

# Fun Poems from Wales

**Dylan Jones** who has a poem in the Welsh issue of *Agenda* and also in the Welsh online supplement here.

## **Gardener**

Each day I rise to murder the living;  
with blade & knife  
and flaying yellow twine  
I march through continents of gardens  
creating a world in my own image.  
Small, unseen things  
flee or are broken;  
their unique world I tear apart  
unremittingly.  
Are you needful?  
Are nettles rising in rashes  
across heaped, unbroken wilderness?  
Does the bramble push  
toward an unchallenged dominion?  
Call me. Evenings are best.  
The Slayer, The Impaler,  
The Creator of Empires,  
Genghis of Suburbia.  
The man who waits to satisfy your desire  
is daily for hire.

## **Redstart**

Mr Quiver, Mr Foxtail,  
in black highwayman's mask  
edged in white – stand and deliver!

Fly-fishing on fence-posts,  
dashing under derelict eaves –  
your wife is the drab one

she lacks your fizzle,  
your razzamatazz, your drama;  
only the tails match.

Dapper Mr Slate-Back  
with your under-water whistle –  
wheet-wheet, whee-tic-tic

### **Buzzin Fly**

How you talk!  
The same phrase  
over & over  
no commas or stops -  
only the relief of altitude  
takes you away  
till your droning  
is only a hint bordering  
the silence.

Master  
of persistence – taming  
the relentless task  
round & round  
with no trace of being glum -  
if inks or smokes  
could trail you  
what crazy insistent spirographs  
you'd notch up – what  
remorseless tapestry of knots!  
Buzzin fly- the only question is 'Why?'

**Idris Caffrey**'s work appears in the Welsh issue of *Agenda*.

### **The Not So Obvious Welshman**

I am an exile,  
speaking a foreign language  
in a strange country  
where I've found work.  
I didn't take with me  
the tenor trills  
of a male voice choir  
or the skills  
of running with a ball.  
I never mined the black seams  
or warned of hell  
from a dusty old pulpit.  
I was never a farmer  
scratching away  
at the thin soil  
on the rolling hills.  
But I am Welsh,  
I am Welsh!  
Cut me and see  
the poem running  
through my veins.

## **Eating Welsh Cakes in Newport**

I sit on the cathedral wall  
staring out over the bay  
where the pale sun  
is playing games with the sea.

The city sprawls below me  
but it is not these scenes  
that fill my mind.  
It is the Welsh cakes -  
shop-bought, dry and stale,  
nothing like I remember,  
the taste of so much  
that has changed

**Marc Harris**'s work appears in the Welsh issue of *Agenda*.

## **The Winning Score**

*For Shane Williams*

The wing's feet  
stitch a seam to the line –  
zip-fast, jinking run,  
linking  
unzipping the crowd  
who,  
shrouded in the flames of passion  
fashion a roaring pocket of sound.

*Note:* Shane Williams, a Welsh international winger, lit up the world of rugby union in 2008 when he was named International Rugby Board player of the year. Rugby Union is an intrinsic part of Welsh culture. He has become an icon of the sport.

The lines in the poem are written to mimic the mesmeric, sidestepping action Shane often displays when he scores a try.

**John Barnie** has three poems in the Welsh issue of *Agenda*.

### **About the Poet**

Let's publish his  
leftovers, somebody said, and  
call it Gleanings; or  
Scrapings, said a second; what

about Peelings, suggested  
a third, or Droppings; a thin  
book, like stragglers in the forest  
limping among trees after

the Grand Army had passed  
banging its drums, leaving  
village ruins and old  
women in rutted country roads.

### **BAARRPP!**

BAARRPP! goes the Patient  
Appointment board on the wall  
commanding Ieuan Evans to proceed

to Doctor Griffiths, Room Eleven;  
BAARRPP! for Nia Morris;  
in between each call the board is blank

as if contemplating darkness,  
or a message trickles across its brow  
D.o.n.'t. f.o.r.g.e.t. t.o. g.i.v.e. y.o.u.r. n.a.m.e...

