

Northwords **Now**

Issue 13

Autumn 2009



Poetry from **STUART B CAMPBELL, STEWART
CONN, KONA MACPHEE and PETER URPTH.**

Short Stories by **CARL MACDOUGALL and
CYNTHIA ROGERSON.**

Issues of translation discussed in **REVIEWS**
of **HEANEY'S** translation of **HENRYSON'S**
'Testament of Cresseid' and the
CAIMBEUL/GOODWIN collaboration,
'Da Thaobh A'Bhealaich'

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Submissions to the magazine are welcome. They can be in Gaelic, English and any local variants. They should be sent to the postal address – see above. Unsolicited E-mail attachments will not be opened. The material should be typed on A4 paper. Contact details and SAE should be included. We cannot return work that has no sae.

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Next issue planned for March 2010

EDITORIAL

A MAGAZINE IN WANT OF AN EDITOR WITH AN EDITOR IN WANT OF A MAGAZINE Northwords has a vacancy - for information and application details see our page 24.

THE CURRENT EDITOR, with a lot of help from her friends, founded Northwords Now in 2005. She will be standing down in the Spring after five – very interesting – years at the editorial desk. This is a notional desk and may be found in some surprising places. There is no actual office and this outgoing editor has worked usually from home. There is a budget for office/phone and travel expenses. And there is a supportive Board of Directors with whom there are meetings maybe 5-6 times a year.

The magazine has been well supported by our funders: SAC and HI-ARTS. Budgets are set and applications for funding are made to the funders yearly, usually in January, and usually by the editor.

Grants may vary according to the resources of the funders, but are currently sufficient to allow the appointment of a Manager to deal with key tasks of the infrastructure such as distribution, sale of adspace, web maintenance, and audit of uptake.

Submissions of new creative writing to the magazine continue to be plentiful; and much more good and publishable work reaches us than we have space to use. We also receive many books and pamphlets for review, especially collections of poetry. These come from established publishing

houses such as Birlinn/Polygon, Faber and Bloodaxe; from more recently established imprints such as Sandstone and Two Ravens Press; and also from writer co-operatives and ‘small’ press projects. We are also continually on the lookout for ‘stories’ or events that will give us interesting Feature items; and we have maintained a policy of balance between these varied aspects of content across all our issues.

We aim also to include 2 or 3 pages of Gaelic writing and engage the help of a suitably experienced Gaelic speaker to oversee that.

Overall ‘Northwords Now’ is in a healthy state. We are, as we have always been, solvent. The magazine gets printed currently in Dingwall, 7000, yes seven thousand, print run per issue. It is stocked in libraries, bookshops, galleries and cafes across Scotland. Our designer is based in Edinburgh and that works well. For a year, recently, the editorial job was done as a sort of time-share or partnership. That was a good experience, not least because it was companionable, even though we lived fifty miles apart.

All of that is thanks to the wonders of e-mail without which it could not be done.

RHODA MICHAEL



The Board and Editor of Northwords Now acknowledge support from Inverness & Nairn Enterprise, the Scottish Arts Council and Hi-Arts.

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Poems by Jean Atkin

Glencairn Rooks

Under a cold sky slaked like lime to white morning,
with feed-buckets weighting my hands,
my ears drummed with dark fanned air.
I stopped and turned up my face
to an arrowhead of birds.

Saw them wing darkness into ragged daylight;
heard them conversational above our fluent roofs.
How for them Glencairn spread dizzying below;
how their eyes were focused on some destination
too plain for me to see.

Spare dark birds, they left me earth-slowed;
wrung by their raucous blare to feel a pang,
for never seeing earth from a bird's share of sky,

to never split that first hundred feet of tree-skim air,
or beat a line straight from hill to loch
with the purposeful flight of rooks.

Rooks in Autumn

The cold cuts out hill edges
clean against the sky.
It's late October, full of ghosts.

Night's coming, and our beech tree
sifts slow rooks, spilling them from branches.
They rise like the belts and helms of stars.

Re-reading censored letters
we re-visit, decades late, and cautiously.
We listen to what was never said.

Things roam through memory, evasive
in daylight, bolder after dark. Sounds heard
seep back inside the skull, won't be denied.

We rest on the hill to get our breath.
The rooks stream away, black-edged,
to link each village, and each stone list of names.

Barnacle Geese

That day the geese sculled the high tide of the sky,
breasting the wind, their voices the creaking of timbers,
and I watched by the dyke, a fallen stone in my hands. I thought
of the islands that will pass under their wings, the boatyards,
and the motorways that ribbon north. Of the beating seas
of their night flight, and one morning, the glittered archipelago of Svalbard.
Above me, in each goose, the pulse - circadian, circannual; a beat to bring
moult and restlessness, migration, and a year
flanged to the track of earth's magnetic fields, so that day the wild geese
were flying a gradient that steepened to north pole.
How they passed me, in wavy trace chains,
dragging behind them their longing for home.

Half Wild Greylag

In January, what would we not have given
for a fat green goose, sap-fresh off grass?
Not till May did we drive the Caithness geese
half-wild, half-walkers, through warm tar.
With its sticky pad gummed to their dry, webbed feet,
they wavered the stone roads slow as sunstruck bees.
They grazed verges, pale necks ruffed in vetch and cranesbill.
In nailed boots we followed them
down drove roads pressed heavy into hills
by our nodding beasts.
From ford to pound to crossroad we shouted on our cattle.
We heard their voices in our sleep; and brought our geese, noisy,
and aggressive in the villages, on the long road
to a cackling market and a backyard death.

Later we'd put by, dangled from a hook,
a cured goose, for a cold winter.

February Merse Poem

Water-drawn, like so much else,
you cut your engine to long quiet of merse
pick up first distant yammer of the geese.
Starlings tail you in a fitting rain
in-out some wind-cut straggled hedge line.
Curlews mapping the grey-green lane.
Scots pine, wind-blasted, twisted, holds
the side-slide, dip-glide dark of crows.
You watch down daylight stillness, bentgrass mouseholes.
You know out there is sea, its low roar ceaseless;
know in the mud, spring shrilling, gorse flowers, geese.

The Blackberry Hen

Half the daylight moon hangs off
a broken hinge on the byre doorpost.
Its door's long gone, a makeshift gate
jammed in some gaptooth dyke. Instead,

our byre's lintelled with a set fair sky,
glass-cool, cleaned by frost.
Above the gutter, slates glint
through thin meltwater.

The broody hackles in her empty nest.
She's peevish, still set to mother
as I carry her out to the morning moon,
set her down on yellow legs

and hold her from falling:
till she remembers, and steps away from me
to pluck blackberries, holding each one
coal-bright in her open beak.

Woodpecker

Without warning or soundtrack,
it was there, wings folded.
As if it had always been there.
Flashy as a magpie, but free
of the bad press, it clung
to the peanut feeder
and stabbed through the wire.

I watched it turn its painted head,
chic among chaffinches
and clocked a moment's forehead's blaze
of scarlet, bright as foxes
in the grey garden.
Admired its Rothko blocks of white
on black.

In my mother's garden, the woodpeckers
have been coming since forever.
I have caught her up. This is
my coming of woodpecker age. I want
to laugh, but daren't. I whisper
at my sons, sure they should see this,
inherit my piebald burden.

The boys rush the window.
See. Shout.
And our visitor splashes upwards
climbing the wet sky.
In a few loops
of swagged flight
it's gone.

Niall O’Gallagher reviews a major new Gaelic poetry collection from Two Ravens Press.

Two Sides of the Pass / Dà Thaobh a’ Bhealaich

Poetry by Maoilios Caimbeul & Mark O. Goodwin

Published by Two Ravens Press 2009

£9.99, 156 pages.

REVIEWED BY NIALL O’GALLAGHER

GAELIC READERS HAVE KNOWN the work of Myles Campbell for more than three decades, but his work deserves to be better known by readers who can’t read his poetry in his chosen language. Campbell’s selected poems were published in 2007 with Irish translations by Rody Gorman. This is his first collection since then and the first since 1987 to include translations into English.

This handsome volume is the first foray into Gaelic verse by Ullapool publisher Two Ravens Press and offers another answer to the vexed question of translation in Gaelic publishing. The recent fashion for parallel English versions by the same author is replaced by a conversation between Campbell and fellow Skye poet Mark Goodwin. The first part of the book features Goodwin’s poems in English and his English versions from Campbell’s Gaelic; the process is reversed in the second part. Throughout the verse is accompanied by illustrations from Eòghan MacColla.

So far, so good – but what of the poems themselves? Both poets take as their subject the Skye landscape, interaction between cultures and the Gaelic language itself – subjects so familiar in Gaelic verse that cliché is an ever-present pitfall. The challenge for both poets is to bring something new to these subjects through their verse. A good example of how they meet this challenge is the poem ‘Òran a’ Chlaiginn’ / ‘The Song of the Skull’:

Gael is cruaidh air bruaich na h-Alba
Chaidh mo ruagadh dhan an uaigh;
Far ’n robh teang’ bha ceanal’t ealamh,
Chan eil ach toll gun chruth gun fhuaim.

Bha uair ghluaisinn com is casan
Bhon a’ Pharbh gu bruachan Chluaidh;
A-nis, mo thruaighe, chan eil annam
Ach slige thana air bheag buaidh.

White and hard on Scotland’s edge,
I’ve been routed to the grave;
where there was an amiable, quicksilver tongue,
there is only a formless, soundless hole.

Once I could move trunk and feet
from Cape Wrath to the banks of Clyde;
now, good grief, all I am
is a thin worthless shell.

Campbell’s tone seems highly ironic, a sense heightened by the redundant ‘mo thruaighe’ in the second stanza. His treatment of this most hackneyed subject is lifted by his

skill in the traditional forms of Gaelic song. The lines each have four stresses, rhyming ABAB, and are further decorated by the use of internal rhyme or *aicill*, where the last stress of a line echoes one in the following line – ‘casan’ with ‘Pharbh’, ‘Chluaidh’ with ‘thruaighe’. Goodwin’s translation reproduces only the bare outline of Campbell’s form and seems trapped by its literalism. One of the features of ‘songs’ like this is the piling-up of adjectives in lines like ‘Far ’n robh teang’ bha ceanal’t ealamh’. This line demands both ‘ceanal’t’ and ‘ealamh’ for the end-rhyme, the fourth stress and the assonance between ‘teanga’ and ‘ceanal’t’. This is the meaning of ‘ealamh’ in this context, more crucial than its semantic value. Yet Goodwin gives us both ‘amiable’ and ‘quicksilver’, where one would do, and spoils his own line in the process, stretching its loose rhythm to breaking point. Campbell’s treatment of a clichéd subject in this clichéd form gives the poem a sarcastic, gallows humour, echoed by MacColla’s Tim Burton-like illustration. In Goodwin’s, only the cliché survives.

Translating poetry always involves a series of choices between sound and sense, between faithfulness to the original poem, and faithfulness to poetry itself, to the new poem in the target language. Translators of poetry know that this is an ideal more often invoked than achieved. But one feels that Goodwin’s translations suffer from having too much respect for Campbell’s Gaelic. Goodwin’s preference for free verse makes Campbell’s task superficially easier, and gives his Gaelic versions of Goodwin’s poems the appearance of equivalence, though when Goodwin attempts regular metre and rhyme in ‘To Crofts’ (after ‘To Meddowes’ by Robert Herrick), Campbell chooses not to replicate this in Gaelic. Goodwin’s own poems are those of a relative newcomer to Skye, someone who has fallen in love with the island, but whose relationship to those who have come before him gives him pause. The poem ‘Skye’ is crucial to Goodwin’s contribution:

Skye, let’s put our relationship in some sort of order.
I know about the clan warfare, the Clearances,
the painful baggage of a previous marriage;
but can’t we now tie our own individual Celtic knot with a little
more hope?
Skye, you are not East Timor; Portree is not Dili.
I know, I know, it’s not going to be easy;
crofting daughter is in trouble again;
she’s being flattered with riches.
You’ve come over all postmodernist in Portree,
and Urban Nightmare, he stalks the shadows in the square
with the latest in mobile phone technology.

Here, the real place fails to live up to the speaker’s idea of it, as he chastises the people of Portree for using mobile phones. While this poem seems to regret the change it describes, Goodwin’s attention to this reality prevents

his Skye poems from being overly idealised.

The relationship between these two poets is unequal. As a translator, Campbell is in the stronger position, working directly from his counterpart’s poems, while Goodwin works from Campbell’s own cribs. In another sense Goodwin has the advantage – the language of his poems and translations makes them more accessible than Campbell’s. More often than not, the relationship between the two poets and their two languages will be seen through Goodwin’s prism. If Campbell mourns the decline of Gaelic, Goodwin seems to feel complicity in the replacement of Gaelic with English in many parts of the island, a feeling expressed in his ten-line poem, ‘Soay’:

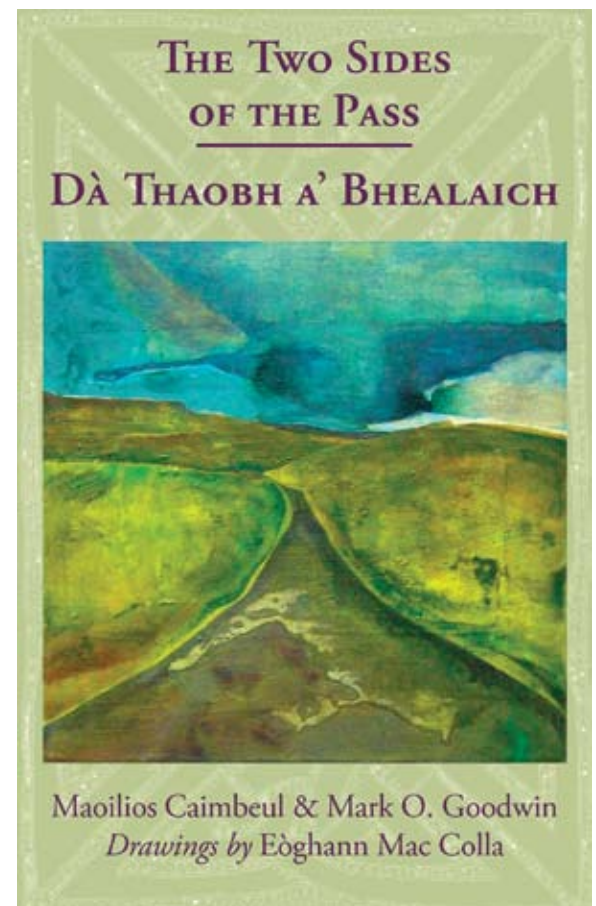
This man’s home is a ruin, a hollow space of grass,
nettles and scattered pegs of sheep’s bone.
Brushing aside the wind, we wander in
to graze on memories of his life on Soay;
conversation fills in gaps, rebuilds walls,
and thatches the open roof with its laughter.
Between two stones a lintel, pale and scarred,
sketches a doorway, a hint of two rooms,
and the past as it used to be. But now this island
drowns in cloud, in drizzle, in a rain of foreign words.

In both Goodwin and Campbell’s contributions to the book, the Gaelic language is associated with a world that is past. The piety paid to Gaelic here evokes both a sense of regret at the current position of the language and an acceptance of its demise. The tone of the volume is plaintive throughout.

Two Sides of the Pass / Dà Thaobh a’ Bhealaich is Mark O. Goodwin’s first book of poems; it is Myles Campbell’s seventh. It’s probably unfair, then, to judge them both as harshly. Gaelic readers will recognise in this collection the quieter, more contemplative Campbell of his recent work, his facility with both regular metre and free verse, his echoes of earlier Gaelic poetry and interest in the wider world. Those without Gaelic will be introduced to some of these qualities through Goodwin’s translations. For Goodwin, this book is an ambitious and imaginative debut. His poems are those of a writer coming to terms with the world around him, and his place in it. We can look forward with interest to how his verse develops in the future.

