

Poetry Series

Steve Downes
- poems -

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Steve Downes(25/1/73)

Steve Downes Biography

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Steve Downes was born in Drogheda Co. Louth, Ireland in 1973. He has been writing poetry and prose since 1992 and has been publishing and performing his work for over 20 years.

Steve's debut Novel is Cosmogonic Marbles (available on Amazon @

Join Cosmogonic Marbles of Facebook @

Steve's plays produced, performed and given awards are:

Until Morning 1995

Voices 1996

For God and Country 1997

The Creator 2006

Steve has poems and stories published in magazines and anthologies in Ireland, the UK and the USA. His poetry books to-date are:

The Pagan Field 1996

Celtic Echoes 2000 (with Tom Hodgins)

Side Angles 2005 (with Roger Hudson)

Urbania 2010

Steve Downes was educated at NUI Maynooth, where he received a BA in Classics and Anthropology in 2001 and an MA in Research Anthropology in 2003

Steve currently lives somewhere in Ireland (he's not exactly certain where himself)

Blistering In Soho

The babble of streaming tongues
in the courtyards and parks
littered with tanning bodies
lunch-time escape artists
with one hour's reprieve
from cardboard walls

Pretty girls by the score
eager boys eyeing more
shady doorways offering
sweet respite for thirsty eyes
summer coats sinners and saints
evenly in Soho's square eyes

Steve Downes

Christmas At Christchurch

I feel translucent
a man of marble skin
as if dreaming my motions
every step a tread in water
each reach of my hand
a ghost grip touches
but nothing holds and yet
I clutch these stones and
iron spear barricades
as a sea-snail would the bedrock
for this is my folly
to hug close the masonry of charity

I feel nothing
no remorse runs down my arms
to my useless wrists
no rage
twists my mouth into rabid snarl
no pleasure lifts my face
from the footfalls
of those celestial beings
bustling above

not even a soaked black wall
on which I am a shadow
penetrates my deadened hide

I feel grotesque
I am a gargoyle of flesh and bone
sown into the fabric of these
flowers with closed doorways
that form broken arch homes
for broken things
but

no longer am I broken
I have embraced
the cold and hunger
of my mouth and my soul

I am free of this place

Yet

here I am still

here for you to see

if you can stomach

to see me

Steve Downes

Commuter Widow

Trainspotting
isn't fun
not when she's dead tired
arms of jelly
ears full of tears
Baby wants
Baby wants
pick the kids up
from school
strawberry jam
sandwiches uneaten
traffic jam
Ma I'm hungry
Baby wants
Baby wants
make the dinner
bake the cake
bun in the oven
bending over
nightly shapes
the body pays the price
of new-born joy
Headache
joyless
thankless
throb
9 to 5
paced out
on the kitchen floor
supermarket
Chicken would be good
Baby wants sweets
5 o'clock
tick tock
train halfway
baby straps
double check
Throb
in at seven

should be six-thirty
commuter widow waits
for the daily rebirth
a partnership
What a day I've had love
he shallowly sits
TV
dinner
bed
make the shapes
if both are able
How did it come
to this
nearly dawn
where's his tie
Used to be a woman
intelligent
bright
outgoing ☐
He used to be a man
wide-eyed
unpredictable
caring
No time to care now
we used to be together
in this
this mess
baby just wants a hug

the question you didn't answer
what's left
?
when reality robs us of dreams
what do you see in me
lined
fatter
turning sour
at being cheated
and then depressed when
I realise I cheated myself
out of a better life
what's left

over

?

what do you see

when you look at me

settlement

or

excitement

is it still there

is it still detectable

after all that has passed

baby wants

baby wants

baby wants a hug

Steve Downes

Cybernoia Cafe

Sleeping eyes open to sobriety from engrossed lethargy
A medicated shroud of self-indulgence lifted momentarily
Voices chatter back

But not forth

Each earbox buzzing with ethertalk
One sided conversations blended into a muddle of nonsensical gesticulations
While rapid thumbs tap out nanospeak in a series of electronic grunts

The caveman has found microfire

Total immersion – 2D/3D – sub-reality

The second Prometheus flame engulfing all fleshly fuel and sanity

Until only 1's and 2's remain

Tongues d-evolved to 'positive' and 'negativity'

No more maybes or what ifs in the cold circuitry

Language

Re-branded – renewed – re-booted

Listen around to the solitary mouths pounding out

Numbers for words formed to abbreviate

Depreciate

Relate and

Relegate

What is excess is irrelevance

LOL

Laugh out loud – no one's heeding at any rate

All eyes are pricked

All ears are peeled for infor-gossip

Infor-knowledge

Infor-nation

No human to human communication in a room of mind

Hooked up

Logged on

Clued in but checked out

Beep goes the screen – blank goes the sound of modernation

Game Over ... Man!

