

Black Bough issue 3, 'yolk', was dedicated to the Belfast poet, Geraldine O'Kane. Geraldine is the editor of @PoetryNI's *Panning for Poems*. We interviewed her about her poetry and projects.



When did you start as a serious writer?

I've written poems since I was in my teens but I probably didn't start really working at my poems until I was in early twenties when I joined an online forum called 'My Writers Circle'. They had a really good critiques page; you had to critique three poems for every one you placed up for critique. I learned not only to edit my own poems properly but also look critically at work others were producing as well.

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I was working on there for around two years before I was even ready to start sending any work out. I got rejected for maybe the first year and a half before I managed to start getting published. I wouldn't say I was a serious writer even then; it was probably when I was awarded the Arts Council Artist Career Enhancement Award in 2015/16 that I would have even dared to consider myself a serious writer with some kind of potential to become better.

How would you best describe your writing?

Emotional, I try to capture an emotional energy with my poems. I guess my Irish heritage also lends my storytelling style. You definitely wouldn't call my

Geraldine O'Kane

poetry 'academic'. I like to use the 'I' in my work but the 'I' is not always me. I feel it gives greater immediacy. My poetry usually has a focus on mental health; things that can enhance or detract from that fine balance we all need to find to stay mentally healthy. I often go to the darker places in life. I find it fascinating how we as a society cope and live with so much hurt; it's good to know, understand and be able to connect with the fact that we are not alone in any of these experiences. In many cases I would describe my writing as small!

"My debut collection comes out in June 2020 from *Salmon Poetry* so my time between now and then is definitely fixed on preparing for that."

Tell us about your work and projects.

I run *Poetry NI*, with my husband and co-poet, Colin Dardis. Within that, we have hosted for the last eight years 'Purely Poetry', our open mic, which runs on the first Friday of every month. We also edit between us two journals, *FourxFour*, an online poetry journal and *Panning*



for *Poems* an online and print micro poetry broadside. The former being Colin's baby and the latter being mine.

My debut collection comes out in June 2020 from *Salmon Poetry* so my time between now and then is definitely fixed on preparing for that. I'm hoping to take some time off work and do a little bit of a literary tour when the book comes out. I'm also working on a launch night spectacular, you only unveil your debut collection once! I'm working on writing Haibuns at the moment; small pieces of prose with a three line poem.

You edit NI's *Panning for Poems* project. This publication was the primary inspiration behind *Black Bough* micropoetry project.² How did your project come about?

I have written micropoetry back before it was even called micropoetry; it was initially referred to as small poetry and I didn't like that as a phrase at all. I like to think I coined micropoetry but I feel somewhere in the world someone else was calling it micro too and the world picked up on the synchronicity! I had a micropoem published in a broadsheet around 2003 (I still have it somewhere). The editors clearly had an all-singing, all-dancing printer as these tiny poems were printed every which way on it and I thought how cool is this!

I quickly discovered when it came to *Panning for Poems* that anything printed couldn't be like that

as we could only print double-sided, so we played around with different layouts. I really wanted something you could carry around in your pocket, use as a bookmark, leave for someone else to pick up. I'm also obsessed with anything tiny and had harboured ideas for many years of printing miniature books of poems, so this was the next best and affordable thing. There weren't many outlets to submit micropoems to, which was another reason behind starting PFP. Like all our *Poetry NI* projects we love to provide platforms for other people to share their work.

Why do you like micropoetry? What do you think this kind of poetry has to offer?

I love the ability to connect with the reader in the shortest amount of words possible and in that connection move them to feel something. I kind of think of micropoetry as the performance art of literature. It captures a moment in time. Even if it is seen by the eye again, it will capture something else entirely. Micropoetry is that moment that will always be different to anything else. Micropoetry makes poetry convenient and accessible. Who doesn't have 15 seconds to read a six-line poem? It's meditation, a breather in your pocket or at your fingertips!

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What inspires your writing?

Life, other people, other poets, my family, my friends (including the furry kind), the moon (I've been writing a series of micro moon poems as past few months). Music inspires me to write the rhythm of it.

Geraldine O'Kane was interviewed by Matthew M C Smith (October, 2019)