This volume also offers drawings by the artist Eòghan Mac Colla.

Rhoda Michael says this is an inspired addition, not only Mac Colla’s striking painting reproduced on the dust-cover, but also some twenty from a series by him of black/white



miniature drawings distributed through the collection.

Several of these are of identified Skye landscapes. In size, on the page they are just over seven centimetres tall by eight wide. The medium used is graphite. These are precision drawings in exquisite detail. You would recognise each place at once. And in addition to that physical accuracy there is a range of emotional power across these that provides a marvellous ‘counterpoint’ to the poetry: the turbulent force of the Hinnisdal River, the bleak challenge of the contours of the Morghan Pass, the fragile signs of human survival in The Fanks, Top of Glenhinnisdal.

Others of these drawings connect with some of the more ironic aspects of the poetry. They have their own wit to add to this collection; and of these The Hitchhiker and The Auction (An Rup) are among several vigorous examples.

Eòghan Mac Colla, the artist, was born in Inverness in 1970. He took a degree in Fine Art at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and has since worked as a full-time artist, at first in Barcelona and now in Ayrshire. He was Artist in Residence at Sabhal Mor Ostaig in 2008 where he collaborated with Campbell and Goodwin on this book. He was short-listed for the Aspect Painting Prize 2007 and for the Sovereign European Art Prize in 2008. ■

Anastylosis: From 'Twelve Line Poems' by Pàdraig MacAoidh

thog sinn an càrn-cuimhne
gus an diochuimhnicheadh sinn

na milltean a chaidh a mharbh aig Ypres
a' sleuchdadh 's a' sniomhadh sa pholl

gach òg-ghaol a chaidh air fhàgail
air chidhe Ghrianaig sa ghuil

na faclan a bh' aig a' Phuilean
airson siud 's seo 's an t' eile

ciamar dìreach a bha e a' faireachdainn
a bhith ag èisteachd ri Mac a' Phearsain:

thog sinn an clach-chuimhne
gus sinn fhìn a shaoradh

*we raised the cairn
so we could forget*

*the thousands that died at Ypres
crouching and writhing in dirt*

*every young love that was left
on the quay at Greenock, weeping*

*the words of Angus Campbell
for this, that and the other*

*just how he was feeling
when he listened to MacPherson*

*we raised the cairn
to free ourselves*

••

choinnich mi ris a' Ghaidheal an-dè
chuir sinn blàth-eòlas air a' chèile
le cromadh-cinn dubh beò-marbh
agus bhruidhinn sinn ris a' chèile

ged nach robh Gàidhlig againn idir
air a' bhriseadh-chridhe, air a' mhuir
air cogadh creideamh ann an Iorag
air sianal ùr airson ar dhaoine

ged nach robh daoine againn
ged nach robh canan eadarainn
agus dh'fhalbh e airson bliadhna' eile
a' fagail leam a chromadh-chinn-sa

*I met the Gael today
we welcomed each other warmly
with a black dead-alive nod
and we spoke together*

*though we had no words in Gaelic
for the heart break, for the sea
for a holy war in Iraq
or a new channel for our people*

*though we had no people
and no language between us
and he left for another year
leaving me just the nod*

clach an truisel
clachan fhaobhair
clachan-ghorm
clachan-tomhais

clachan shreathail
clachan-thuislidh
clann Mhic Leòid
clachan-oisinn

clachan fuail
clann Mhic Dhòmhnail
clachan brath
clachan meallain

*clach an truisel
sharpening stones
lunar caustic
measuring stones*

*ashlar stones
stumbling blocks
clan MacLeod
corner stones*

*kidney stones
clan MacDonald
judgement stones
hailstones*

••

chaidh mi air ais chun a' chladaich
nach deach chleachdadh nam bheatha
's gun duine leis an dualchas –
map-chuisle na sgeirean 's na creagan –

a' struthadh tro a chòrp
gun aon iasgair carach
le trom-laighe siubhal sa chala-sa
eagal air na tuinn gorma gasta.

mar smuain bàrd à Leodhas
a' tilleadh gu tursachan Chalanais
laigh mo shùil air traigh m' òige
na diochuimhneachadh, na h-aineolas

*I went back to the beach
that hasn't been used in my life time
there's no one left with the knowledge
a map of each stone on that coastline*

*coursing through his veins
not one fisherman who braves
nightmares in the harbour
afraid of the strong blue waves*

*like the thought of a poet from Lewis
returning to the Calanish stones
my eye lay on the beach of my youth
in forgetfulness, memory gone*

hiu ri oro
ochann i ro
hiu ri o ro
ochann i ro

hiu ri oro
ochann i ro
hiu ri o ro
ochann i ro

hiu ri oro
ochann i ro
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*hiu ri oro
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*hiu ri oro
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*hiu ri oro
ochann i ro
hiu ri o ro
ochann i ro*

tattoo – facail Duitseach
a' marsail
tron deichead
bho 1690
mar chù-fala
thar Alba 's Eirinn
thar Bheurla 's Ghaeilge

deis-marbh – facail Gàidhealach
a chaidh a chumail beò
's a chaidh a thiodhlacadh
mar sgàile an tlàths
Alba Nuadha

*tattoo – a dutch word
marching
through the decade
from 1690
like a blood hound
across Scotland and Ireland
across English and Gaelic*

*deis-marbh – a Gaelic word
kept alive
and buried
like a shadow in the tranquility
of Nova Scotia*

••

chan eil parrais ach tu
's mura robh ach fàsach
gun fhùr no co-dhiù deòr
theirinn parrais air
gun theagamh nam fhaclan

chan eil ifrinn ach tu
's tu an teine a loisgeas
mo cholann son ìobairt
do na diathan faoin

chan eil bristeadh ach do liopan
a sgàireas ifrinn 's neamh
pòg 's toibheum

*there's no heaven but you
and were it a desert
without flowers or tears
I'd call it heaven
with no doubt in my voice*

*there's no hell but you
the fire that burns
my body as a sacrifice
to the frivolous gods*

*there's no breaking but your lips
that cleave heaven from hell
a kiss from blasphemy*

Translations by Niall O'Gallagher

Pàdraig MacAoidh is a writer and academic, and currently teaches Scottish Literature at Trinity College, Dublin. His Introduction to Sorley MacLean will be out next year.

The Sacred Cross of Santa Maria

SHORT STORY BY CARL MACDOUGALL

MCCONNACHIE¹ SAYS THE object known as the Sacred Cross of Santa Maria was taken from a monk who wore it fixed to his waist. Balfour² says it was stolen, either from a monastery or a dying warrior killed by the Saracen hoards, and Lord Locarno³ claims it was won during the Crusades.

None of the stories seem particularly accurate or even believable. For example, Lord Locarno's Crusades version was written more than three hundred years after the event and is contained in the verse epic *The Knight of the Cross*, which many believe to be a forgery. The only known manuscript was discovered in 1947 by the present Lord Locarno's father. Few scholars have seen it, and none for more than half an hour.

It tells how Sir Rory Locarno set off alone for the Crusades. When the boat was attacked by a great fish and most of the crew eaten, Sir Rory swam ashore in a country believed to be Spain because of the 'proud, foot stamping dance' he describes, 'where women swirl their skirts and men pay no attention.' He was immediately captured, thrown into a dungeon and given 16 lashes a day because he refused to acknowledge the supremacy of Roman Catholicism. The prison governor's daughter heard his cries and visited him every night, sitting outside his cell listening to his moans; which in another version, Archibald Douglas's *Treatise Against That Black Deil, The Paip o' Rome, Old Red Socks*, discovered in 1792 and also thought to be apocryphal, is said to be his singing.

The governor's daughter, Rosa Montecastillio, convinced her father to make the stranger his servant. In return he told his daughter she could never marry this man and the most she could hope for was a chaste friendship.

But Sir Rory brought Rosa back to Scotland where she pined for her homeland and died. Douglas's dismisses the fact that she was not allowed to practise her religion as a feature of her misery: Inwardly, she rejoiced to be free from idolatry, he says.

The Cross was said to be a family relic Rosa brought from Spain; but the recent assertion by Fr. Joseph Patrick Healey⁴ that

the Cross came from an Irish monastery and was originally painted green corroborates Balfour's theory, though reference to what the priest calls 'the true and original colour' is found in no other text. He points out that Lord Locarno's claim that the Cross was brought to Scotland by Rosa Montecastillio contradicts his earlier claim that it was won in the Crusades and thinks it likely Sir Rory bought the Cross from immigrant sailors. This theory is supported in the recent work of Anna Mildred Cowan⁵. As we now know, her monograph *The Men Who Carry The Banners* was the subject of dismissive press coverage and she left for America vowing never to return to Scotland. A lengthy section on The Symbolism of Colour ended with the words, *For more information, click here.*⁶

The Cross has been the focus of recent public attention since the present Lord Locarno, the racing driver and wine writer Jamie Jock Locarno, offered 'this ancient and priceless relic which my family have lovingly held in care for more than three hundred years' for sale to the nation for £6 million. Lord Jamie calls this item the Locarno Cross and seems unaware of other studies.

"My old nanny told me the Cross was found by bairns playing on the beach at Invercullion," Lord Jamie says. "It was on a body that had been washed ashore. The children found the Cross, along with two foreign coins and a black button, while they were going through the man's pockets, no doubt searching for identification. They had buried the corpse in the sand twice by the time they were called hame for their tea. One of the children gave the Cross to her mother who was maid to one of my ancestors. The lady admired the Cross and the maid gave it to her as a gift."

This quote was broadcast and published in both *The Herald* and *The Scotsman* when Lord Jamie Jock launched his public appeal and elicited a flurry of correspondence in both newspapers, mainly centred on the assertion that the Cross was not Lord Jamie Jock's to sell.

And there the matter might have ended, were it not for Elsie Marie MacDonald. Mrs MacDonald lives in Glasgow and was recorded by Calum John Michael while he was researching and recording the Indigenous Music of the Glasgow South-Side. He discov-

ered Mrs MacDonald in a residential home and recalls the incident as follows.

"Mrs MacDonald had just finished reciting a well-known South Side Tale, 'The Day Tumshie Thomson Bought a Drink and Wee Sadie McIvor Was Black Affronted', which is a variant of 'The Day The Wean Lost The Ration Book or Mammy Didnae Know Whit Tae Dae', a story that is very well known across the city and variants can be found in many parts of Scotland. Mrs MacDonald's version finishes with a rousing chorus:

*So it's fare thee weel Strathbungo
And goodbye to Pollokshaws;
Never again will I live to see
My city, just because
I lost the bet and must cross the foam
No more will I return
Wee Tumshie Thomson bought us all a drink
And man was made tae mourn.
Aye, man was made tae mourn, I'm telling yese,
Man was made tae mourn.
Wee Tumshie Thomson bought us all a drink
And man was made tae mourn.*

Mrs MacDonald was standing when she delivered the final chorus, which other residents joined with bravado – it's something of a party piece at Larry O' Lee House – and when she sat down she whipped the newspaper from my pocket and pointing to the Sacred Cross correspondence declared, 'Shite! I'll tell yese the true story.'

"And she relayed the account which follows."

Long, long years ago, far and away from here in the Highlands of Scotland, a young traveller laddie was forced to leave his lovely glen. Black, dour poverty surrounded him and his old mother could scarcely feed the hens, they were that poor.

Now you'll be thinking he went off to make his fortune, the way folk do to this very day, but if that's what you're thinking you'll be wrong. Fortunes were hard to come by in they days, so he left home to find himself. I suppose you could say he was seeking enlightenment, but he'd been having a hard time with the drink and needed to get away from what his mother called the bad, wicked company that had led him astray, so off he went and after adventures in Falkirk, Stirling, Perth, Inverness and Paisley he landed up in Glasgow, where he found refuge in the district that used to be called Springburn, but which has since been cancelled.

Here he spent his time reading novels and musing over the mysteries of love while imagining the places where the novels were set. In this way he travelled the world, journeyed across America from coast to coast and through most South American and European

countries. He didn't like Russia because the cold reminded him of home and Africans ate things he didn't like the sound of, fruits that were different from apples and berries and potatoes that were sweet.

None of the cities sounded like places he had known and he loved to imagine himself wandering their cobbled streets, admiring the elaborate buildings, or sitting in a wide square by the fountain drinking dark, bitter coffee and watching the young women with covered heads arriving or leaving their places of worship, wanting to talk but unsure of the language or custom. When he came across names like Tierra del Fuego or Costa del Sol he imagined the mysteries of romance in places where the inhabitants had to imagine snow or the cantankerous sweeps of rain, places where one could read outdoors rather than having to sit huddled by the grate over a winter fire.

On nights when it wasn't raining he walked the streets to make himself tired. This was when he met the wee man with a raincoat that looked so big it almost dragged along the pavement. They fell into step and within a mile or two knew as much as one needs to know to begin a friendship.

What are you reading? the wee man asked.

A book.

What's it about?

It's a love story.

You mean going to bed early on the long winter nights and rubbing her back and the soles of her feet, or is it about watching a lassie bending over all day at the peats or the harvest and helping yourself as soon as you can.

No. It's about the other sort of love, the painful sort.

I might not read it then.

They carried on throughout the winter and when spring came the wee man said it was time to leave, that he was bound to move on and in his opinion the Highlander had found enlightenment for he had tried to understand love and reading had taken him across the world to places where he knew he could visit as well as locations whose names made him shiver.

Take this, the wee man said, take this and keep it safe. It is the Sacred Cross of Santa Maria, but do not let anyone in Springburn see it, for it does not belong here. It belongs in a place like your village, where you have a priest and a minister, a schoolmaster, doctor and postman. It will get lost here. There's too many people, Take it and keep it for it has performed miracles and will perform one for you.

continued on page 9 ►►

1 *Mystery Relics*: William James McConnachie, The Lobby Press.

2 *Mystery Relics Explained*: Robert Balfour, The Trouser Press.

3 Locarnos Forever! *A True and Accurate History of the Locarno Family, Drawn from Family Papers in the Locarno Archive, with colour illustrations (Limited edition of 50 signed and numbered copies)*: Lord Locarno, House of Locarno Publishing Company, £1,950.00

4 Father Joseph Patrick Healey: *Over The Sea From Ireland: Scotland's Catholic Roots and Relics*, Sacred Heart of Midlothian Publishing.

5 *The True Histories of the Survival of Ancient Scottish Religious Relics, Including the John Knox Missal, the Paisley Prayer Book, the Larkhall Dove and The Sacred Cross of Santa Maria*, Anna Mildred Cowan, Birling.

6 Various articles beginning with *Sexy Yankee Boffin's Massive Cock Up*, Daily Moon, various dates, all editions.

Skimming The Skiff-Plain

Skaldic poets and poetry: bringing alive for a modern audience the sophistication of a mediaeval culture.

By IAN CROCKATT



Viking Odyssey - Ceramic Sculpture by Wenna Crockatt

A many-sided man

WHETHER YOU ARE, for the purposes of the following paragraphs allow yourself to imagine you're Rognvald Kali Kolsson, Earl of Orkney. That makes you a 12th century Christian Viking, an admired leader, nephew of St Magnus in whose name you built the still-surviving cathedral in Kirkwall. You're a crusader, a ruler, a law-maker. You're a pirate and plunderer, a lover and poet too. You're Renaissance man 200 years before the Renaissance. We know because your exploits are recorded in *The Orkneying Saga*, along with some of your verse. It's a very particular kind of verse, a tightly wrought poetry of kenning and patterns of stress, rhyme, half-rhyme and alliteration, composed and spoken in strict syllabic form on the spot. Listen, this is how as a young man of promise you described your own qualities in verse:

*Who'll challenge my nine skills?
I'm champion at chess,
canny reading the runes,
well-read, a red-hot smith -
and don't I ski and shoot
and scull - and more - with skill?
Above all I've mastered
harp-play and poetry.*

If you're still with me as Rognvald you should know you'll survive as chief earl of the Orkneys for 22 years. For much of that time the machinations of others with claims on the islands mean you'll be a settler of disputes, often using your sword and axe as the final arbiter, and eventually that's how you'll meet your own death too - but then no self-respecting Viking earl of your time would bear the disgrace of dying old or in a softie's bed.

