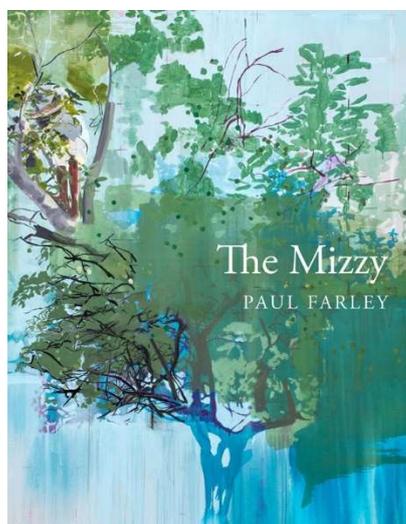


The Mizzy **by Paul Farley**



Paul Farley was born in Liverpool in 1965 and studied at the Chelsea School of Art. He has published five collections of poetry with Picador, *The Boy from the Chemist is Here to See You* (1998), which won the Forward Poetry Prize for Best First Collection, *The Ice Age* (2002), which was shortlisted for the T. S. Eliot Prize, and won the Whitbread Poetry Award, *Tramp in Flames* (2006), *The Atlantic Tunnel: Selected Poems* (2010) and *The Dark Film* (2012). He was named as a Next Generation Poet in 2004. He is Professor of Creative Writing at Lancaster University.

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Reviews

Paul Farley is now widely recognized as one of the leading English poets writing today. As usual it is impossible to summarise the book in terms of theme, as his interests are too various: there's an air of 'the innocence of childhood' being viewed through the corrective lens of worldly middle age, though, and also of mid-life, its creeping self-consciousness and decrepitude, and the distortions of perception that attend it; confusing encounters with tech, modernity and its accelerated rate of change; satirical excursions critiquing the way business and digital communications have debased language. Farley is also interested as ever in the peripheral and marginal and no-man's lands – the lives of others, and their strange occupations; the birds and unsung-by-the-pocket-guides fauna and flora you miss. 'Selfie with Sea Monsters' encapsulate one of poetry's most capacious and eclectic imaginations. (Pan Macmillan)

'The Mystery'

There's a funfair in the small bones of my ears.

It's pitched up in the deep olfactory bulb,
in the crosshairs of my eyes. It lights the marrow
of my long bones, with a hoop for every year
it turned this park into a diamond district,
each slow excited stride from ride to shy
beyond the goldfish that would grow a bib
of mould in time, beyond the smell of straw
and caramel and two-stroke generators.
Even the big wheel still turns inside me,
though the thing itself has long since gone for scrap,
and every bulb's blown to an iron-grey dust.

You must still hang there in the moving night,
unaware this blank machinery
is doing such dark work, until a slight
catch in the throat and shiver passing through
which we call déjà vu. A thought like that
can swing one of two ways: either you feel
yourself the very centre of all things—
the girls laughing, the cinder toffee, the bulbs
like hot rivets holding the dusk around you—
or you can feel the cold all of a sudden,
a mouse inside a town hall clock's movement
frozen before the iron strike of the hour,

and all at once the fluke, the joke, of being alive
lies open and exposed, a sheet-steel sky
shutting the furnace door on Wavertree,
the spoke that holds him pointing towards nothing,
an axle groan rising about the music.
And so he hangs there in the moving night,
knowing the big wheel has to set him down,
a stop/start through fifteen degrees of arc;
that the man who took his money will take his hand
like any boatman would; but he stays aboard
a while longer, for one more go around,
and leaves me standing in an empty park.

'Moorhen'

Shy, maternal, unknowable
haunter of water edges, bearing a red
shield like a cross. There is no danger here.

Primitive three-pronged claw
designed for the packed mud and its sheen

of algae: a print from central casting.

Prey-bird in your forest of reeds,
a few scene-changes from being flightless,
you could walk back there again.

And why stop there?
Keep going, little moorhen.
You carry in your heart the code

to scale up, to sprout true teeth,
to rise with the ruby eyes of a dinosaur
from the lake where we hire boats by the hour.

'The Keeper of Red Carpets'

Come in. Please be careful. Mind your step.
He keeps them in the dark.
It stinks, I know. Like a stable or a paddock.
Perspective slackens like an ankle rope

in a gallery. Carpets sleep off the world,
digesting its flash and glamour,
its royal visits and movie premiers.
He's dragged last night's returns in, tired and soiled,

to see to their cigarette burns, studs of gum.
Always the indents of heels:
moneys bitemarks leave a trail.
A few lie about – unfiled – like ruin columns.

Armed with a dandy brush he settles them down
with a beating and a groom,
and talks to them when the stain removal fumes
fuddle him and make his eyes run.

Safe now from so much as a glance,
he sleeps among them in the racks.
The stockroom phone is ringing off the hook.
Somebody's always looking to make an entrance.

Discussion Ideas

- What's the optimum age to go to a funfair? Is 'The Mystery' a poem of youth or age? When was the last time you went to a funfair? Did you have fun?

- What other funfairs do you know of in poems, novels, films, tv shows, other cultural creations? What happens there? Is there a difference between British funfairs and ones in other countries?
- <https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/bird-a-z/moorhen/> - why does a scientist record the moorhen's details, why does a poet? Do they share the same impulse to record or not? Who are their records for?
- The people hiring boats by the hour in 'Moorhen' – do you think they enjoyed themselves that day?
- Is <https://www.standard.co.uk/topic/red-carpet> a site you'd ever visit? What are you looking for if so? What are you avoiding if not?

Other books by Paul Farley

The Boy from the Chemist is Here to See You (Picador, 1997)

The Dark Film (Picador, 2012)

If you liked Paul Farley, try ...

- Michael Donaghy
- Greta Stoddart
- Kayo Chingonyi

Paul Farley online

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Farley