

'Glitches of Mortality', by Graham Fulton

Review by Will Burns



Graham Fulton (b. 1959) has been a poet, a publisher and a live performer for over three decades. Born in Hampton, Fulton moved with his family to Paisley in the early 1960s. He had a prolific 2018 (his sixteenth collection of poetry) is one of four books he published that year, alongside (Controlled Explosion Press),

(Penniless Press), and (Clochoderick Press). This collection is dedicated to Fulton's fellow Itinerant Poets Jim Ferguson and Bobby Christie, and is divided into three sections, First Glitch, Second Glitch and Last Glitch, comprising 65 poems. The glitches found in Fulton's poetry occur when everyday

life is interrupted by a surge of poetic insight: trips to the supermarket, journeys on public transport, drinks in the pub, and a lost earring are a few examples of the seemingly day-to-day circumstances that Fulton inverts and elevates in this funny and poignant collection.

Like his erstwhile mentor Tom Leonard, Fulton's poetry insists on the universality of local experience. Paisley is the setting, and its people the protagonists, of several of the poems in . The collection opens with System, a poem that follows two people in anoraks from Paisley who are bewildered to find

Fulton's poetry alludes to the shifting landscapes of his hometown and the erasure of traditional working-class culture without moralizing, and also succeeds in defamiliarizing his local area to the extent that it becomes a different planet with alien(ated) residents. The anoraked audience inspect the instructions on the exercise machine:

Specific Paisley sites form the backdrop to *The Anchor Snails*, *Dunn Square* and *Saucel Hill*. *The Anchor Snails* sees a moment of reflection in the shadow of the town's historic Anchor thread mills as the speaker narrates the journey of A quartet of four-inch snails / without shells / or slugs as they thirstily make their way across the pavement / as wide as a desert, arriving at the poem's conclusion that takes quiet pleasure in the machinations of life as they serenely follow / the journey of their lifespans (the sheep in *Sheeps* are similarly wandering through their gentle routines). In *Dunn Square*, Fulton turns his gaze to the gardens at Paisley Cross and the statue / of a woman / naked from the waist up / with her erotic bronze tits / anointed with / pigeon shit. But no one else pays attention to the statue as they sweep past / on their way to Argos. Even the child on the

although the poem begins bleakly: it s a brutal cosmos, we die and we re gone .

, , and
are some of the films to which the poems in the collection respond. In *Jane Hair* , Bertha (Charlotte Brontë s madwoman in the attic) is replaced by the woman who walks the corridors / of our special residence / at midnight / and dawn / and all the time in-between / like Rochester s doolally bride . *There s No Need for Swearing in Poetry!* pokes fun at the canon, and sends up the divergence in registers between swear-word-speckled speech and the works of Tennyson, Wordsworth, Keats, Eliot and Shakespeare, creating comical mash-ups like:

As well as bringing together different discourses to humorous effect, the poem also subtly interrogates the potentially sexist treatment of women in canonical poetry:

The question of what constitutes appropriate poetic language is also taken up in the poems written in Clydeside Scots. In *This is Thursday* , an overheard speaker negotiates a phone call: hear mi oot Kevin will yi jist hear mi oot / yir drunk yiv bin drinkin since Sunday [] am fed up bein used az a punchbag a canni take it . In *Paisley to Glasgow Ten in the Morning* , someone totally fuckin steamin is not allowed off the bus until they retrieve their lost ticket. While it is welcome in these poems to have the authority of standard English interrogated in the same *Good Style* as Leonard, it is ambiguous whether the substance and domestic abuse references are an astute assessment of working-class social problems, or whether they contribute to the stereotype that casts aspersion on people who speak this way.

The glitches of the book s title give pause, momentarily staving off impending

death, and these disturbances manifest in the content, form and style of the poems. For instance, in *The Castle* by Franz Kafka, the speaker reads the same sentence repeatedly while distracted

In *EEGH EEGH EEGH EEGH EEGH EEGH EEGH EEGH EEGH*, the sound of a car alarm interrupts the text of the poem itself:

The poems also literally give pause. The cover of the collection is a melting clock in reference to Dali's *Soft Watch*, suggesting the surreal nature of the glitches to be found in the book, as well as the theme of broken, halted, and imagined time. In *Clock in a Shop*, there's a large clock / propped against the wall / with the time stopped / at twenty-two minutes to seven, while in the eponymous *Glitches of Mortality*, the speaker takes a watch whose battery is died into the *InShops of Paisley*. The poet reckons that he won't get any older /

My organs won't rot / my head won't collapse / more than it stupidly already has /
My heart / won't surrender itself / to the past.

The poems are generally comic in tone, but this makes those that are not primarily humorous all the more affective. In *Chloe and Huw*, the poet mourns
The baby we never had who

Fulton belongs to a contemporary Clydeside canon that is characterised by a darkly-tinged surreal and absurd humour that counterpoints moments of seriousness and ripples out from ostensibly everyday experiences, elevating them to profound heights. In this sense, his poetic vignettes can be likened to the short stories of Chris McQueer and Limmy's TV and internet sketches.

will appeal to new readers as well as those already acquainted with Fulton's distinct, thoughtful and hilarious brand of verse.

Pindrop Press, 2018.

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Fulton has the gift of playfully blending high and pop culture: in *Larkinesque*, the speaker is more concerned / with the Welsh competitor / of Chinese descent on *MasterChef* / called Larkin than with the author of , although the poem begins bleakly: it's a brutal cosmos, we die and we're gone . , and

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