Yes, you're a Christian. Still, on your way to the Holy Land with your fleet of 15 longships you are quick to seduce the beautiful Ermingerd, queen of the French port of Narbonne. Later you'll storm the castle of a foreign chieftain who is making life difficult for the Spanish locals. You do this for the loot, and, of course, honour. You'll pillage and raze any villages you find that are occupied by pagans. In the Mediterranean sea, having first had a tactical consultation with Bishop William of Orkney who sails with you and fights alongside you, you'll attack a Saracen merchant ship, or Dromond, having agreed to distribute one 50th of the spoils to the poor. A true Christian.

In the Holy land you and your warrior-band will visit all the sacred places, and you and young Sigmund Fish-Hook must swim the River Jordan. On the other side the two of you will tie symbolic knots in the brushwood

and compose verses comparing your trials and bravery with bastard stay-abeds at home. You'll journey to Constantinople where you are feted as important visitors by the Emperor and spend a winter there as mercenaries. Finally, you'll make your way home via Bulgaria, then Puglia and Rome, across Europe on horseback to Demark and at last, as returning heroes, by boat to Norway. By the time you get back to strife-torn Orkney you'll have a morass of intrigue and power-play to sort out, again with fire and sword.

And all along the way you, and the warrior-poets you gather round you, will record in verse the big and the small incidents; not later, this is not "emotion recollected in tranquility", but now, spoken straight out and only written down later by others.

It's all in the verse. Look how you all, like lovesick troubadours, pined for Ermingerd! As your longships leave Narbonne you, Earl Rognvald, declaim:

*Ermingerd's words inspired
us. For her sake heroes
spur their eager wave-steeds
on, as far as Jordan.
I swear when sail-trees wear
round, our track back north through
autumn's rollers will home
in on her, on Narbonne.*

Then it's Armod the Icelander's turn. A little more direct, he says:

*Ah Fate, I fear you tear
my heart from Ermingerd's.
That rare man's matched with her's
must make loss slave to love.
Where is beauty's lair? There
in her brow. To bed her,
just once - oh for the chance! -
I crave French hive-honey !*

Yes, you shout - beat that, Oddi the Little! You bet I will, says Oddie Glumsson, an Icelander too - just listen:

*Admired Ermingerd, queen
of elegance, of all,
will you ever give way,
gift one of us one kiss? -
treasure worth ten times more
than our smitten hearts merit!
God guard you, Ermingerd,
Narbonne's sun, bright girl-gold.*

And so you'll continue the voyage, through the Straits of Gibraltar, the fleet splitting after that, six ships of fools who quarrelled with you heading for Marseille and the majority, you and your true companions, sailing for Africa. You are jubilant -

*The coast's north-curved thrust. Thin
hull's thrumming timbers. Fools
stint on sea-poetry -
waves cave mis-shaped gunwhales,
ill-scarphed ribs. Our skalds,
envied by theirs, ride high
fierce verse, fleet prowls plough sheer
sea-furrows far from Spain.*

Then later, during a lull in the fighting when you're attacking a castle, after dodging the boiling sulphur and pitch, you and Sigmund Fish-Hook who fought so fiercely with sword and axe in the breach in front of you, will pick up the woman theme again. You declare:

*That was joy, that woman
warming to my talk; we
made love all that autumn.
Long tongues of flame lick stone
now - I loved that lady -
till it crumbles. Lads, we'll
carve fresh flesh, crimson the
eagle's claw, when walls fall.*

And Sigmund, perhaps only 15 or 16 years old at this time, still earning his reputation, comes back with:

*When spring swallows take wing
cast off, ride the skiff-road
to Orkney. Bear back my
freshly-blooded name, dyed
for her embroidery.*

*Swear no man – older, more
loved - cleft skulls closer to
the stone-mound than Sigmund.*

These poems, they're like a diary of your voyage, of all experience; sea-poems, war-poems, love-poems, comradeship-poems. There's even time for joke-poems, like the one you spluttered after Erling Wry-Neck's drunken tumble off the pier into the mud. And when you do get to Jerusalem the four short lines of yours that survive from there are among your sweetest:

*On this poet's breast, Christ's
cross. Across his shoulder
one cut palm. Sssh! Calm
stills the crowd on the hill.*

Finally, Rognvald Kali Kolsson, Earl of Orkney, in 1158, 5 days after the feast of the Assumption, you will be cut down in Caithness while acting out an un-negotiable quarrel no different from the centuries-long quarrels about power and honour and killing that underwrite all Viking court life. It will be said that your blood can still be seen on the boulder where you were killed, "as lovely as if it were newly spilt". Your men will sail with your body "in great style" from Thurso to Orkney, where you will be buried in the cathedral you built, deeply mourned as "a good friend to a great many people, lavish with money, moderate, loyal to his friends, a many-sided man and a fine poet". Many verses will praise and mourn you - there will be lengthy elegies - none of which, as far as this writer knows, will survive. So this last one is mine to you, Rognvald, though not translated from the Old Norse language in which you chanted yours. It's something less sure of itself being, apart from anything else, 9 ½ centuries overdue. Imagine I'm standing in the room you're in, speaking it to you:

*Rognvald Kali Kolsson
- wave-weaver, skull-cleaver;
whose mind engaged with minds
before opening men's veins;
cathedral, study, hall
still recall sweet verse-skills,
skiff-mens' Sifs of silk mourn
their many-sided man.*

Plundering the Word-Hoard

FOR VIKING COURT poets making verse was a competitive past-time, a way of entertaining and impressing king, earl and peer. Over time - approximately the 9th -13th centuries - it developed into a tightly controlled form that led to such convoluted word-order and grammar that it sometimes verged on the meaningless - the skill at creating it, and the ingenuity with which tradition was marginally varied within the rules by individual poets was what mattered. This makes most skaldic verse close to untranslatable into everyday Old Norse, never mind other languages. Why? Well for a start the use of kennings, which are ways of by-passing nouns so that no object is spoken of as itself, makes for formidably dense layers of obscurity. For example, a woman may be described, as various women are in the originals of the poems I've given versions of above, as "Sif of silk" (Sif being a viking goddess), "Skogul of embroidery" (Skogul was one of the Valkeries), "Mountain-rib's polishing-tree" (Stone is Mountain-rib, Polishing-tree is woman), "Flax-prop" (Lady wearing linen), "Hawk-lands valkerie" (Hawk-lands is the arm on which a falcon is carried), a "Kerchief-tree". A warrior may be a "wound-gaggle feeder" (one who feeds carrion-birds ie by killing enemies and leaving them to the birds), a "wolf-sater", a "javelin-tree", and his sword a "wound-serpent", a "blood-taper", a "scabbard-wand". His ship may be a "steed", a "mast-head's stallion", a "bow-sprits elk", a "wave-ski". So, the range of ways of making a sentence meaning "the warrior jumped from the ship and presented his sword to his lady" using kennings in place of the nouns, is only limited by the number of kennings you can come up with. The trick was to do it contriving new kennings, or adding original developments to those commonly in use. Have a go!

OK, now take a look at the stanza form I have used in the poems above. Stanzas of 8 lines, each with 6 syllables, no more and no less. Check the pattern of alliteration, every pair of lines being linked by a minimum of 3 alliterating syllables (not words) usually, but not always, two in the first of the pair of lines, one in the second. Note that vowels alliterate

with each other, and "h" alliterates with vowels. Also that it's the sound of the syllable that alliterates, not the spelling.

Next, consider rhyme, again on syllables, which may be in the middle of a word. There should be no end rhymes, ie at the end of a line. Lines 1,3,5 and 7 in each stanza should have a minimum of a pair of half-rhymes. Lines 2,4,6 and 8 should have a pair of full rhyming syllables.

Check the last of the poems above - Rognvald Kali Kolsson - for an idea of these rules in action.

The challenge now is to take that sentence you had a go with - did you? - and apply these rules as well as the kennings you chose. Examples on a postcard to the editor please....

The form described above is based on a form used by Skalds called Dróttkvætt (court metre), but it's simplified. They had additional rules - for example all rhymes and half-rhymes must be on stressed words (mine aren't), none on the last syllable of a line (some of mine are), the line should be of 4 stresses, two in each half. And they tried not to cheat - you can see that in some pairs of lines I have made the full-rhymes and half-rhymes interchangeable..tut, tut.

Given all the above it will be clear that translating Skaldic verse is even less of an exact science than most translation, and the results do vary hugely. George Mackay Brown's "imitations", as he refers to them, abandon the form ("impossibly difficult"), aiming for "a loose paraphrase" designed to appeal to the modern ear and sensibility while preserving "some of the gaiety, savagery, piety of the originals". He makes beautiful poems of them, but the skaldic sound and gritty texture are missing. Those that try to make a literal translation may give a sense of the swagger and compressed extremes of verbal and imaginative invention the verse conjured, but as well as abandoning the form - a major ingredient of the effect - they often end up being incomprehensible. You have to decide on your approach and stick with it. The versions I've made for this article may be seen as hybrids, fairly true to their own planned structure - which is derived from one of the Skalds' classic structures - sparing on densely packed

kennings - though on occasion inventing new ones for the sheer pleasure of it - and aiming to make some sense as well as capturing the showy, visceral feel of the originals. The last one, Rognvald's elegy, was the easiest to make because it's not a translation - previous experiments with this form suggest that once familiar making original poetry in it is a joy. That's because, apart from the challenge of the demanding wordplay, and the thrill of making a well-turned piece, there is the fact that not being able to use the first word that naturally comes to mind, being constrained to search for words to fit the complexities of the form, results in mind and imagination soaring. You have to get out of your comfort zone and go places you would never otherwise have gone. It's liberating. You go beyond yourself. It's like sailing an open boat out to sea, "skimming the skiff-plain", submitting to, but trying not to be out-witted or overwhelmed by, the turbulent sensuality of the wind and waves. It's pure exhilaration. It's poetry. ■

Acknowledgements:

All prose quotations are from Palsson and Edwards' translation of The Orkneyinga Saga (see below).

My versions of Rognvald's poems, and those of Armod, Oddi Glumsson and Sigmund Fish-Hooks, were made for this article, and are intended to be illustrative rather than definitive. They derive mainly from the very different translations by Hermann Palsson and Paul Edwards, and Judith Jesch; my thanks to them. In retrospect I can see that George MacKay Brown's inspiring "imitations" led me towards Skaldic verse in the first place.

My main source-books for this article were:

Hermann Palsson and Paul Edwards, *Orkneyinga Saga, The History of the Earls of Orkney*, Penguin Classics, 1981. ISBN 0-140-44383-5

Thomas Owen Clancy (Edit), *The Triumph Tree, Scotland's Earliest Poetry AD 550 - 1350*, Cannongate Classics, 1998. ISBN 0 86241 787 2

Julian D'Arcy, *Scottish Skalds and Sagamen, Old Norse Influence on Modern Scottish Literature*, Tuckwell Press, 1996. ISBN 1 898410 25 9

George MacKay Brown, *Winterfold*, Chatto and Windus, The Phoenix Living Poets Series, 1976. ISBN 0 7011 2147 5.

Ian Crockatt's poem series SKALD, Viking Poems, Koo Press, 2009, ISBN 978-0-9558340-6-6 was reviewed in Northwords Now, issue 11. It is available directly from the publisher - www.koopress.co.uk - or can be ordered from bookshops.

► The Sacred Cross of Santa Maria, continued from page 7

A fisherman found it in his nets, with the herring and the cod. When he brought it ashore, the clouds formed into a cross, lame children ran to meet him and blind men were astonished at the vibrancy of colour. In the years that followed humphry-backit women were married and gave birth to stunningly blonde children, old men impregnated young women, idiots studied the stars and dogs sang in tune.

The priest said these miracles were the work of God and that the Cross should be confiscated because it came between man and his Creator and gave women false hope. He took it to a monastery where the abbot tied the Cross to his hassock. but the people wanted the miracles back so they broke into the monastery and stole the Cross. But the miracles were gone. The abbot told them the

Cross was a replica, but no one believed him, though that was the start of a slow change when people believed the Cross had lost its power that it could no longer help them, so it became worthless, an object fit for children's stories or fireside tales.

Some said the Cross should be sent back to where it came from, back to the sea where another fisherman could find it. Others believed they should wait, that if they held on to the Cross it would repay them.

The wee man said, My story's done. They gave the Cross to my father to throw in the sea, but he gave it to me and I'm giving it to you because I have no more use for it.

So the young man took the Cross back to his glen where he said it would be safe. But the more he thought about it, the more he wondered if it was the true Cross, if it could

work miracles and bring him fortune, if it would help him penetrate the mysteries of love and if he could take a wee drink, now and again, like at funerals, weddings and the odd weekend or two, go with his pals to the pub in the evening.

He wakened up back in Glasgow in a back court broke and the Sacred Cross was gone. So he set off on another mission, wandering the country, having learned more than he knew before, praying for the marvel that would restore the thing that could perform miracles, even though the evidence suggested otherwise.

Now he says the Sacred Cross of Santa Maria is what everyone says it is and all the pieces fit, that the only bit missing is the Cross itself and when he finds the Cross it

will perform the greatest miracle of all, that he'll be able to take a drink and leave it. So you'll find him on the corner with his hand outstretched, reciting a poem he wrote himself:

*I'm a wandering loonie in a long black coat
Mad as a wind in the evening sun
Looking for the captain of a well rigged boat
To take me back to where I've come from,
Across the river where I long to be
Far away and journeying on,
But when I'm there I'll want to be here,
Safe and snug and almost done.*

Mrs MacDonald told us the Cross is all round us. It's everywhere, she said, and one day we'll find it.

Further investigations are obviously needed. ■

Poems by Stewart Conn

Homecoming Scotland

There we were sipping Pimms with a group of Americans here for The Gathering, when in came such a man-mountain I swear the room darkened. Eyes like beacons, he told us

he and his tattooed mate were from Austin, Texas. Between them, they've traced their ancestry to Wallace and the Bruce: a shoo-in for tossing the caber, or as tug-o'-war anchorman.

Later our host said, 'I saw you chatting to our gay couple. Bob – the one with the kilt like a marquee – we call him "the Buachaille". Their ambition's to start up a guest-house

somewhere in the Highlands.' I eagerly await the sight of those massive hands serving the full Scottish breakfast, or cradling a clutch of speckled eggs, in soft dawn light.

Rain, Rain, Rain

(for Tom Pow)

Your card tells how you and your son, holidaying in the Hebrides, experienced 'rain, rain, rain, then glory' – triggering in my memory forked lightning, lochans thrashed by demonic claymores, a carbon fibre trout-rod jettisoned on the machair;

or caught in a freak mid-summer storm, hailstones drumming on corrugated tin, drenched cattle looming like water-kelpies, our fleeing helter-skelter for the shelter of the black house where we were staying, its thatch soggy under flapping tarpaulin.

Swamped by these thoughts my mind, seeking the balm of sunshine, is lured to that baking afternoon at Benbecula airstrip and the tannoy announcement, 'Would embarking passengers please remain in the departure area meantime'

while a group of men in black suits and dark glasses crossed the tarmac as the incoming plane taxied closer, then in what might have been a scene from a Fellini film, stood watching a coffin being lowered from the hold

and placed in a limousine: all under an incinerating sun. From somewhere nearby the stifled sobbing of women renders us intruders on age-old ritual. Recoiling from the image and its clarity, I long for submergence in 'rain, rain, rain'.

