



COLIN DARDIS

When did you start as a serious writer?

I'm not too sure what a serious writer is: someone who tries to make a living out of writing? Someone who tries to build a public profile? Someone who spends a lot of time engaging with the writing community? I've identified as a poet since my mid-teens, I've adopted it as part of my persona, but I guess I only really started to try and get my work out in the public realm from about 2010-11.

Back then, I wasn't working due to a prolonged period of depression. Writing, and the act of submitting, was a way to try and anchor my sanity a little. I would go down to the library occasionally and email out a few places; for about six months, it was some of the only social engagement I got. And once you get a few acceptances and a bit of encouragement, that starts the ball rolling: you want more, you aim higher, people start putting your name and 'poetry' together.

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How would you best describe your writing?

Well, a theme throughout my work would be identity and mental health: where does the individual stand in a world that often doesn't make sense, and is often overwhelming? I struggle with depression and mental health, so it's natural that comes out in my work. But equally, a poem could be about a countryside walk, or a cup of tea, a news report. Any subject is valid.

If you're a musician, or in a band, people like to know what they are dealing with, and tack on genres and sub-

Black Bough issue 3, 'yolk', was part-dedicated to the poet, Colin Dardis. Colin is a sub-editor of PoetryNI's *Panning for Poems*. We caught up with him about all things micropoetry and his new book *The Dogs of Humanity*.

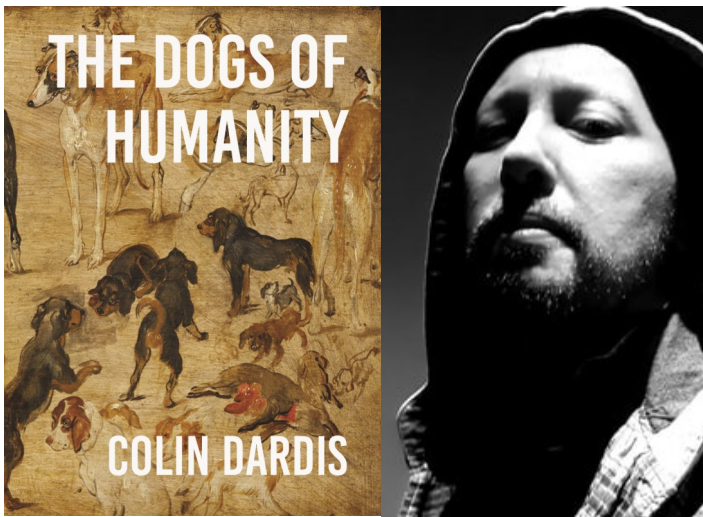
genres to your music. I don't want or expect that in poetry. I want poetry to hold many voices, many styles, and I think it's possible that multitudes could derive from one person.

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Tell us about your work and projects. It sounds like you're highly creative and extremely busy.

My wife Geraldine O'Kane and myself run *Poetry NI*, a kind of multimedia platform for poetry within Northern Ireland. We have a monthly open mic night in Belfast, and we edit *FourXFour*, an online poetry journal, as well as an offshoot of this, *Panning For Poems*, which focuses solely on micropoems. We also run the occasional workshop and standalone reading, and work sometimes with festivals, charities and anyone else who will have us really! We just want to provide platforms for people we know who are great at poetry and deserve an audience, as well as discovering new blood.

I've also recently started an ambient sound art project, D.A.R.D.I.S – Discord And Relative Depressions In Sound. As part of the project, I released an ambient soundtrack of sorts to accompany the new book, *The Dogs of Humanity*, designed as background sounds to listen to whilst reading the collection. It will be available to stream



and download from <https://dardis.bandcamp.com>.

You sub-edit NI's Panning for Poems project. This publication was the primary inspiration behind Black Bough micro-poetry project. How did your project come about?

That was really Geraldine's impetus; she is a big fan and advocate of micropoetry, writing it before it took off in a big way through social media. Admittedly, I was sceptically of it at first, believing these little bitesize pieces weren't big enough or deep enough, leaving me wanting more from the poems. But I have since been converted and see the power in brevity!

Geraldine wanted to do something akin to *FourXFour* for micropoems. I can't remember how we decided that each issue would be on one A4 sheet, designed to print out, fold up, and carry about with you. Possibly, we were inspired by the Emergency Poet, Deborah Alma, dispensing poetry prescriptions to people. A poem is something that can be consumed relatively quickly, and taken repeatedly, like a little literary pill. *Panning For Poems* tries to provide a similar service.

"Micropoetry is also good to keep the old poetic muscle supple and lean"

What have you learned from being a sub-editor of *Panning for Poems*? Has it improved your own writing?

It's always good to be exposed to more poetry and new names, so it's beneficial in that sense. You get poems that surprise you, that pack power into something tiny, like Bruce Lee's one inch punch. I guess it's helped my own writing to stay on topic, to

know what sometimes the packing you get around the core of a poem is superfluous, that it's okay to cut straight to the centre of things.

Micropoetry is also good to keep the old poetic muscle supple and lean. If I feel I haven't written in a while, and want to try and get something down on a page, I'll allow myself to write little snippets, often just a series of three-line thoughts. It's easier than saying, okay, today I am going to write a sonnet, or a villanelle. Sometimes it's a warm-up exercise, sometimes that's all you have to give, and it can be enough.

For fans of *Black Bough* or *Panning for Poems*, who perhaps favour the micropoem, does your collection contain any shorter work

Yes! There are indeed a few shorter pieces. For *Dogs*, I wanted to adopt a simpler lexicon and vernacular that I applied in *the x of y*, so short form poetry is really good for these, and to ensure you stay focused on the matter in hand. There's also a translation of *Blackbird of Belfast Lough*, a 9th century Irish poem, which is already a very well-known short poem which has been translated many times before. But still, I fancied my own crack of the whip for that one.

Will you be touring / gigging to promote you new book?

The book launched in August at the Eastside Arts Festival in Belfast. I read alongside Ali Whitelock in Waterstone's Belfast in September, and I'm currently lining up a few other events – we're having a Poetry NI showcase as part of the Bounce! Festival, focusing on work by poets who self-identify as having a disability, so I'll be a part of that too. All dates will be on my website at colindardispoet.co.uk.

I'm not wholly comfortable with putting my own name out there, I like being able to share platforms with other poets and give people an opportunity to be heard. It's a lot easier to promote someone else that yourself, but for this book, I need to overcome that!

The Dogs of Humanity can be purchased at
Print: <https://www.flyonthewallpoetry.co.uk>
Kindle: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Dogs-Humanity-Chapbook-Colin-Dardis-ebook/dp/B07TCBCZ64/>