Time for termination

Steve Downes

Darren's Room

A window to a wall
a dull council grey that exists nowhere in nature
a few square feet of glass
dividing what is inside from the wider world
retina thin and translucent
letting in the march gloom
half-illuminating his mind
a forty watt light not enough to set a fire
but yet too much for ignorance
too much for quiet blissful darkness
the embers are smouldering
burning black holes
in his face
in his brain
in his soul
he feels that soul move
a half-hearted heart beat
a foetus kick in the belly of the self
that is why he broke
that is why he beat
that is why he scream
that is why he drank the poison
that is why he snorted the dust
that is why
he can not articulate
he can not voice the pain in whispers or words
he can not imagine the images in colours
the smoke from the ash is too thick
chokes his eyes
makes blind the metaphors he would
sing from his sore cut throat
and deafens the song he would paint on the wall
in brilliant screams
a window in a wall to a wall
he can only see through it
to what is really there
he can not see past it
not today
on his own

not ever

Steve Downes

In Answer To Your Question

It is not a hallmark day
nor a chocolate festival
nor plastic paddy pageant
not even a pagan sunrise
appropriated by Christists
none of these things are sacred to me
It is not a victory march
or personal triumphal arch
built in dreams
not yet realised
Supremacy means little to me
Nor is it a love
a lover
or a streetlight perversion
All are visceral within me

It is a day from my youth
repeated now in these words
in this half-way-house of age
It is the day of my repression
It is the day of my realisation
and release
a bad time
and yet a good day to find yourself
a stone day
Solid Cold Honest
the stuff that can build cathedrals of mere men
a day to face the truth
a day to overcome or succumb
to the forces of mortality

It is today
And when the sun sets for me
I will be your tomorrow

Steve Downes

In Zombia

I shuffle like a bad movie extra
around the cold dark kitchen
you know the type of place
written by a hack and furnished by a ham
only an orange street light illuminates monsters
a devildog from the toaster's shadow and a
scaly gremlin in the sink of dirty dishes
the soundtrack is provided by
a not-too-distant motorway strip
wailing banshee-like and the refrigerator
humming mindlessly because he has
nothing left to say to me after all these years
This is the realm of the lidless eyes
where the Sandman
like an evil Santa Claws stealing the gifts of
drowsiness and yawns leaps from rooftop to
rooftop keeping you alert for fear
downing warm milk and hoping for good dreams
dire dreams
any dreams
even mares with flames and toasters behind
I pack my eyeballs off to the bedroom
where the sheets have somehow pulled themselves
back in a sarcastically smug manner
and facedown flop into the soft infuriating
fluffy madness

Steve Downes

Incomplete Circles

A tiny push
Just a tip of a finger
As the exhale of a humming bird

Barely discernible
And yet it is enough
To change all from white to black

All that has gone before
Has gone quickly
Without fuss or fury

To wait for that final breath
To watch him
As once he watched over me

If I could find a circle
A way to loop life
As a water-rath from a heaved stone

But I must be content
With what a fleeting moment
A single human life is

To begin and live and end
As a tiny push
On the surface of the water

First Published 'Drogheda Writes' 2009

Steve Downes

Osamu's Mirror

See my face
an imperfect window on this spirit
slivers of my likeness
on shattered and bruised glass

Touch my body
a perfect shell
for my artistic ego
a woman's dream in a man-slave
cut
beat and tie
punish and bleed for
me for my
for our beauty

See my mask
a theatre dance
on a private stage
I have given my very life
to play-out this role

Touch this mirror
cold
like a polished lake of ice
reflect my hand
my black eye
my lover's poison veil
ecaf desrever ym

Steve Downes

Questioning

Ugly poetry
sub-urban
interwoven emotions
with car crash image

 imagine

A time when nature
and beauty
were all to pen
and muse

 suppose

Is it my failing
these unrhyming rants
these charmless doggerel
dogged though they are
still

ugly

☐

Or has the world gone this bad?