The Camellia House

Clear as though it were yesterday he sees the tangled entrance to the camellia house, its dank water-butt, cracked window-panes, discarded tools rusting; inside, the glory of the blooms – each waxen flower-head symmetrical, the colour of blood. He takes her one each day in season. Her workmates, oblivious of the walled garden, the estate where he rents a cottage, thought he must be really keen. Only she knew their origin, that no way could he afford them.

Early on St.Valentine's day he found a scene of desolation, beds trampled, stems crushed and broken, bulldozers moving in, blocks of flats going up where the derelict big house had been. He imagined droves of young lovers without two pennies to rub together kneeling to their partners, purloined flower in hand – rather than concede that behind the camellia house, might be a mound of mulched flower-heads rotting.

Let There be Light

Our window-cleaner, a Jehovah's Witness, comes alone, bringing no fellow-devotee, the proselytiser in him clearly off duty. Theology is not among the things we discuss.

He enthuses rather over his other love, golf, at which I like to think he shows prowess, keeping his drives on the straight and narrow, steering long parabolas clear of the rough.

Between visits he has the satisfaction of knowing that regardless of denomination he has done his bit to make our lives shine, each pellucid pane letting Heaven's light in.

Snake-Charmer

La charmeuse de serpents by **Henri Rousseau (1844-1910)**

Such the choysya's golden tonsure, that ivy's verdancy, lilies like lances, your garden makes me feel I'm in a painting by Douanier Rousseau – but which one?

How about his hooded flute-player, a glistening slat of lake, sinuous creatures under a moon of bone? From his youthful visits to the Jardin des Plantes

he remained on the side of the inmates, not the oglers and bun-throwers: this taught him to stride the Art world with a capital A, vie with the vacuous chatter of the salon.

His later work displays gourds like lanterns, the spirit naked in a silky dawn. But enchantment can quickly succumb to savagery. Take care, lest you end up trapped in Nègre

attaqué par un jaguar; or threat emanating where least expected, the Snake-Charmer's succulent calf and thigh clench like a boa-constrictor round your throat.

The Glass House

has at last been refurbished, its cherished cupola reglazed, rusted finials restored,

the original design retained in scrupulous detail along with these statues of skimpy

maidens: Boucher would have adored the frilly fillies – their dazzling whiteness

once at a visiting preacher's behest concealed under calico sheets. Today's

speeches receive a quivering of applause, During the buffet the instruments play

so rousingly we fear for the glass; while the fishes, back in the main pond, their age anyone's guess,

blunder through whorls of weed, impervious to plopping coins, the advent of a new century.

Tom Pow at Northwords Now

He talks about 'In the Becoming', the New and Collected edition of his poetry: retrospect and prospect.



Tom Pow photographed by Alex Barclay

TOM POW WAS, until this year, on the teaching staff of Glasgow University's Crichton Campus in Dumfries. This 19th century building had previously been the Crichton Memorial Mental Hospital and had continued in that use well through the later years of the 20th century.

The archive of the hospital was still held there and Tom Pow was given access to it for the purpose of creating 'stories' about aspects of the experiences of people who had been patients or had worked there. We wondered what kind of person Tom Pow might be that he should be attracted to such material.

What evolved, in 2008, from Tom's reading of the archive was the poetry collection, *Dear Alice: Narratives of Madness*. We were glad to have had it offered to us for review. It was remarkable: quiet, tender, acute with insight. There was something about it that brought to mind the 'quality of mercy' speech from the *Merchant of Venice*. It is profoundly imagined. The Alice of the title poem is Alice in Wonderland; it's a 'letter' to her from Peter Pan. It ends with

*Somewhere, I've missed out on love, dear Alice.
Wendy tells me I don't know how to kiss.*

And now in 2009 Polygon have published *In the Becoming*, a 260 page volume of poems selected from across the 7 poetry collections Tom has had published since his first, *Rough Seas* (Canongate 1987). Such a volume would have been a challenge to review and, besides, our interest to know more about the poet himself had grown.

He agreed to meet us in the space of a late afternoon between a poetry workshop and an evening reading at the Inverness Book Festival. In his acknowledgements to this new collection he quotes advice he'd had from Stewart

Conn (first Edinburgh Makar) that this book should have its own organic life – subject to 'an undertow of the poet's own priorities, a satisfying of inner longings and compulsions'.

I asked what, if any, bearing this had had on his experience of preparing the collection. He spoke of his expectation that there would be a straightforward choosing from among things familiar; and of adding on to that a full section of new work. He found himself questioning what a 'collected' edition was for – a record of development? Something other?

He found instead that he was discovering what should not go in. The poems in *In the Becoming* answered a certain set of 'priorities' and 'compulsions'. Because of these he came to know which poems to include as new work. But he also recognised new directions in his writing, the products of which were going to need future and separate publication.

He speaks, for example, of the work he has been doing on Tom Watling, a Dumfries man born in 1762, a forger of guinea notes; and of his deportation to Botany Bay.

A few weeks earlier Tom Pow had shared a platform, at a poetry festival in the Lake District, with Ruth Padel. When I remarked on this as, to me, a surprising pairing Tom explained how the organisers wanted to place Tom's work on a poetic biography of Watling alongside Padel's.

Ruth Padel's subject was, of course, her great-great-grandfather Charles Darwin – whose interests need no spelling out here. A crucial part of the reason for the choice of Botany Bay as the location of Thomas Watling's penalty was that the colonising authorities wanted him there for his highly developed skills as an artist – they wanted him to make accurate drawings of the novelties of the Australian flora and fauna for their reports.

Who can doubt the existence of a Divine Joker!

There is a Tom Watling archive at The Natural History Museum. Tom has been drawing on that for a work he has called *A Wild Adventure - Fragments from the life of Thomas Watling, Dumfries Convict Artist*. He sees his task there to be to explore what kind of man Watling might have been and how his encounters with another culture might have affected him. We allow ourselves a moment to appreciate the felicities of this Padel-Pow pairing.

A few days after this first conversation with Tom Pow I am offered, for consideration, the first in some years, a group of poems from Stewart Conn; among them one with (*for Tom Pow*) as a sub-script to the title.

Neither poet, I check out, is aware of my now current contact with the other. I begin to plan a fitting juxtaposition of pages. I congratulate myself that 'Chance favours the prepared mind'. (I'm sure that all our readers know who first said that.)

I boast of this co-incidence to the poets, both of whom are pleased. And then Tom adds, 'Ah, but there are no coincidences'.

Tom Pow impresses as a quiet man. You know he's there but he doesn't draw attention to himself. When I mention to other writers that I am doing an interview with him for Northwords Now the reaction is of immediate recognition, respect, affection. One says 'Tom, he's a good friend'. Another recalls an edition by the Cacafuego Press back in 1999 of a collection he called *Landscapes* – an edition on fine paper, beautifully designed.

Tom's c.v. bears witness to his achievements. He has sustained a working life as a teacher, in schools until 2001 and then as Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing and Storytelling at the Crichton Campus of the University of Glasgow till his recent move, to the University of Lancaster, again as a Creative Writing lecturer, this time part time on the distance learning MA.

In 2002 he held a Hawthornden International Writing Fellowship. In 2001, and again in 2002 and 2003 he was the first poet-in-residence to the Edinburgh International Book Festival. He was poet-in-residence also at StAnza, in 2005. These are significant honours. Three of his collections have been short-listed as Scottish Book of the Year; *Dear Alice: Narratives of Madness* recently won the Scottish Mortgage Investment Trust's Scottish Book of the Year Award, 2009; and four collections have taken SAC Awards for Poetry.

He has held SAC travel bursaries, and has had Creative Writing awards to support his

work on the Dear Alice collection, and on his *Dying Villages of Europe* (www.dyingvillages.com) – a project reported on in the September issue of the Scottish Review of Books (Vol.5, #3) There is much else besides, books for children; and plays for radio – projects of what might be called the by-ways: about, for example, the last woman to be hanged in Scotland – Mary Timney, found guilty of murdering a neighbour in a remote Galloway village; and about John Rae, an Orcadian, the foremost Arctic explorer of his day, yet the only one of those exploring the North-West Passage not to be knighted – a matter, says Tom, of social exclusion. That quiet statement says much about Tom's sympathies.

There is also Tom Pow, the reflective man: the one who, when writing his New Statesman (Scotland) column in 2000 to mark the 80th birthday of Edwin Morgan, produces an essay that, just a few weeks before the first re-opening of the Scottish Parliament, is a state-of-the-art summary of the position of poetry and poets in Scotland at that significant turning point. It's fascinating to come on it after this nine-year gap in time. It's a thing to visit, or re-visit, not only for the generosity of its tribute to Morgan; but also for the astute but sympathetic comments on most of the other Scottish poets being published at that time. (New Statesman, Scotland, 15th May 2000). He makes his points with tact; and his evaluations stand up well to scrutiny even from this present point of hindsight.

In an interview with Carl Homer he talks about the experience of being a poet. He quotes Emily Dickinson: being a poet is all; being known as a poet is nothing. He has much sympathy with this: it's doing the writing rather than seeking outside validation that is the greatest satisfaction. And yet . . . you can be somebody for whom writing is important, but it doesn't have to be the sole most important thing in your life. For Emily Dickinson it was, but there's a certain chill about that. For himself more of a balance of family and work was what suited his temperament

'Emily Dickinson's sacrifices produced her kind of art, but wasn't it Joseph Brodsky who said it was an insult to say, of eastern European poets, that they needed to suffer to write? He insisted that what makes you a good writer is the sensitivity you bring to what you experience. And I think one of the hugely attractive things about Heaney is that his is a poetry of health; his poetry is testament to a happy life in which any grief intrudes in a quite natural way'.

Which seems to describe Tom Pow, himself, too.

We have been enjoying the poetry gathered into his 'New and Selected' collection, *In the Becoming* (Published by Polygon), and commend it to our readers.

There is a short discussion of it on page 22 of this issue. ■



Poems by Stuart

Artwork by Lo

Six Thousand Feet Beyond Man and Time

(John Tyndall: *the 3rd ascent of the Matterhorn, 1868*)

*“every pain and every joy and every thought
and every sigh... in your life must return to you.
The eternal hourglass of existence will be turned
again and again.”*

Nietzsche – The Gay Science 1882

After years of wooing and rebuttal, the Matterhorn was no longer virgin; he was not the first man. He looked down to Breuil, from where before Carrel had begun his conquest of the mountain and he looked down also to Zermatt, down the route Whymper had taken before them both. He saw chalk-white houses and slate-green pastures as unremarkable now, as small as rock samples he had on his desk; indifferent and indiscriminate as the degrading summit, hacked and hurt by age.

Above him was the deep blue of the morning sky, so filled with stars and planets; it seemed as if he was able to look back in time. He saw aeons of shifting glaciers, mountains being born in the birth-canals of volcanoes before frosts cracked them into brittle teeth, decaying year on year into the stumped remains of majesty. He saw past all this to plates folding over nascent fossils; the one great sea receding and the rise and collision of continents and further back, out past the earth, the moon, the morning star, in the gasses and carbon motes of space, his own genealogy evolve; as if in that nebulous haze lay the origins of his feelings; the progenitor of this present thought; all his traits and whims and sadness, his disappointments being conducted back to their ancestral home; all his endeavour telescoped into this perspective. He turned to retrace dim footsteps downhill; ones which might very well have been his own.

Last Prayer to Daedalus

(After Paolozzi)

Oh, Father, is this not how you conceived me;
is this what I've become?
Was it your ambition
or mine
that welded the technology
of bionics to the pistons of my cantilever
limbs, converted my manhood
image into the enhanced vector shapes
of a new androgyny?
At that moment on the launch-pad
how we believed in that
fledgling dream of flight... and I
all revved-up with the technological
talk... I'd become: a calorific catalyst,
a mass of electro-pulses, the prototype
for the next evolution.
Did you see my heat-shields
melting, my solar-panels collapse,
the platelets of my new silvered skin
flake and burn, vaporise
in the too steep dive of my re-entry
and as I reached terminal velocity
how it all, the mechanics, the concept
... how I broke down.
What could be salvaged?
A twin-chambered pump with
its atrium and ventricles,
its tricuspid and mitral valves?
No! This is my heart: bloody and raw;
the last thing left that cries
“Father, father,
was the experiment worth it?”

Looking Through the Window

(Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Reims

– *Vitraux de Chagal*)

“For now we see through a glass darkly”
1st Corinthians 13:12

Within the cathedral
the art is to focus first
on the central rose
which holds le rayonnement
de l'Esprit Saint, maybe
then the brightness
of le chandelier à sept branches
above la Vierge à l'Enfant,
finding each translucent icon;
for we have already learned
to ignore the square-angled astragals
and the black lead beading; the immaterial
armature. There is nothing but Chagal's light
-painted dream, his vocabulary of blue upon
blue, severe as a winter sky, cornflower fresh,
inscribed on glass, reconciling
every shade; you can see
emerging: figures
recalling des prophètes
qui ont annonce le Christ and
le peuple en prière and like them
become absorbed; passing beyond
plain words, where the votive voice
gives out, even beyond the sufficiency
of the tongues of angels, to pass
through this mediating plane
into the indefinite distance
and dare look into that wide-blue infinity
of the soul's disappearance.



art B Campbell

uise Allardyce

Sojourn in the Frontier

(Avant Garde)

“to be in my element and not in front of closed horizons”

Matisse

“the present existence of our mind depends only on this, that the mind involves the actual existence of the body”

Spinoza

He had gone so far
into the frontier,
that looking back,
he could determine nothing as distinct
as a border;
all that was before him
was no more or less familiar
than all he had left behind.

The horizon preceding
and receding, all that
was to be explored and experienced;
every point of the compass,
past and future; he could not tell
if what he pictured was what he remembered
or what he imagined
he might yet see; those once given limits
became immaterial. He inhabited
that substantial, unbounded world
as surely as
its sun was warming; the wet rain,
the withering wind
transfused his senses and
he tramped the earth restored.

Rodin’s Eve

(La Origin du Monde)

Day after day after day he returned
to her; with thumb and forefinger,
smoothing and contouring her
hips and belly, moulding his hands to her
shape; trying to get the measure of her,
as if by touch alone he might feel his way
into her mysteries. Day after day
he tried to visualise her nature:
the muscles of her loins and limbs, he shaped
and reshaped; her profile little by little
changed time and again. Day after day;
to make perfect her form was to make perfect
that creation and so moulded and cast
would be fixed for eternity. Day after day
Eve has taken her fill of Adam, rampant and rutting,
for (God alone knows how long) this moment;
to her nothing was forbidden, nothing refused
on the flat boulders of the river, in the meadow-
grass, against trees, amongst the beasts
of the fields and the birds of the sky. She was all
his delight, even when his manhood waned,
she took him (he that was made from clay) and
shaped him to her satisfaction: to feel, at last,
her appetite assuaged. She has tasted that fruit,
feels fear and secret jubilation; a kick inside:
she would bear children; whether good or ill
or something else will come of this is beyond her.
There was to be no defining moment:
Day after day Rodin tried; then, disillusioned
with his form, saw her spirit, and all the world
originating in her, could not be anticipated.

Night Shelter

When you’re overexposed, frozen
–out, no longer accommodated,
or become weary of inhabiting that world,
you come to seek shelter

here; where some people talk
out loud to God and
hear his voice answering clearly, as surely
as others repeat last night’s desperate discourse
they had with demons
yet again; there are other exchanges.

But it’s warm in here, warm enough
to loosen thick blood
from its sluggish circulation;
capillarating into the corporeal surfaces,
infusing the cortex as it detoxes
itself in the crucial emergency
of dreams; prehistoric memories,
souvenirs and elements of lived lives,
held once more in the eyes’ rapid moment,
saved in the reverberations of slow-wave sleep.

And I feel, more than through the fibre
–optics of neural pathways and
synaptic switches, in the depths
of my marrow-hive, re-
collections extending seamlessly to the source
of antique chronicles and, out
on the threshold of the night shelter
dawn, I believe I might have acquired
the ability to play the melodeon,
or change the future somewhere.