BAARRPP! it wakes up with a jerk  
for Adam Connolly...; most look healthy,  
and that girl's pretty; but some

may already harbour Dead Sea fruit within  
and will taste its ashes when the doctor  
reads from his on-screen notes;

BAARRPP! now it's me; my name  
in ruby dripping fire for all to see,  
as I lurch up quickly from my seat.

**Stephen Knight** has published four collections of poems, including a pamphlet about his home town of Swansea and, most recently, a book for children, *Sardines and Other Poems* (2004). His novel, *Mr Schnitzel*, was the 2001 Arts Council of Wales Book of the Year.

### **Friday, After School**

, and everything is wrong.  
Locked out, you try to sing  
your bestest song  
aloud, but your voice is cracking.

Light leaves the sky, and the air  
cools perceptibly until  
the garden pond is somewhere  
black and still.

Your shorts really short  
+ your shoes 1 size  
too small = you, distraught.  
So, you rub your eyes.

At midnight, breezes blow  
the long grass back and, tall  
as you are, you don't know  
what to do, who to call.

A little bored then, you chew  
your stripey tie until it's wetter  
than your feet. Trust you  
to know no better:

waiting on a square of lawn  
level with your knees?!  
— Waiting for the dawn  
now, eager to please

or, rather, ready to behave  
yourself (albeit wounded  
and in need of sleep,  
new clothes, a shave) . . .

## Elegy: A User's Guide

Of the many challenges death produces,  
The creative response has a number of uses;  
Not least the chance to earn extra cash.  
Take measures to avoid seeming rash  
By, for instance, making notes at the deathbed  
But only writing when the loved one's dead.  
Never forget: he/she might recuperate,  
So it's always best to wait. †

When to begin is your choice, not mine  
— You may, for example, have a deadline —  
But I would point out that indecent haste  
Calls into question your grief *and* taste.  
Why hurry to put your elegy to bed?  
A year from now the dead will still be dead.

Buy a ledger, thick and faintly lined,  
Then put all other books from your mind:  
Eg, Tennyson, Alfred, Lord. Dunn, Douglas.  
Remove paintings. Make floors rugless  
And open windows until your breath is visible.  
Think intensely. Write nothing risible.

The skin plastic? The jaw-line wrong?  
Turn these and other observations into song,  
Why not, to capture something new.  
But think: *every detail leads back to you.*

The rule if someone well-known dies is  
Every passing acquaintance elegises,  
So ask yourself: What in particular have I  
To offer? A barely articulate why-oh-why?  
Some gossip? (NB Endeavour not to use  
Elegy to point-score or disabuse.)  
Granted, what you have is how you feel,  
But protracted grief holds little appeal  
And few will care about the state you're in.

Remember the following before you begin:  
However great your loss, no matter  
How frequently your teardrops pitter-patter  
You will come to know, sooner or later,  
That your subject's loss is greater.

**Duncan Bush** has two poems in the Welsh issue of *Agenda*.

### **Men's Room**

The beautiful stalls  
And cubicles of the Los  
Angeles Public

Library (slabbed gray  
Marble, with good chrome fittings)  
Bespeak not grandeur

But proletarian  
Worth, and date from an age when  
Knowledge could still be

Found in books, and came  
A right. (Though why has no one  
Yet written a book

Or lapidary  
Monograph on *Great Toilets*  
*And Urinals?* – Or,

*Men's Lavatories*  
*Of Europe and the U.S.:*  
*A Personal Guide?*

If ever they do,  
Those of the Los Angeles  
Public Library

Should claim a place – with  
Tasteful full-colour plates  
In illustration

Of the lovely light  
That slants through the frosted glass  
On mornings of heat

When it's cool in here  
Among marble, porcelain  
And trickling water. . .)

## **West 86th Street**

A style I've always  
Admired: that of elderly  
Well-off Jewish men

Who live on New York's  
Upper West Side, near the Park,  
In tall apartment

Buildings with doormen  
And foyers and residents'  
Committees, and who

Wouldn't set a foot  
On the sidewalk in winter  
Without first donning

A good overcoat,  
Trilby, tasselled scarf, and  
Taking leather gloves

(one unworn, and gripped  
lightly in the other prior  
to pulling it on,

urbane, urban - just  
pausing to assess the day,  
the street, the city).