Steve Downes

Return To Tara

There is no return of the Kings
the sun will never travel from west to east
the Augur will never see the blackbirds
fly backward across a windswept hill
in Meath
under a cold Irish summer
standing alone exposed to the elements
upon the immortal mound that keeps
no hostages only memories and ghosts
one and the same to me now
over the halfway mark in life and
still their chill
scent
and whisper
make me smile
even if it were all to end too soon
and it always ends too soon
some days were worth the mortality

Steve Downes

Rule And Regulations Of Aardvark Poetry

Never begin a poem with the words

'And Suddenly ...'

Or

'Aardvark'

Or

'Because'

Why? I asked my would-be-mentor
in my childish innocence

"Because it's the rules! " he barked.

*

"What way will I start it? "

asked the extremely bored boy

My voice

that now of authority

replied "Try Aardvark."

"Why? "

"Why not! " I whispered

The boy

slightly befuddled and curious

scrawled on his school copybook

'A Poem

Aardvark ' he began to think in creativity

Steve Downes

Slumped On The Shoulders Of Dwarves

I am vanquished by pressure unseen
my lungs are rasped by air unclean
and my eyes are bagged
by images and magazines obscene

Obsessively I repeat my day
the day is obsessive in its repetition
obsessively
repetitious
did I mention my day is like that?

I am held aloft to the stars
by those who never look up
from the toil of TV's convenience
here I slump too exhausted to protest
too proud to prostrate and too foolish
to be happy

These systems we have to make us Gods
have made us children
they look down on us
from their giants and laugh
as the jolly jackasses beneath

Those beaten by stress
Or stressed at the prospect of defeat
Come
Slump with me
On the shoulders of dwarves
While we rely on technological wonders
And wonder why we have achieved nothing

Steve Downes

Something Wonderful [first Published: Urbania 2010]

Amid the madness of eyes on stalks

 Wagging tongues drying out in the bluster of their
 own chatter

 Up-shake walks of boys stepping out as girls

 and girls tough as boys

 tattoo parlour of colour needles the scene against

 Soho coffee shop backdrop

the good

and the bad

and those of us who are both

perhaps all of us are paradoxes

We move as birds flock

to and from the drudgeries and pleasures

one to the other

back and forth

 anticipating or dreading the alternations

Here

 they tell me

the coffee is good

but irrelevant to the location

certainly irrelevant to me

Something Wonderful has come

come to pass

or come to realisation

 perhaps the sipper doesn't know the difference

 and couldn't really care

Something Good

Sweat

is an addiction

not administered but absorbed through the senses

as magnificent as the microcosms of creatures passing by

too long can be spent here and roots may grow down

finish the cup and leave

A little brown circle on the heavy china saucer

beside it a little too much change

and a flyer

for some destination of moral question

to the arms of Something Wonderful

f̄orget the oscillations of the flock
f̄or a few smitten moments

Steve Downes

The Fire

Silhouettes against a kaleidoscope
fast-motion dancers on the stage floor
the DJ spins another web of indecipherable drivel
and the hunt begins again
another great exhibition of sexual instincts –
animalistic – boys and girls
all hues – peacocks in Ben Sherman shirts
all persuasions – no barriers
playing 'catch me' the game of youth
and in the corners
dark shadowed asides
lovers and loners and
regretters sipping vodka and wondering where the
time went

I sip my vodka
and eye the exit measuring my time to leave by the
level of my glass
unexpectedly a spark
a flame that has not glowed for decade
almost forgotten – turned to ash
her eyes are fixed on me
how long without approaching
we stare across the madness – hearts thumping with
old excitements
teenage kicks and kisses remembered
tasted
enacted in the fire
her head turns
of course there would be another
how many did it take to forget me?
after all
a dozen lovers I mistreated to bury her
she smiles
I reciprocate and understand
you can't burn the same fuel twice
not even if we wanted to
she falls away from view
into the silhouettes

I think I'll order another vodka
and dance
□

Steve Downes

The Ghost Of Saint Anthony [first Published: The Pagan Field 1996]