Homage to Robin Jenkins, creator of modern Scottish Fables.

BY RHODA MICHAEL AND RUSSELL BRUCE



Sculpture commissioned by Cowalfest, celebrating Robin Jenkins' work *The Cone Gatherers*, Benmore Botanic Garden. Photo: Russell & Dorothy Bruce.



Robin Jenkins Literary Award 2008/9 Shortlist

'The best-kept secret in modern British literature ... if you are interested in books that are humane and wise, then treat yourself this year to some Robin Jenkins', says Andrew Marr on the cover of Jenkins' 'Poverty Castle' – (Polygon, 2007).

ROBIN JENKINS WAS BORN in the village of Flemington in 1912. He became a teacher, worked in schools in Glasgow and in various postings around the world with the British Council, and lived the 32 years of his retirement at Toward on the Cowal Peninsula till his death in 2005.

Across those years he wrote perhaps close on 40 novels. In her *Scottish Writers Talking 3* (John Donald, Publisher, 2006) Isobel Murray speaks of it being difficult to know the exact count; difficult, for example, to know whether all the manuscripts lying in drawers were completed texts. She describes him as 'one of the most important of Scotland's twentieth century novelists'. She describes her concern, when she was in contact with him in 1985, that he was 'undergoing a period of unwarranted neglect', and suggests that 'inadequate agents and cursory publishers' may have been contributory factors. Of twenty-two novels published between 1950 and 1985 'most of them were, at that time, out of print and unobtainable'.

Murray's cautiously stated view has been expressed by others. In his introduction to 'Poverty Castle' Alan Warner speculates that the difficulty Jenkins had in getting his new novels satisfactorily published 'might have been' to do with very small payments; or with Jenkins' feeling that his books would not be properly distributed: either way a bottom line of no financial return for the writer.

Nonetheless Jenkins continued writing

his novels. It is known that he accumulated a series of novel manuscripts across the earlier 1980s despite having no publishing outlet for them – truly, as Warner says, 'an autonomous author'! Harry Reid, editor of *The Glasgow Herald*, succeeded in helping him to get 'The Awakening of George Darroch' published in 1984, and there were further publishings of 'late-flowering' novels across his remaining years.

Of the many who have spoken publicly about what is agreed as the 'neglect' of Jenkins' writing there is little speculation about what, in Jenkins himself, may have contributed to the earlier publishing difficulties. Might there be a hint in *Scottish Writers Talking 3* where Jenkins is very firm in asserting that he doesn't see himself as a political writer. 'I am a moralist ... And in my books I sometimes overstepped them in morality'. Just a hint from himself, perhaps, that he might not always have been flexible in negotiations that could seem to be compromising a moral position?

And perhaps there is in some of his books a slight sense of the characters being constructed, and they and the narrative being developed, in order to make some moral point? – although one hesitates to suggest that books led by an 'idea' may not always work in so satisfactory a way as those that are more plot- or character-led.

In his introduction to the 1980 (Paul Harris Publishing) edition of the *Cone-Gatherers*, Ian Crichton Smith writes,

'... few novels in our heritage have the bell-like harmonies of this book. There is a fairy-tale quality about the novel, a lean, spare, classical, inevitable quality as visible as the pines themselves: and pervading it, as well as the scent

From left to right:
Linda Cracknell: *Doubling Back: Ten Paths Trodden in Memory*
Louisa Gairn: *Ecology in Modern Scottish Literature*
Myrtle and Philip Ashmole: *The Carrifran Wildwood Story*
Michael Russell MSP, Minister for Culture
Mandy Haggith: *The Last Bear*
Linda Gillard: *Star Gazing*

Not pictured:
Gregory Norminton: *Serious Things*

of evil, there are the other more wavering scents of mortality and the natural world. It remains in my opinion as very possibly Jenkins' best work, and therefore as good as anything we have had in the novel this century, for, though a novel, it has a strange haunting poetic quality, conjuring from a few props a fable of eternal significance.'

The Cowal Peninsula where Jenkins lived for the last third of his life is one of the less well known parts of Scotland; but it has, nonetheless, contributed significantly to Scotland's cultural heritage.

The Cowalfest, started in 2003, is a Walking and Arts Festival that promotes the environmental and cultural assets of the area. Russell and Dorothy Bruce, officers of the Festival, tell us, in what follows, how raising awareness of Jenkins' contribution to Scottish literature has been one of Cowalfest's more recent projects.

Michael Russell, Minister at the Scottish Parliament and Jenkins admirer, has supported the Jenkins project and delivered the inaugural Jenkins Memorial Lecture at Toward in 2005. In 2006 the Jenkins lecture was given by Harry Reid, former editor of *The Herald*, and in 2007 a sculpture was commissioned with the brief that the design should refer to Jenkins' best-known book, *The Cone-Gatherers*. This sculpture has been installed

under Douglas firs near the entrance to the Benmore Botanic Garden.

The Forestry Commission Scotland has been closely involved with Cowalfest's Jenkins projects. It was to forestry work that Jenkins, as a conscientious objector, was allocated during World War 2: an experience that provided the context for *The Cone-Gatherers*. The Commission asked the Cowalfest organisers to look at the possibility of preparing the proposal that has now led to the establishing, in 2009, of the first Robin Jenkins Literary and Environmental Book Award.

The judges made the deliberate decision to reflect the welcome diversity of styles and writing genres represented in the submissions made to the competition; and wished this diversity to be characteristic of the future of the Award. They were able to produce a short-list of six titles. They reported that each of those works on the short list met the criterion of high literary quality as well as the environmental requirement. They said that choosing among them was difficult but they settled finally on *The Last Bear*, a novel set a thousand years ago in the remote north-west of Scotland, by Sutherland writer and environmentalist, Mandy Haggith as the first winner of the prize. ■

A Dangerous Place

SHORT STORY BY CYNTHIA ROGERSON

SHEILA IS GETTING used to the heat. The way the air doesn't go anywhere, but just sits mid stream, slightly stale. A whiff of salt from the bay, eucalyptus from the hill, exhaust fumes from the freeway. Something else underneath. Maybe the smell of things rotting. The air tastes used.

She bought clothes for their move for California, but the Marks and Spencer's dresses stick to her skin and she's recently taken to wearing cotton shorts and sleeveless T-shirts from Macy's. Not flattering, over her dimpled thighs and upper arms, but vanity is out the window. All that matters is being able to do the shopping, the cleaning, the cooking. She moves in slow motion.

One mystery. Though it is baking hot there are no places to hang up clothes. Every house has a dryer in the garage. Pronounced gaRAGE. Sheila can adapt to most things – she's here, isn't she? And they are not short of a bob these days. But she is not going to spend good money drying clothes with electricity when the sun can do it for nothing in half an hour and leave her clothes smelling sweet. So one of the first things she does is make her husband drive her to a hardware store to buy a clothes line and pegs.

Her new line hangs between the lemon tree and the pole her sixteen year old son Jamie hammers into the ground for her. She watches him do this from their kitchen window, his narrow frame tensed, sweat coating his freckled nose and sunburned ear tips. As poignant, in his clumsy metamorphosis to adulthood, as a toddler emerging from infancy. Such a brief appearance, this version of Jamie. A matter of months, the blink of an eye.

He could use some help tying the line, she can see he isn't quite able take the strain. But she stands and watches, her hands absent-mindedly drying a dish with a tea towel. She sees that he doesn't want help. A proud manliness has come over his face.

She has three sons; has the hang of boys by now. Pretending they are better than they are is the only way to keep them getting better. Confidence is all. So she patronises them, even her Murdo, her fat, red faced, puffing husband. She patronises him, always says what a winner he is, and look where he is now. A transfer to the San Francisco offices. A very long way from Inverness.

Jamie is her baby, the older two are still in Scotland. Jamie might have left school if they'd stayed there, he is old enough and he hates school enough. But here, in this strange and lush place, he is only a sophomore in high school, has another two years before he will leave. This is good. This place slows down everything. Even childhood lasts longer, and god knows, thinks Sheila, everyone could do with a bit more of that.

It was a good move, coming here. Good for everyone. Isn't this the place everyone dreams of coming? You can't do better than California.

Yet she has to keep checking, keep justifying it to herself. Such an awful risk you take when you stop living the life you were raised to live and try living somewhere else. You can't know in advance if it is the right decision.

Jamie only had a few friends in his old school. But here, he has quickly become popular. When he opens his mouth to speak, blond girls with tanned legs in short white skirts, stop talking and listen. Smile. Say things like:

'Oh Jamie, I love the way you talk. Are you coming to the beach later?'

One Saturday night, some boys come to his house. One of the boys is driving his father's car, a big blue Buick. Sheila thinks he looks too young to drive, has to remind herself the legal driving age here is younger. You can drive five years before you can drink in a bar.

'Wanna come out, Jamie? Maybe head down the point. There's a party later at Paula's.'

Jamie checks with his parents, who gladly say:

'Oh yes, go, son. Have fun. See you later.'

They watch him jump in the car with the other boys and drive off. Murdo notices the garden hose left lying on the lawn. Says:

'Lazy kid never puts anything away. Useless. Tomorrow morning he's doing it properly and cutting the grass too.'

'What about the baseball game? Don't you have to make an early start for that?'

'He'll have time. I'll just get him up early.'

The boys are in a good mood. It's July 15th, smack dab in the middle of summer, another six weeks of no school. Still hot, but bearable. The windows are all down, the breeze delicious on their bare arms and necks. Straight white teeth flash in almost continual smiles. They drive down the point by the bay, stop and drink a few beers from the twelve pack one of them has brought. They laugh hysterically at silly things.

An obese man in bright pink Hawaiian shorts and no shirt comes jogging down the beach. He passes in front of their car. Jamie laughs with the boys. He doesn't think the man looks funny, but their laughter is contagious. They laugh their croaky adolescent laugh, and then one of them says:

'How about this party then?'

They start off again. It's not late yet, only just after 8:00, the sky just starting to darken, the horizon a haze of pink sundown. They drive back up to the coast road, head south. They get behind an old van.

'Pass it, man.'

'This guy's going nowhere. Come on.'

The boy driving swings out to overtake it, straight into the path of a cement truck headed for the quarry. The truck driver doesn't even have time to step on the brakes. All he sees is one second's worth of blue car as it flies off over the embankment.

Sheila and Murdo are watching television when the phone rings. They're watching a doctor show, the same one they used to watch in Scotland. They're drinking Earl Grey tea, and a plate of imported Mr. Kipling cakes sits on the table between them. Their bubble of normality. Murdo answers the phone. Sheila turns the sound down.

'Yes. What? What? How badly? Oh. Yes. We'll be right there. Yes, I understand. I know where.'

Sheila is shaking her head, just tiny movements, but quick.

'What is it? What's the matter?'

'There's been a car accident, Sheila.'

'Jamie.'

'Was thrown from the car. He's at hospital. Where are the car keys? Quick. I'll get the car out.'

'Oh no, oh god, Murdo. Stop. Are you sure it's Jamie?'

'I'm sure. Sheila. He's not dead. We have to go now.'

He gives her a little push towards the door, then turns off the lights and television. Watches himself doing these things. In the car he hears his voice from a distance.

'She couldn't say how bad it is. I asked. She said they couldn't say yet. I don't think they know. She just said to come. The nurse. Or whoever she is.'

They arrive at the hospital and park. Start to walk, then run in. Sheila is shivering. They ask at a reception desk and are told to go to the third floor. In the elevator, she shuts her eyes and fights an urge to sleep. Odd, but she could sleep at the drop of a hat. A big, grey cloud of oblivion, that's where she wants to be. In a rain cloud, breathing familiar damp air, her babies asleep upstairs.

A nurse is with him, checking the tubes running from his arm and mouth. Sheila stares, startled. Jamie looks as if he's been here hours, all tucked in, clean and bandaged. As if this evening contains two Jamies, one they have waved goodbye to, who is spending this evening doing what carefree American boys do on Saturday nights. While another Jamie has lain here, tended to, his heart monitored by machines.

The tiniest fluke has incurred this. Surely such a tiny fluke can be reversed, proved wrong, inappropriate. Time travel on a grand scale is out of the question, Sheila knows, but surely travelling mere minutes into the past can be managed. This boy should be at a party. The other driver should've taken his time with his dinner earlier, not rushed it, not been exactly in time to hit a blue Buick driven by a child.

Anyway, how can this have happened without her knowing about it, not felt the smallest flicker of alarm? Just watched television and drunk tea. Something is very drastically out of kilter. Maybe to do with the dislocation of being in the wrong country. Her radar has

not functioned and now this. Her son's lanky body, tucked tight under a hospital sheet.

'Jamie, Jamie,' they both say in low voices.

'One minute,' says the nurse, and presses a buzzer. A doctor appears seconds later, a young man, maybe thirty. His eyes take them in. He speaks slowly, looking from Murdo to Sheila, back and forth.

'Your son was thrown though the car windscreen. He's in critical condition, we're just stabilising him, then taking him to the operating theatre. He had his student card in his pocket, that's how we knew where to phone you.' He pauses.

They both speak at once.

'What's wrong with him? Is going to be alright?'

'Why is he asleep, have you put him to sleep?'

'James was in a great deal of pain. He was sedated. It's better if he's unconscious till we know more about his condition. I'm sorry I can't tell you more. I'm awfully sorry. You must be very worried. We're doing all we can. We're taking him in a few minutes. There's a room you can wait in.'

'Doctor, what about the other boys. In the car.' Sheila almost whispers.

The doctor shakes his head unhappily, exhales loudly through his nose. Opens his mouth to say something. Closes it, then opens it again.

'We're still trying to reach their families.'

Sheila shuts her eyes a second, absorbs this. Then picks up her son's hand. Soft and limp.

'It feels clammy, Murdo. Touch it.'

Murdo looks at the doctor, then lifts Jamie's other hand. Feels the flesh, but cannot say to himself this is my son's hand because a sense of unreality has fallen on him, heavy and powerful. He has to keep breathing normally and not shout and run. He has to remind himself to breathe.

'Yes, it does feel a little chilly. It's probably the air conditioning.'

'You don't think he's cold?'

'I don't think so. He's asleep Sheila.'

'He's deeply sedated. I'll talk to you as soon as we know more,' says the young doctor, and he turns and leaves the room.

They watch Jamie's face a few minutes, lean towards him. Below the bandaging covering his forehead, his eye lids flicker, as if he is dreaming. His lips press together. He has thin lips and pressed together, they disappear, make a pinched slit under his nose. His skin is white and the sunburned skin is obviously that – dead cells temporarily still attached to the pink living skin underneath. He is breathing, they both notice. They keep checking that his chest rises and sinks.

The waiting room is brightly lit, with a coffee machine, but no tea. Sheila makes them both coffee, but after a sip, neither drinks it. They sit across from each other in plastic arm chairs.

► Sheila has rehearsed this scene. The way every mother waiting up for a child to come home imagines the phone call with the bad news. The sudden violent rip in the fabric of her life, a glimpse of darkness and chaos. And that is the strange thing. When she has imagined it, she has always reacted the same with a pounding heart and tears ready to flow. But here she is, living the reality, and it isn't like that at all. She feels cold and frightened, trapped inside herself. Her head feels squeezed. She is acutely aware of all the details in the room. The posters persuading pregnant mothers to give up cigarettes, a dark stain on the carpet, the tinny ticking of the clock.

'He'll be alright, you'll see Sheila. I've heard this is the best hospital in the county. Jamie'll pull through.'

She manages a glancing nod of agreement.

'Kids put you through it, no doubt. They all have.'

'But this is the worse, Murdo. Nothing like this ever happened before.'

'There was that time Ian needed all those stitches.'

'No. That was not the same.'

I've never been here, she wants to say. They are silent awhile.

Each privately considers praying. Sheila, who has been very religious, shuns it, except to urgently offer a bargain to whatever powers might exist to never again take the lives of her children for granted, should Jamie be spared.

