

the vast bar, fully lit
like a waiting room, sticky tables.
I recognise the woman from outside the church.
she was digging a grave, alone.
now she is drinking, and not alone.
they must have simpler
lives, I think, I, too, just want to work
and drink, knowing it's not true.

the commuting to the mainland
and the fishing industry.
the centuries of poverty, the difficulty
of trying to pick up this woman
in this bar.
the sheet metal sheds and sheep
and the men they and she

belong to. their rough hands might claim me, too.

but these are shipwreck waters. I feel right at home.
the finality of it all, the final call
for the ferry.

if I don't leave, the silvery dusk awaits me.
the snorting of the seals
- the waves. the foam on the beach
like the head of my stout, I could live
like a stranger here, bracing myself
for the winter storms.

Motherhood in Euclidean Terms

by Dawn Watson

I

During your first summer on earth, a crow would perch
on the roof and watch me bottle-feed you in the yard.
It returned a piked caw for every kick and suck.
It would dive low in a straight line
over the cracked concrete, from gutter to gate,
and strike at the brass latch with its feet.

I think the crow was trying to let you out.
Or is that ridiculous?

II

I know there's no such thing as straight lines—
space is curved.
Straight lines are abstract concepts that apply to Euclidean
geometry,
but space is non-Euclidean.
Even the flat horizon is a circle.

But straight lines feel real;
so, fall under Euclid's first common notion:
things which are equal to the same thing
are equal to each other.

III

Non-biological mothers from same-sex couples
are not equal to biological mothers
in emergency situations, says the GP general manager.

You see?

Doctors need to make snap judgements
and will struggle to draw a straight line
between you and your son.

You have different surnames.

You could be anyone.

Narwhal

by Gail McConnell

The beast receives and reads the sea
that purls into each cavity.
He knows where icebergs melt
and form
by measuring salinity.
Any loss of sensitivity
is deathly here, he knows,
though the ocean spreads below,
the ice above, on on it goes – the capture
and release of water in the hollows.
The problem is the cure –
the scouring and discharging sea.
Salt accrues in apertures –
the price of intimacy.

ORLANDO

(A Performance Piece for Two Poets Who Just Can't Believe It)

by Micheál McCann

1: We grieve for them.
2: Our hearts cry for them.
1: Think of all those ... people.
2: Brave people.
1: Strong people.
2: People who will never. Be. Forgotten.

Both: This. Was. A hate crime.

[Between segments both drop heads, hands by sides,
expressionless, to signify changing characters.]

– (i) "*Anxious Love*"

Child: It's a beautiful [gesture] night to be home.

Parent: Stay safe, don't drink too much,
[chuckle] Don't dance too hard.
Oh, and—

Both: Battery.

Child: Charged. Up to the top. All the way up.

Both: Up and up.

[They embrace]

Parent: Battery or not, I'll still find you.

– (ii) "*Refuge*"

Person: The strobe lights are so bright,
 So bright and, white.

Damn, they make everyone look like... look
 Like they're sparkling, you know? The colour
 is splitting, splintering,
it's fissuring into a rainbow of colour,
like the sun, kissing a gas leak.

Everyone looks so happy,
So happy to just, *be*, you know?

– (iii) "*Blinding*"

Person: One minute, I was dancing.
 The next, [takes a strengthening breath, looks
 painfully into the audience]
I was running.

– (iv) "*Please Help Me*"

Reporter: Ma'am, please, stay calm.

Mother: [emotive] I don't know where my son is,
 No one can tell me where my son is,

Reporter: I, – Is he inside?

Mother: He texted me, he's in the woman's bathroom,
 he's so scared.
 Please,
 Can't you help?
 Please.

– (v) "love u"

Mother: My baby, my baby. [plays text sound from phone]

Son: [panicked, breathless] i love u

Mother: [whispered] I love you too. [text sound]

Son: im in the bathroom

Mother: Hide, baby. Just hide. [text sound]

Son: im gonna die

Mother: [distressed] You can't. [more to herself] You haven't even started yet.
[looks directly to audience] They hadn't even started yet.

[Both speakers step back, bow their heads.]

[Spoken by one.]

1: The mass shooting and murder of 49, and the injuring of 53 LGBT people in Orlando, Florida, marked the deadliest attack on U.S. soil since the 9/11 attacks and marks the largest attack on the LGBTQ+ community in recent times.

Both: Rest in peace.

Of the Vein

by Paul Maddern

There beyond the green check lawn, the group
who keep to shade and doff their boaters
to the beauties but fix an eye or eight
on passers by to warn them of a boundary.

Says John to James: *Dates, figs and plums, old chum:
Look you there on deserts spread on a picnic blanket.*

Here one adds, as one must,
some rolling thunder.

James to John: *I hear, when it rains, Japanese ladies
invert their parasols to catch chrysanthemums.*

One elder wanders off,
as eventually one must.
From underneath a willow tree
he leads his boy to bed and to obituaries.

Matt to Tom: *When bird watching, I use opera glasses
to spy the best throated, don't you know.*

And so the code continues:
here two dashes, there a dot,
passed down the generations
or in lapel carnations pinned by practised hands.

Matt to James to John to Tom (perhaps in Greek with masks):
Four marble peacocks move and shape their own mythologies.

Here one adds, as one must,

some desperate laughter.

Tom to John to Matt to James (perhaps en masse they gesture):
Let's raise a finger to detractors.

Now, there beyond the green check lawn,
only parts survive. There there now.
A high brow, an elegant calf, a digit raised,
displayed like this. (And here I gesture.)

Or, as if there'd been a choice, a neck
set at an angle ripe for striking, muscles flexed
by an adoring sculptor, veins plumped
and fit for bursting. Green. Reclaimed.

I say: *I inherit the vainglorious.*

(from The Beachcomber's Report: Templar, 2010)

On Sexuality

by Carla Rowney

I want to talk about the school chaplain who told me I was on
a path to hell
when I was thirteen – which is also the number of countries in
the world where being gay is punishable by death
I want to write an ode to the boy with scars on his arms who
stopped coming to class
and then one day stopped existing altogether
I want to talk about the crater between love and understanding
that I toe the edges of every day when I call my mother.

I want to condemn the people who chose hate
and vote against equality and progress
I want to write about injustice and ignorance and the way
religion is used as an excuse
and how I hate turning to labels and stereotypes
for empowerment,
because just being who I am is too confusing for the people
around me.

But how can I write a poem about sexuality without writing
about her eyes
how they are the prettiest brown I have ever seen;
how we share the same fires that burn inside
but that with her, I can withstand the heat.
I cannot write about anything, these days, without saying that
that her name is a prayer
in my heathen mouth.

I want to write about the feeling of being wrapped in a flag
that isn't synonymous with violence

and cheering with fifty thousand other people on a Belfast
street

about belonging and believing and the quality make up advice
you get at Pride.

For the first time in my life, I want to write about the future.

I am learning that celebration is the most beautiful form of
commemoration.