Once I was a man like you
Strong in the heart and mind
Now my spectre drifts the sands of Egypt these sixteen
Centuries
Across the tombs of Pharaohs
From Alexandria and the sea into the desert mountains
Where only insects live and hermits come to die

No longer do I feel the burning Sun of Purgatory on
my bare back
No longer does the word of God wet my dry lips
No more do I hope for resurrection
I only pray for eternal sleep to end my torment

My shade counts the sands of time
Moving as parches water
Through its fleshless fingers
The carrion have abandoned my bleached bones
A scorpion has nested in my eye socket
No answer echoes in my skull to the
Frozen scream of my broken jaw

I am alone
The only ghost in a godless land
I pass through a stone crucifix and Sun Gods
On ancient plaster
Neither have redeemed my soul
So I will walk the Breath of Egypt
Until the end of the world

Steve Downes

The Moon King

Poor little Moon King
trapped inside a gilded cage
within the marble prison walls
the cage is painted
and the marble held up with balsa wood
a fake fairy-tale façade
castles in the clouds
ladies in classical poses
battles never won
nor even fought
locked in frozen frescos
as trapped as the poor little Moon King
forever
insulated from the cruel sisters
modernity & society
having anything you want
except what you really need
the sisters cannot let you bare
flesh and soul
crying to sleep
in the silken cradle
an empty shell
an unnatural fondness forbidden
yet tasted behind the closed door
a self-deluded love lost among luxuries
□
Oh Ludwig how you wished so hard
the sun would shine
on your chivalric dreams
but
alone lamenting at the balustrade
you are the Moon King
forever in plaster and paint
cloud-covered
but shined
bag-ridden highness
hiding behind a pile of stones and pretty
colours
poor little Moon King

Steve Downes

The Pagan Field

Here in a place of Gods
without worship
stones without mortar and
graves stripped of souls

tourist silence hangs itself
web-like
from each jagged edge
air clings with stale memories

to each niche of ancient art
river swirls on naked eye
suns are born and moons consumed
by dark

the dead have abandoned their graves

ashes to dust
they are blown by an aimless wind
distant from the tombs of men
without prayer without names

Steve Downes

The Wordsmith's Anvil

B e a t t h e a n v I l l I t w I l l s u r r e n d e r d r e a m s

Information illocution inclination integration imperfection indecision
Nihilist narcissist nullificationist nudist novelist nonobjectivist nircist
Trecento two☐ live tombolo tornado terrazzo telephoto to thereunt
O obtainment within a word ordainment omnipotent outfit overneat o
Tolith ☐yish to be an utterance thirtieth tunesmith therewith teach
Harmonise humanlike heartache hence haywire haste hostile hotline h
Eckle evoke emote elude evade exterminate eliminate exhume exhale

Dogmatize diffusive dilute defuse devise deduce decree dare duplicat
Entrap entrap entrap entrap entrap entrap entrap entrap entrap entrap
Pestilent pessimist put into the prefect poet pussyfoot publicist poin
T through toyish touch depth of ourself tough trillionth truth triumph
H hereto hidalgo hello☐together we become one hello hitherto hood
Oo offshoots offences offcasts offal offhanded offerings offstage of
Fpring forgetting forbidding foreboded fragments for facade for fear

Onto umbo undergo uptempo ultramicro unmacho upto upgo underdo
Unilinear upsetter unkindler upstager uprooter upstarter unpopular upb
Raiders reads ☐touch reels riles rills rifts romps rules rusts ruins rouse
Sabotage stifle☐bf the surreal simple source subtle serenade succuba
Excel extol exposal I give you dreams expel exordial extemporal exile
Le temporal ordial impel admit secret blame fail exile exiled exiled li
Fe forgo I am you will dream create believe bestows wonderful life

B e a t t h e a n v I l l I t w I l l s u r r e n d e r d r e a m s

Steve Downes

Writing Under Water

Waiting for that sweet moment
When I break the surface and gasp
A lungful of clean air
When words mean what I want them to mean
When they say what's in my eyes
And not the lies on my face
The public face worn as a thin skin veneer
Exploiting those last moments before
Sinking down again
Back into heaviness
Down to another blank page
Washed clean
Struggling and writing under water

Steve Downes