Murdo, though, thinks praying might be a good way to fill the time. He says all the prayers he can recall from childhood. He says them silently several times, his lips moving. He knows he is not a subtle man, might miss things. He likes to hedge his bets.

They look at the clock. They sit up every time footsteps come near their door. Once Murdo says:

'Sixteen is an insane age to be driving. I knew it was. It's crazy.'

And later,

'If I find they'd been drinking.'

But Sheila doesn't answer, only sighs. Paces sometimes, to the window and around the room. Out the window she can see their car in the car park. It's the middle of the night and the car park is almost empty. She can't open the window. She sees a light in the sky, maybe a star. Maybe first star, a wish star.

She has a clear sense of Jamie, of who Jamie is, how he feels, separate from his body. The

thought of him has a certain shape and weight and colour in her mind, wrapped round by the soft vowels and consonants of his name. Shutting her eyes, she wills this Jamie to stay inside his skin, his blood, his bones, his cells. Inhabit yourself, she begs silently. Do not leave. She opens her eyes and tries the window again, but it won't budge. She longs for the sound of crickets and frogs, the lukewarm air and sense of over ripeness. Then in a sudden surge, she is drenched with longing for that other landscape. Home. Damp air hitting the back of her throat like a drink of water, the smell of coal fires and wood smoke, the sound of voices speaking with her own accent. She literally feels the floor and walls receding, all of California fading into nightmarish unreality.

Yet when she pictures their home in Scotland, she has to really think. Remind herself of the wallpaper pattern in the sitting room. So much has just slipped away.

She doesn't want to think of Jamie anymore. Jamie is in a very dangerous place and if she does not let her thoughts summon him, he might be safe. He needs to be alone now, not fragmenting into her mind. He needs all his strength. Her job is to hold her breath, mentally. Put everything on hold, so he won't have missed anything when he revives.

But again she sees him putting up her clothes line. Leave me alone, I know I'm not the strongest sixteen year old, but I can do it. The man he would be, wanted to be, simmering impatiently beneath the surface. But still a child, still recognisably her boy.

'Should I go and try to find the canteen, see if there's any tea?' asks Murdo, coming to an end of a round of prayers.

'I don't mind, Murdo. Go, if you like. Go on, stretch your legs.'

And when he returns, he asks:

'Would you not be more comfortable if you took your cardigan off?'

And later,

'Maybe you should slip your cardy on again, you look cold.'

Once a nurse pops her head in, but by accident, and she has no news for them. Then a man comes in, looks at the magazines, looks at Sheila and Murdo. Eyebrows raised in a question.

'We're just waiting. For news of our son,' says Murdo.

'He was in a car accident, he's in surgery

so they can see how badly injured he is,' says Sheila.

'Ah,' says the man.

'We think the other lads all died. He's lucky,' continues Sheila, almost whispering.

'How terrible. Terrible.' He frowns, then chooses a car magazine and leaves.

'He didn't want to know, did he, Sheila. Oh well, can't say as I blame him. Dreadful business.'

She says nothing.

'Are you sure you don't want me to get you something to eat or drink, love?'

'No thanks, Murdo.'

She knows what he needs. He needs the gift of her helplessness. Her collapsing in his arms. She may never give him this. While Jamie is in danger, she must remain remote and focussed. Active worrying is what she is good at. She's had years of practise and now she hones all her ability into concentrated hard fretting. This is what Jamie needs his mother to be doing. Not comfort seeking. She keeps busy looking out the window. Walks to and fro, in brittle movements. Moves her head jerkily from clock to magazine to window. Not to Murdo.

Murdo begins to feel strange with the effort of not crying. There is a pain in his throat, a gasping tightness in his chest. All his life, he has been able to fix things. He is a first class trouble shooter, but this is something else. Jamie's injuries lay outside his ken. Unlike Sheila, he allows himself to sense the possibility of losing Jamie and he sees it clearly. There it is and though he knows he can do nothing about it, he can not stop wanting to fix it. Frustration wells up and his whole body tingles. He thinks he might faint. He stretches, takes deep breaths camouflaged as yawns. Fidgets by emptying his pockets. Money, keys, two baseball tickets.

He turns his face to the wall and begins to cry. He rocks and cries quietly, while his wife looks out the window. Searches in her bag for a clean hanky to give to him.

The driver of the truck that hit the blue Buick sits in an all night diner. He orders black coffee and a donut. He is tired and dirty. Dirt clogs the pores of his face and the creases in his hands. His nails are short but still grime has found its way under them. He ignores the donut and lights a cigarette. His boss has said he can have tomorrow off, but he doesn't think he will. A day at home alone, thinking, is not what he needs. He runs over the evening's

events again. He can't stop doing this. It will be years before he can stop doing this.

Leaping out of his truck and hurtling down the embankment to the car. Seeing bodies through flames. The grass beginning to catch fire, sparks crackling on dry manzanitas. Clambering back up to the road, seeing the boy flung in the bushes. Checking for breathing.

'Jesus fuck, you're not dead, you're all right, what a smart kid you are, not dead, good boy, you good good boy.'

Scooping the body up, he lets his broad chest and shoulders take the weight and carries him up the slope. All the time talking to the boy. The boy whimpers, flings an arm, does not open his eyes. The truck driver carries him to a near-by house. Opens the door and hollers:

'Hey! I need an ambulance, anybody home? I'm phoning an ambulance.'

The house is empty. He lays the boy on a sofa and finds the phone in the kitchen and dials. He gets some paper towel and dampens it. Gently washes some of the blood off the boy's face.

'Hey, you're going to be alright there guy, you're looking pretty good, have you fixed up in no time. You're such a good kid, everything's going to be alright.'

It doesn't take long for the ambulance to arrive. But all the time, the truck driver keeps saying things to the boy.

Jamie lies still while men and women he will never meet hover over him. Sheila loses sensation in her legs, giving Murdo the chance to do something. They lean against each other like felled trees, caught mid fall by lucky accident. Six thousand miles away, in a house where two other sons are eating their dinner, all the places where Jamie spent a lot of time – his bedroom, the soft chair by the television, the place in the garden that slopes down to the noisy burn, the flat ground where he used to kick the football – all these places might quiver if they knew. A light might flicker over them. Even in California, which has known him so briefly, there are places that might notice. The pole holding Sheila's washing line might remember his straining. It is hard to tell the difference made by one less heart beating. It is dawn. Outside the hospital, the crickets stop and the traffic starts. ■

Doubles Poems by Desmond Graham

The Dilemma

Would you rather listen to
Glenn Gould and The Goldberg Variations
or watch 'Match of the Day'
before a vital operation?
'It depends on the outcome', he said.

The Lesser of Two Evils

not quite
more a matter
of assessing
which of two possible
mistakes
would be the one
you would rather have made
if it didn't work out

At The Sportsman Dunstanburgh

Watching a Viennese
eating a kipper
is like seeing a man
picking his way through
a crossword
eyes down
concentrating
or someone
very politely
looking for fleas

The Callander Poetry Weekend 2009

BY CHRIS POWICI

EVERY SEPTEMBER, THANKS to the vision and hard work of Poetry Scotland editor Sally Evans, and husband Ian, something happens in the Trossachs town of Callander that, amazingly, has nothing (or very little) to do with hill walking, golf, wool shops or high teas. From just about every corner of Scotland, and quite a few niches south of the border and across the sea, poets and readers of poetry (not always the same people) gather to have themselves a festival.

The sheer range of poetry read (as well as whispered, sung, declaimed and screamed) at this year's versefest proved a heady brew. There were entertaining 'knockabout' poems about, among other things, the ambiguity of a certain kind of Glasgow handshake and the prehistory of the Cornish pasty; there were also insightful, poignant, poems that explored questions of identity, history, war, the nature of place, loss, desire and art. There were talks on Burns and science, Burns and the stars as well as a sprightly and entertaining literary history of bees. To misquote that most lyrical and sophisticated of literary minds, Donald Rumsfeld, there were poets you knew you knew, poets you knew you didn't know and poets you didn't know you didn't know but got to know anyway. Their names include Elizabeth Rimmer, Colin Will, Eleanor Livingstone, Les Merton, Vivien Jones, Jean Atkin, Jackie Galley, Fiona Russell, Andrew McCallum, Bridget Khursheed, Magi Gibson and Charlie Gracie. There was also Sally Evans who gets a sentence of her own for organising the whole shebang and ensuring that the twin venues of the Kirk hall and Kings Bookshop were filled with attentive and appreciative audiences. I should also mention

the haunting but oddly beguiling presence of the itinerant poetry librarian. All the way from San Fransisco (where else?) this formidably besuited and bespectacled figure managed to blend public service and performance art with a finely tuned bureaucratic aplomb. The weekend culminated in a cruise around Loch Katrine where thirty eight poets (and two somewhat bemused tourists from Leicester) enjoyed the scenery and some bite-sized portions of Walter Scott's *The Lady of The Lake*.

Of course, not all the poets engaged their audience with the same degree of intensity, and some poems 'hit the spot' rather more unerringly than others. But there plenty of high points and, besides, to expect absolute consistency and slickness of presentation is rather to miss the point of the The Callander Poetry Weekend. In a letter to *The Sunday Herald* Tessa Ransford (another welcome presence at Callander) claimed that the bigger literary festivals – The Edinburghs, Cheltenham and Hays of this world – will surely have their moments but tend to suffer from a degree of sameness due to their focus on celebrity culture and the need to please sponsors. As far as Tessa is concerned a thriving literary culture means writing engaging with readers 'through the regular use of radio and interactive modern technology that allows person-to-person meeting, as well as local authors regularly visiting local schools.' It's a fair point and events like the Callander Poetry weekend have a part to play as well in bringing readers and writers together; it's diverse, independent, unpredictable, joyfully proud of its grass-rootedness and a living, breathing testament to the belief that poetry matters. You even get to go on a cruise. Beat that Edinburgh! ■



Itinerant Librarian at Callander. Photo: Chris Powici.

One of Lari Don's novels for children is reviewed by Niamh Latham, aged 10

FIRST AID FOR FAIRIES

and other fabled beasts

By Lari Don

Published by Floris

REVIEWED BY NIAMH LATHAM, AGED 10.

I LIKED THIS book, Niamh told us. It's about a girl called Helen who lives with her Mum, a vet, and her Dad and little sister Nicola.

Helen goes to primary school and she's keen on playing her violin, but she also gets involved in surprising adventures and so she has a problem fitting in all the practice she should if she wants to get to go to music school.

The big adventure in *First Aid for Fairies* begins when she sees a strange creature in

the garden of her parents' house one evening when her mother, the vet, is out.

The creature has the body of a horse but the head and shoulders of a boy. He tells her his name is Yann. He has an injury to his leg and Helen offers to try and sort that for him. She knows a bit about first aid because sometimes she has watched her mother at work. She manages to help him and very soon Helen meets his friends who include fairies and, as the title of the story says, other fabled beasts.

Niamh says that, although you know that fairies don't really exist that's not a problem in enjoying the story. They talk about the things they have to do and deal with just like real people. She thinks children even older than herself might enjoy it because of all the things that happen.

Yann and his friends have a big problem

about a Book that is very important to their tribe – the Book is lost and it is their fault. There is an enemy whose leader is called the Master of the Maze; and he is a Minotaur. Which means that he is a creature a little bit like Yann except that the Minotaur has the body of a man but his head is that of a bull – very scary. And he too wants to find the Book because it will give him power.

So all these people are searching for the clues that will tell them how to track it down. And Helen gets involved too. Though she also gets into quite a lot of trouble with her parents and also at school because she has got behind with her music tasks, and all the worse because she tries to keep her activities with the fairies secret.

It gets really scary at times, says Niamh but in a way that you enjoy. And in the end

– well she's not going to tell us how it ends because that would spoil it. But she promises that though it's scary it's also really exciting. ■



Poems by Kona MacPhee

The problem of the bees

Inside the templed city, writers tend
the stone-walled gardens of their cleverness,
and flaunt them, with the air of pioneers
who think they've mapped the limits of the west,

at scientists who know they have unpicked
the bumblebee's enigma, and henceforth
can mount it, dead and labelled, on a pin
which, dropped in water, turns and wavers north

to where, far off, an aging canvas, stretched
and mounted in the manner of the east,
is ever blank, despite the fecund brush
the artist borrowed from the orchidist,

while up and down the country, thrumming hives
fall silent overnight – and in the south,
a skein of pollen rides the wind beyond
the apple-blossom's parched and begging mouth.

A minute's silence

i.m. Simon Wake 1961-2008

We stand encircled at the stony Y
where road and gravelled track connect; beyond,
a twisting path away and up the hill;
beneath, the cold intransigence of ground.
Some gesture, then, some fleeting monument
of silence, yes? And so our quiet makes
a gap the restless morning wants to fill:

a cow lows across the carse; a pause;
she lows again. A startled pheasant grinds
his rusty gears, then clatters to ascension.
The grimy sheep's observances produce
erratic bleats of woolly liturgy;
even the distant knots of trees are loud
in farewell kyries of autumn colour.

In absence, hurt. In stillness, eloquence.
The speechless minute passes. Words return
and turn themselves to memories of you.
our murmurs rise and join the clear-skied morning's
gentle mass of sound; the vocal blackbird
tells us, Simon, whatever silence is
it isn't what you were. Or where you are.

Autumn evening blues

Love, as the day's length plummets
down the shot-tower fall of October
and this old house is reminded
of its standing invitation to the cold,

remember this: the chilled skin warms
by inner-dwelling heat; our eyes
in common darkness barely glimmer,
yet burn like tigers in the infrared.

To a young daughter

Sore as the sorest thumb you think
you're sticking out like, clubbed today
by differentness, cut off, left out,
I'd fold you up in ugly-duckling
promises of future perfect

sisterhood revealed, but then
I think of swans, those debutantes
who grace the loch in glossed parade –
that brutal elegance, that blank
exactitude! – and I recall

instead the mountain hare, whose pelt
pulsates with light and dark, a beat
that's metered by her essence, not
the world's erratic seasons; who,
beneath a mild December sky

(no snow to coat the bog-black peat,
to smooth the stalky heather), finds
herself a radiant dissident,
her bluewhite glow a lonely vote
for somewhere else's winter. Spied,

she freezes in a bid to fade
that's doomed by what she is; and yet
she lives; she fears and lives, preserves
her only self, that soon the world
must answer her with snow.

Wild night's morning

Watch as storm-lees
settle in the air,
a black rood, pendant,
mullioning a square

of cloud-merled sky:
one crow, athwart
the erratic wind,
and an omen caught

in his own mischance
(fox-struck, cat-nipped
or weather-strafed?):
one pinion stripped

to a chancel-lattice
or the ragged fringe
of a roof subsiding;
yet look – he'll hinge

on that half-plumed wing
and hold his course,
annul each gust
with accordant force:
the metaphor
in his ruined grace
not a sundered abbey
but a boxer's face.

Marchmont Road

Above the tarmacked voids that breach
the ranks of tenements, a reach

of sky to which the day has lent
a calibrated gradient

of northern blue. Along the road
the pelt of antlike cars is slowed:

a hearse in mirror-faultless gloss
precedes its cavalcade of loss,

and while this dark skein passes, I
cast out for where its gist might lie . . .

Stop it. No moment *must* encore
itself in some pert metaphor.

Suspend that distanced commentary.
Take a deep breath. Now *be* here. Be.

Poems by Peter Urpeth

Plover

Plover
wandering
like a banished monk
on the moor,
show me
what you see
from your tummock,
tell me
what you hear at night
in the darkness
so that I can learn
from the bog.

I envy you running
bare-footed
beyond the road end
and your low, sure flight
by the river bend,
but do you know your
belly's black?

And why do you not fly
to a hot, dry land
to raise your young?

Why do you
not answer me
when I shout at you
until my voice
has broken?

