

THE SUN IS OPEN

Gail McConnell is from Belfast. She is the author of two poetry pamphlets: *Fothermather* (Ink Sweat & Tears, 2019) and *Fourteen* (Green Bottle Press, 2018). *Fothermather* was shortlisted for the Michael Marks Poetry Award and made into a programme for Radio 4 and the *Seriously...* podcast, produced by Conor Garrett. Gail's poems have appeared in *The Poetry Review*, *PN Review*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Blackbox Manifold* and *Stand*, and she is the recipient of two awards from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. She is Senior Lecturer in English at Queen's University Belfast and the author of *Northern Irish Poetry and Theology* (Palgrave, 2014). Gail's writing interests include violence, creatureliness, queerness and the possibilities and politics of language and form.

ALSO BY GAIL McCONNELL

POETRY

Fothermather (Ink Sweat & Tears, 2019)

Fourteen (Green Bottle Press, 2018)

CRITICISM

Northern Irish Poetry and Theology (Palgrave, 2014)

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*Grey text denotes material found from
sources listed in the notes on p.119*

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ON THE MORNING of March 6, 1984, Mr. William McConnell, assistant governor of the Maze Prison, was outside his home, checking underneath his car for explosive devices, when he was shot dead in front of his wife and three-year-old daughter.

BEGIN WITH VICTIM on his
back is how this could begin
place your mouth over his mouth
pinch his nostrils shut easier to
take what I have found and break
it up breathe steadily till victim's
chest begins to rise pause
every minute to glue it back
the wrong way take a deep breath
yourself if there is no air
exchange do not touch him

YOU COME into this world
head first come in on your rump
they call it breech you may be
lifted out

I'm making soft returns
for this you need two keys SHIFT
and ENTER to go down the line
carries on the carriage moving
back

our house was on a street that
slanted at the bottom a
carriageway you didn't cross
four lanes all going fifty to
a roundabout nearby the dog
next door was Honey
a lab as old as me who loved
to lie on the just
cut lawn and sniff her tail
going in the afternoon sun

I played a game with
ladders and a bird inside a cage
on my BBC you typed in rows
and rows of code it made no
sense they were commands the
screen was black without but
when you'd hit the last RETURN
a snake curved round & round
& round until you turned it
off

my teeth are made of milk
deciduous he calls them
mum goes first three sound two
sound one sound one two three
the nurse writes it all down she
rinses then it's me I see the hairs
inside his nose my mouth all big
he taps each tooth E D C B A A B
C D E only there's a gap where C
should be before you hit the sack
get rid of plaque says SuperTed
a spotty man from outer space
brought him to life with cosmic
dust I stick it on the wall fight
tooth decay the He-Man way
when I wake up it's gone under
my pillow

there's a coin

she's still asleep I watch cartoons
Bananaman smiles back at me
then Doctor Gloom whacks him
with a mallet BONK his head's
submerged inside his chest his
eyes roll round and round the
doctor points the gun directs the
age-reversing rays and turns him
to a baby with one tooth the crow
has a banana and what saves the
day's a mirror purple rays
bounce back now the doctor's
just a tot

there was a time when I was
Brian like our neighbour six
doors down I had a skateboard
with a monkey skull on the
underside my cards read Happy
Birthday Brian whose dad we
knew not to say was in the police
that day he must have been dead
scared hearing the shots they're
coming now for him for me he
might have thought he had a test
in school that day he knew if x
then y but couldn't make the
pencil cross the page it lay along
his pointer then he folded back
three fingers raised his thumb to
make a gun shape

God made the sun the stars
the moon or did he make the
bang we learned about the Milky
Way not just a chocolate bar
with soft white air inside it is a
spiral whirlpool of stars and one
out there on the edge is yellow
that's our sun