Then, in the quiet,
you ask me
why I live in a house
when the land is open
and the sky is as free
as burn water,
and why I will not be
your neighbour?

The Emptying, The Finding

for Norrie Bissell

An ràmh is fhaisg air laimh, iomair leis
(Row with the oar that's closest to hand - old Gaelic proverb)

He soussed his tongue in the Clyde,
rowed his curragh on Partick buses
and in tenement closes,
banked shells in window boxes,
sowed dulse in rusted pans
for winter milking,
set sail for the light out west,
knowing well the old charts
of the Dumbarton Road.

On Luing, the Bàird Cladaich
brag and chatter,
their gonys bobbing keel-less
over the sands,
and the terns - *Sternus Paradisaea* -
(one summer flying,
two summers feeding)
worry over the verses
of a iorram they learnt
in the waves of long back,
when there was just one word
for poetry and song.

On Luing, the poet finds silence
in local abundance,
bunched like Sea Pinks
on that mile of shore,
and hardy of the salt wind
as his own words,
fine for the emptying,
the finding.

Over lapping, at St Aulas

At St Aulas
in keeping
with the oral traditions
of wave birds -

The cormorants
speak Holy Norse,
and the guillemots
have the Gaidhlig.

The gannet
knows Norn.
The black backs,
staunch Doric.

The red legs,
have mostly Welsh,
The kittiwake,
some Cant.

There's a crake
who knows Xhosa,
And a goose
fluent in Inupiaq.

The oyster-catcher
took a vow
of silence
but weakened
for a love of words,

and the over-lapping
of tongues
by the shore.

Mouth Music

If the net breaks,
we'll fish from the shore,
If the pipe reed splits,
we'll sing instead,
If the singer is mute,
we'll feed her seeds.
If the drum skin slackens,
we'll stamp our feet.

If the peat is wet,
we'll burn the creel,
If the berries shrivel,
we'll eat the stems,
If the axe is blunt,
we'll burn the books.
If the oar blade breaks,
we'll hope for wind.

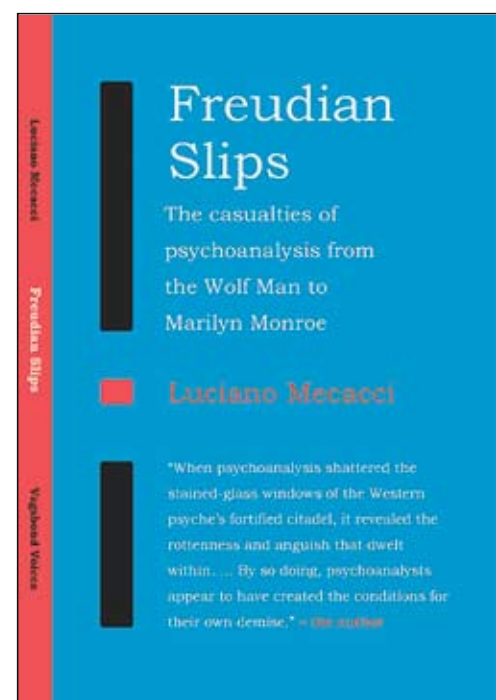
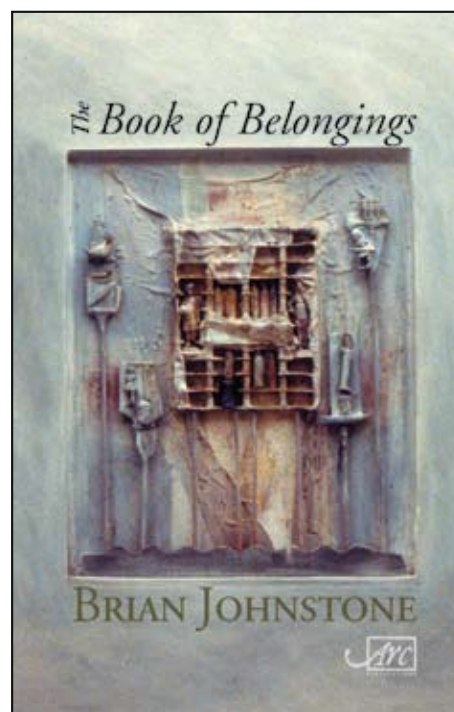
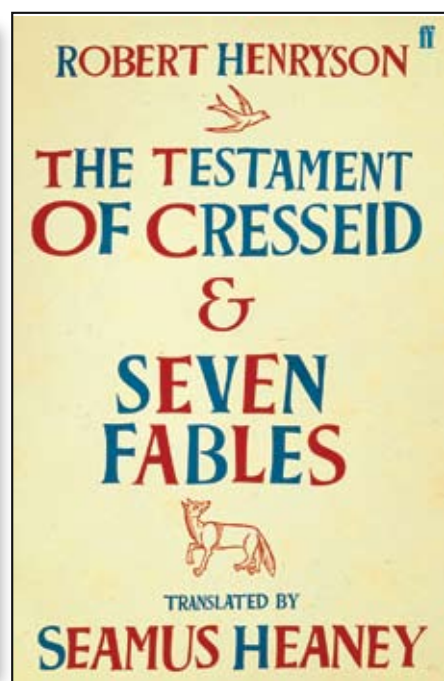
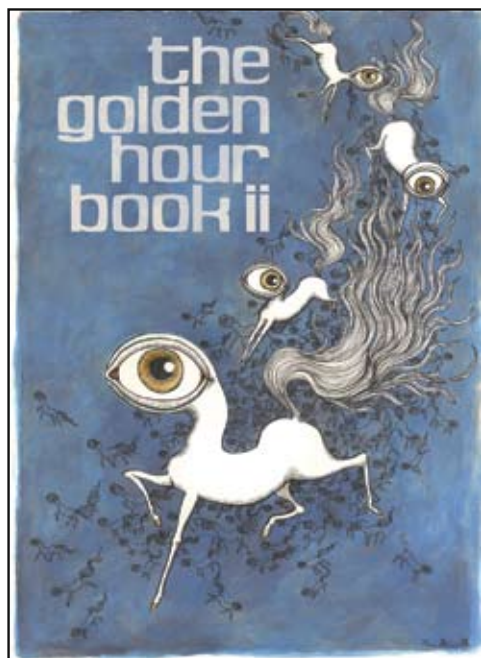
If the salmon dies,
we'll never know,
If the heather burns,
we'll sleep on bracken,
If the plover keens,
we'll weep at night.
If we talk with the crows,
we'll know our fate.

If the high tide turns,
we'll gather kelp,
If the loon wails,
we'll beat a path,
If we send word,
the distance is shorter,
If we walk at night,
we'll arrive by dawn.

If the crop fails,
we'll gather at the shore,
If the nest is empty,
we'll chew on feathers,
If the neck bone breaks,
we'll set it by sunlight,
If the fruit is bitter,
we'll blame the root.

If we bury what we have,
we'll neither waste nor thrive,
If we shout down the well,
there'll be weed in the burn,
If we sing on the machair,
there'll be haar at the coast,
If we break the silence,
we'll keep our tongues.

REVIEWS

**The Testament of Cresseid and Seven Fables**

By Robert Henryson

Translated by Seamus Heaney.

Published by Faber

REVIEW BY DERRICK MACCLURE

The well-justified enthusiasm which we bestow on our national bard, and have done most particularly during the Homecoming year, often blinds us to the fact that he is far from the only mighty poet that Scotland has produced. One of his great mediaeval predecessors, from a period in which the Scots tongue attained to an even higher and more sustained level of poetic development than in Burns' eighteenth century, now appears in a form which removes any excuse — to the extent that excuses ever existed — for contemporary readers to remain ignorant of his works.

Robert Henryson, schulemaister of Dunfermlyne, is on any showing not only one of Scotland's greatest poets but one of the finest writers of fifteenth-century Europe. Active during the reigns of James III (of whose foibles his poems contain some thinly-veiled criticisms) and James IV, his work embodies not only a literary sure-footedness rarely matched in Scottish poetry of any period and an effortless command of the full range of mediaeval scholarship both Christian and secular, but a profound human sympathy and a passionate response to both the tragedies and the pleasures of life which only Burns, among compatriot poets, can equal. The present book contains his greatest single poem, *The Testament of Cresseid*, and a selection from his masterly re-tellings of Aesop's Fables, in the original mediaeval Scots and with facing-page translations into contemporary English verse by Seamus Heaney.

Poetic translation is a creative art of enormous potential. It has a particularly important place in Scottish literature: one of Henryson's immediate successors, Gavin Douglas, initiated the entire European tradition of secular translation with a masterly rendering of Virgil's *Aeneid*; the flourishing coterie of

poets which adorned the court of James VI (the King himself being an enthusiastic participant) produced translations from their French and Italian contemporaries; in the twentieth century virtually every one of the great post-MacDiarmid makars included translations, collectively representing nearly every language in Europe, in his output. Heaney in his introduction briefly examines "the three motives for translation identified by the poet and translator Eliot Weinberger", these being "advocacy for the work in question ... refreshment from a different speech and culture, and the pleasures of 'writing by proxy'".

These and other factors make poetic translation an irresistibly enticing, even addictive pursuit; but the pleasure which it entails brings a concomitant responsibility: in a nutshell, a translator has a moral obligation to produce a version worthy of its original. A poetic translation (as distinct from a mere literal crib) must itself be a work of at least comparable merit to its source: if a translator offers something which purports to be a rendering of a great poem but is in fact patently inferior to it, he is misrepresenting his model and betraying his responsibility as a translator. The more distinguished the original poem, the more daunting the task facing the translator: a fact recognised by Gavin Douglas in his graceful statement that no translation, even an inadequate one, could detract from Virgil's glory. Douglas was a major poet in his own right; but it is a noteworthy and readily observable fact that great poets do not necessarily make great poetic translators: Hugh MacDiarmid's translation of Donald Sinclair's *Slighe nan Seann Seun* ("The Path o' the Auld Spells") is frankly terrible; and by contrast Alexander Gray, though certainly no negligible poet in his original work in English, achieves his highest distinction in his Scots translations from German and Danish.

In the present case, we have some of the most representative work of an unquestionably great poet being translated by one of the most practised and most respected of his contemporary confrères, and one whose fine

rendering of *Beowulf* has established him as a translator. How, and how well, has he approached the task?

The poems of Henryson represented here are all (except for two self-contained sections of the *Testament*) in the same format: stanzas of seven decasyllabic lines with a fixed rhyming pattern *ababbcc*. A translator is not necessarily obliged to replicate the actual verse form of his original, even if this is possible as in many cases it is not: this time it clearly is, and Heaney appears at first sight to have chosen to do so. Not entirely so, however. Henryson's rhymes are always exact; and though the mediaeval decasyllabic had not yet crystallised into the strict iambic pentameter of, say, Marlowe, he alternates stressed and unstressed syllables with notable consistency, departing from the pattern no more frequently or more radically than is normal in iambic poetry of later periods. Heaney, by contrast, makes free use of rhymes which are only partial and lines which are metrically irregular:

*The fables told by poets in old times
Are by no means all grounded upon truth
Yet their attractive style, their craft and themes
Still make for pleasant listening; and with
Good cause, since they, from the beginning,
Aimed to reprove man's whole wrong way of living
Under the figure of another thing.*

(Prologue to the Fables, p.51)

This reads perfectly well as modern English verse; but clearly it is not Henryson's voice. Sometimes the loss of the dignity which Henryson's stately metre brings to his lines becomes painfully evident: compare

*Nane suld presume be ressoun naturall
Tò seirche the secretis off the Trinitie*

with

*None should presume by their own natural
Reason to unravel the Trinity
(The Preaching of the Swallow, pp.106-7)*

Heaney's treatment of Henryson's varying registers is likewise somewhat cavalier. The line "The same as a sow that snotters in her gruel" (*The Cock and the Jasper*, p.63) is certainly expressive, but it is far more crudely repellent than anything Henryson says at this point. Henryson can and does, at times, make use of deliberately harsh sound effects, and Heaney's rendering of the description of Saturn in *The Testament of Cresseid* is fully in keeping with the original:

*With rucked and wrinkled face, a lyre like lead,
His chattering teeth sent shivers through his chin;*

but at other times, surprisingly, he passes over opportunities for expressive alliteration: Henryson's

*Allace, it wes grit hertsair for to se
That bludie bowcheour beit thay birdis doun*

is tamely rendered as

*Alas, it was heartbreaking then to see him
Butcher those little songbirds out of hand.
(The Preaching of the Swallow, pp.122-3)*

His choice of words is not always truly on target in suggesting Henryson's meaning ("disease" in modern English does not mean the same as *diseis* in Middle Scots ("wretchedness, unhappiness"), *hartlie joy* is not the same thing as "high excitement", "nifty and nimble" is an attractively ear-tickling phrase but does not give the same impression as *richt tait and trig*). And occasionally a chosen word not only fails to convey the sense of the original but is odd or out-of-place in itself: the *schort conclusion* / *Of fair Cresseid* could mean several things (her actual death, the ending which Chaucer did not supply for her story and Henryson has now written, the sword-stroke finality of the concluding line of the poem), but neither any of those nor anything else is suggested by "the final quick *declension* / of fair Cresseid".

Undoubtedly the translation has its felicities. It always reads fluently, expressive

modern idioms are sometimes used fittingly to suggest a similar register in the original (“‘So,’ said the wolf in rage, ‘you think you can / Get round me still? Am I wet behind the ears?’” — *The Fox, the Wolf and the Carter*, p. 133), sometimes a line has fallen into its modern guise with almost complete appropriateness (*Nocht is your fairness bot ane fàiding flour* — “Your beauty’s nothing but a flower that fades”, *Ane fals intent under ane fair pretence* — “A kindly face can mask maliciousness”, *Thinkand on it I may nocht sleip in peis* — “It gives me nightmares just to think of it”; some lines, though unlike the originals, are memorable in their own right (“Dissembled. Acted scared. Bowed. Bade good day.” — “And raged, grimaced, rampaged and bawled and scoffed” — “The sheltering bough is stripped and shrinks and shudders”). It cannot be realistically claimed, however, that this version matches the elegance, the subtlety or the variety of Henryson’s original. This, however, in its context is not necessarily a disadvantage, for the original is there to be read. Many readers will no doubt cast their eyes first over the modern versions; but they will surely be attracted to the Scots text on the facing page, and will find — perhaps to their surprise — that it is by no means as difficult to understand as they may have expected. The modern version is much more than a crib, and readers who close the book after reading only the right-hand pages will certainly have enjoyed a memorable literary experience; but the most important aspect of Heaney’s achievement here, and the one for which he most deserves thanks, is that his translation will serve for many readers as a bridge to the original — a far greater work. ■

The Golden Hour Book II

Various writers and musicians

Forest Publications

REVIEW BY JON MILLER

Reviewing this collection is like trying to herd cats into a sack — beautiful cats, strangely furred, rippling, not quite tamed. It is a bold and commendable venture : to give voice to a number of (relatively) unknown artists, although many of the writers here have been shortlisted for or won prizes. The work here constitutes a literary and musical anthology drawn from nearly three years of performances at the Golden Hour cabaret at The Forest : a collectively owned, volunteer-run arts charity based in Edinburgh. It puts on a range of alternative literary, musical and film events and this vibrant collection is crammed with poetry, short stories and a CD of music performances from the Forest. Much of what is between these covers reflects the sense of adventure and delight that is often built in to the arts centre and its activities.

So, best to give you a flavour of each of the three genres contained in the collection. Poetry first. A wide variety of forms are used, often working through narrative or juxtaposition of startling images and ideas. Some are in the Jo Shapcott/Matthew Sweeney/Paul Durcan manner of tales and flights of fancy in their use of the strange and bizarre, or what

Elizabeth Bishop called ‘*the surrealism of everyday life*’. For instance, *Lessons from My First Giraffe* fuses the human and angular viewpoint suggested in the title. There is a strong sense of an oblique subversiveness in many poems. Others are looser, more conversational, voices telling their stories with an understated heart-breaking quality. Some read more as performance pieces in their looseness of form that will work well for the stage but may not hold the attention over repeated readings.

The short stories are well-crafted, and various themes emerge. They often have a strong sense of characters lost in some in-between state: a middle-aged man trying to fit into a college party in *Basics of Time Travel*; a thirty-seven year old woman acting protectively towards a younger sort-of-friend and co-worker in *What It’ll Be Like When You’re Older*; a young man travelling to China to take up language teaching post in *A Golden Bowl* and finding himself estranged and alienated. Characters have to negotiate a slippery, elusive and troubling sense of the future unfolding in the present they find themselves in. This is continued in the neo-Gothic psychodrama of *A House in Disorder*, a highly wrought (at times over-wrought) tale of mysterious figures waiting for the return, or not, of an enigmatic lover/father figure. Robert Alan Jamieson recreates an historical and political fable that has echoes of the Crofters Commission accounts into tenants’ conditions but set on Thula, a remote island in the Shetland archipelago. Much of this tale is familiar to those of us who live in the north and are familiar with the historical antagonisms of crofters and landowners so it was not a read that surprised me but may take those not as well acquainted with their history unawares.

And you can put the CD on while you’re reading, or just dance round the kitchen to it : blues, African percussion and harmony, Americana, funk, singer songwriters, rap, soundscapes with voices, the contemplative — from their roster of musical talent they have offered up the quirky, the experimental, the urbane and more. The variety is intriguing and you are bound to find something that you will keep listening.

The Forest is to be applauded for the originality of this project. There is simply too much to cram into this review — each of the three genres represented here would need a review of their own to do them justice. Best thing to do: buy a copy. Invite some friends round. Open some bottles. Host your own Golden Hour. Dance to poetry. Then do it again next week. ■

The Book of Belongings

by Brian Johnstone

Arc Publications

REVIEW BY JON MILLER

The sense of absence inhabiting what remains left lying around us is what permeates this latest collection by Brian Johnstone. Johnstone has been involved with various aspects of the poetry world for some considerable time,

perhaps most significantly as the director of the renowned StAnza poetry festival.

The choice of cover image for the collection is apt : The Archeology of Childhood by Will Maclean, a piece which itself deals with that which has been lost and yet remains in images which resonate deep in the cultural and personal subconscious, a history and geology of remembering. For Johnstone, archeology is not just found in the ruins of churches or old civilisations but in the everyday objects that lie around us. Consequently, poems meditate on old photographs, the gable end of tenement blocks (‘grates that stamped each wall/with absence’), jars, maps, the surface of a table and take them as instances of loss, memory, time : how we are surrounded by sudden plummetings through time by the objects, people and places around us.

Often his poems come from a calm meditation on the tenuousness of surfaces and the vacancy and displacement that unsettles us when we contemplate them. In *Snagged* — a poem about the everyday act of clearing the dinner table — the narrator looks through ‘all the surfaces we polish, searching for/our faces, for some deeper richer grain’. In poems such as *Trace* — about the death of his father, where the poet feels ‘only absence, the impress/ of a word in pencil someone’s accidentally erased’ — names are slowly elided by time, the slow erasure of the personal. This image is picked up again in *Place of Graves* where an emigre returning home reads her family’s name on the grave. She covers it in snow so that ‘It reads again, a white script/ghosted by her fingers into stone’. This sense of the past’s faint presence on the present runs throughout this collection as Johnstone examines these ideas in a variety of guises and voices.

Significantly placed towards the end of the collection are poems such as *Contours of the Mind*, *The Archeology of Meso-America* and *The Experiments of Dr Beurieux*. These find his subjects attempting to investigate in the early days of a crude medical science or through mere curiosity, the secrets of being human, laying bare the contents of our heads to discover the mysteries, the raw material that forms our contemplations and which might reveal to us some answer, which like the past, is so close : ‘the hollow of his skull, sliced through/we see, to taste the substance of his thought’ ; or rubber paste ‘poured into every crevice of the skull...as if to find a trace of final thoughts’. Notably, there are no answers — ‘Something has left’ — and we are left with vacancy and silence. Johnstone frequently takes us to the rim of this silence and lets us peer in, reach in our hand only for it to return empty. This is not a pessimistic collection however — the humanity implicit in the poems’ voices resonates strongly throughout the collection.

These are well-crafted lyrics from an assured poet ; the voice compassionate, human and humane, themes intriguing and powerful. Some of the weaker poems, however, run merely on the engine of their own metaphor; elsewhere the poems might have been pushed beyond evocation and into a harder truth or revelation. But this is to nit-pick — these are confident poems that can be returned to repeatedly to further unearth and re-discover

their inner archeology, their resonance and pleasures. ■

Stations Of The Heart

A poetry collection by Raymond Friel

Published by SALT

£12.99, 61 pages.

REVIEWER, DONNY O’ROURKE

Raymond Friel is an amiable poet and amongst artists the genial are often underrated. Decency can be dull. The easy going can be hard work. Well, companionable, Friel may be, but it is good poetry that makes him good company. And the poems gathered in this handsomely produced hardback are very, very good indeed. An exceptional collection from an outstanding writer, this ripely rewarding book from a Scottish maestro in mid career ought to be valued very highly indeed.

Raymond Friel is self confessedly, occasionally self mockingly, a family man, one capable even of a uxoriousness that is neither embarrassed nor embarrassing. Perhaps’ families’ man is more accurate because in memory and imagination, he returns frequently and compulsively to his native Greenock and his early, apparently very happy, life there with his parents. At such nostalgic evocations he is a virtuoso. We are encouraged to look at two photographs of his father, taken fifteen years apart. His soon to be, Welsh wife, is lodged with a relative, a shared bed being unthinkable in that working class Clydeside Catholic world. ‘Flask’, is exquisitely just that, a homely, compactly contained lyric into which have been poured and stored, warm, sustaining memories of picnics ‘doon the water’.

Such everyday mysteries, the obdurate numinosity of existence striving to be life under the duress of deadlines, responsibilities and oppressive systemic greeds and grubbiness and the grace to be sought in such grim adversity — these lend the poet something of the gravitas, though never the solemnity, of the celebrant, and indeed Raymond Friel began, but did not complete, his formation as a priest while a seminary boarder in Aberdeen. Driving to work at the Somerset school he now heads listening to a Bernard MacLavery audio book; savouring a crepuscular glass of red as a couple by the holiday swimming pool; admiring his wife’s skill as a painter, succour is sought and blessings counted.

One must be careful not to press religious analogies too far however. An earlier sequence of Friel’s was entitled ‘Confiteor’ and yet he is not a ‘confessional’ poet at all, rarely ‘coming clean’ about dirty deeds or flaunting fragrances a la late period Lowell, Bukowski or Sexton. He is rather, a confiding poet, trusting the reader’s engrossed discretion. Less a divulger than a describer and diviner what he reveals are not the sordid details of any one life but the convolutions and nuances common to every life. In this respect he can lay claim to being our pre-eminent bard of grateful but uncomplacent domesticity.

In their ease born of expertise, Friel’s unrhymed, lightly stressed poems are convincingly life-like, often capable of ‘passing’ as

prose. The generally jauntier and more lurid 'I do this, I do that' musings of Frank O'Hara depended on what was being done being interesting or at least made to seem interesting. This requires existential substance; a beguiling head and heart. Of these prerequisites, Friel is in enviable possession. What he 'shares' is brilliantly selected and edited. No poem ever overstays its welcome. A largo and andante man, mid tempo to slow is the typical metronome setting, apt and ample time to take things in with no dilly dallying on the way, the speed at which a Longley or a Heaney or a Dunn mostly move.

Fluent not garrulous. Opinionated whilst avoiding the hortatory or hectoring. Never shouty, never shrill, Raymond Friel is no wheeshed whisperer from behind a diffidently muffling hand either. His poems are self-possessed, quietly confident, certain always of being given a sympathetic hearing. Some have the atmosphere of lightly but expertly revised diary or journal entries. Epiphanies emerge without fanfare or drum roll. The understated can, of course, be overstated. Not so here. As the book's unapologetically romantic (and religious) title implies, rumination is possible without restraint or reserve.

His lyrics lean left. Pasolini and Dick Gaughan are invoked, though these meditations favour a votive glow over their more coruscating polemics.

One utterly ravishing poem is inspired by a visit to Keats' grave. No excuse this, for egotistically projected wittering. The self is not served. It is gently mortified, though far from morbidly. The ego serves the poetry and not the other way around. This is one great strength among many in Friel's magnificent, 'Stations Of The Heart'. Touchingly, humbly, maturely, perceptively, it's all about him. Life affirmingly, transcendently, it's all about us. ■

The Opposite Of Cabbage

A poetry collection by Rob A. MacKenzie,
Published by SALT

£12.99, 54 pages

REVIEWER, DONNY O'ROURKE

By contrast, Rob A. MacKenzie's more densely freighted texts tend to clip along. These poems are about their contents rather than contentment, sardonic inventories that take knowing, unillusioned ontological stock. There is nothing old fashioned in this talented poet's first full collection. The work is droll, disengaged, hard to impress, coolly au courant. Even the ironies are ironised. This poet too, has a theological background. Yet we rarely get to hear what Rob A. MacKenzie thinks or feels. He is much more inclined to show than tell and what's on display zeroes in on the zeitgeist very astutely indeed. Intellectual resourcefulness formal assurance and a copious imagination underpin MacKenzie's intuitive mastery of our post- almost- everything, huge, tiny, sad, happy, global Scottish moment.

That said, those wanting 'traditional' lyric, more Frielian poems, so to speak, that 'simply' narrate, confide, extol, reveal, convey and emote and so on, in more conventionally 'meaningful' ways will find excellent exam-

ples of that less restless aesthetic towards the end of this really rather splendid collection.

One adroit performance, in a book full of self reflexive intertextual allusions, satirises the makers of Scottish anthologies. One's smile is widened by the irony (surely not lost on this wry connoisseur of contradictions) that the author is himself a kind of compendium of influences. W.N. Herbert, Don Paterson, Iain Bamforth, Robert Crawford, Richard Price and Roddy Lumsden are just a few of the predecessor poets present and correct here almost to the point of pastiche, something MacKenzie is adept at, as his impersonation of the aforementioned Frank O'Hara bears out in 'How New York You Are'. And the pasticheur gives way to the parodist in his skit on Alasdair Reid's 'Scotland'. With the shift to the plural, in every sense, Robert Crawford is, none too subtly, but not unkindly, sent up/dinged down, in 'Scotlands'

For the most part this well read if not 'well made' poetry nimbly and elegantly evades the twin perils of belatedness and the anxiety of influence since the obvious role models have (mostly) been assimilated, their presence persisting only vestigially. In any case, poetry that refuses the solaces and simplicities of bygone days and ways can draw writer and reader into a mutually satisfying complicity as the various 'samples' and literary backbeats, steals, downloads and dubs are referenced.

If the poems don't let on much, they let in a great deal. Rob MacKenzie's is a very porous poetics. (Almost) all life is here. Berlusconi. Sorley MacLean. John Ashberry. Van Der Valk. But as the names get dropped, the spinning conceptual plates do not. 'The Opposite of Cabbage' is a volume whirl with expertly juggled ideas and apprehensions. There is not a dud poem in the book. Those with which the collection culminates balance lexical brio, lyric lift, taut technique, a humanity as deep and nuanced as it is unsentimental and a resistance to paraphrase, that ineffably compelling originality, upon which all really good poetry continues to depend.

It is, and I mean this, probably a matter of age and taste but I like those poems best that combine playfulness with feeling, the jejeunely jaundiced with a relieving jigger of jussiance.

'My Dentist, Aniela', a portrait of the young Polish woman working insouciantly on the writer's teeth avers at its conclusion, '...I tell her I never felt a thing.' In our era, maybe, increasingly, not feeling is feeling. And vice versa. That's how it often feels or doesn't, savouring the un-ingratiating but gratifying poetry of this accomplished chronicler and curator of evolving sensibilities his work is helping to define. ■

Freudian Slips

A translation by Alan Cameron, 2009.

of Marilyn M. e altri disastri della psicoanalisi

by Luciano Mecacci, 2000

Published by Vagabond Voices

£10.00, 206 pages

REVIEWED BY DAISY MACKENZIE.

The English sub-title to 'Freudian Slips' is 'The Casualties of Psychoanalysis from the

Wolf Man to Marilyn Munro'. In his letter introducing this book to NNOW Alan Cameron, its translator and publisher, refers to what he calls its 'shamelessly populist title'.

There is a disarming honesty in that remark. Marilyn remains for many, including the females of us, an iconic figure half-a-century after her death; and the essay about her with which this book begins might attract the general reader where other chapters may seem more abstruse.

Freud too remains an iconic figure. His insights have contributed to a paradigm shift in conceptual framework of an importance comparable to that of Darwin and Einstein; and have been of seminal importance in the development of psychological practices across the 20th century. A considerable literature exists that examines his ideas and describes the many subsequent diversifications and developments.

What is this book able to add to that? This reviewer, a psychologist of several years' mainstream professional experience, has found the arguments of the essays that comprise this book difficult to come to grips with. Perhaps this is an artefact of the translation: are we hearing Mecacci, the Professor of Psychology in Florence, or is it Alan Cameron, the translator, about whom we know little – apart from his introductory letter to us, the headed page of which has, as its footscript, 'publisher of translated novels, political polemics, and indeed unbridled rants.'

A disarming honesty indeed. The preface to 'Freudian Slips' begins thus: 'in 'Master and Margarita', Mikhail Bulgakov describes 'Satan's grand ball' in which men and women, overcome by Eros, allow Death to embrace them ... the ball I am going to speak of has lasted for a century. We have all been witnesses – occasionally sceptical, sometimes indifferent and often enthusiastic. The dancing party has been made up of psychoanalysts and their patients ... we shall now take to the dance floor and see what happen.'

The chapter on Marilyn Monroe begins '... the case of MM is not a psychoanalytical one ... genuine cases of psychoanalysis are made public by psychoanalysts who often write up the case histories ... no psychoanalyst ever wrote about (her).

We can by-pass the circularity of that argument without further comment. The essay goes on to mention the change of name from Norma Jeane to MM (which) '... revealed her desire for a new identity'. Well, gosh, what do you know!

It mentions her stammer, 'a disorder that appeared ... probably (sic) after the first case of sexual abuse. That stammer, a symptom of her insecurity ...' One of her housekeepers is quoted as saying, of her clothes, that she owned no underwear at all. 'It was common knowledge ...' is the phrase used to report that 'she spurned the use of underpants'.

It would be too easy to go on pecking at this essay, but it does go on to describe her reliance on 'drugs', unspecified; her dependence on a series of analysts which included the hugely respected child analyst, Anna Freud; and on her 'bizarre and abnormal behaviour' especially her 'persistent lateness in getting to the set'. Well, gosh again!

At the same time there is a reluctant undertow of recognition that she is simultaneously

a highly sought after film star who is earning a great deal of money; who co-starred with such as Yves Montand, Frank Sinatra and Laurence Olivier; who is said to have had affairs with John F. and Bobby Kennedy and a 'great' friendship with their sister Patricia; and who was married for a time to the playwright Arthur Miller.

The essay goes on to set out what is perhaps the core theme of this book: that 'relationships between patients and analysts do not only entangle (this translation is not too hot on the more exact niceties of English word order) these two persons, occasionally leading into sexual relationships, but also involve other people who are linked into a 'constellation' of emotional ties and interests, this constellation in itself becoming 'the dominant force', 'a collective intelligence'. However, if one of its elements crosses a certain threshold it 'alters the entire system'.

This would be to examine psychoanalytic practice in terms of a quite different conceptual framework, that of systems theory. Now that could have been interesting. Methods based on systems principles have been vigorously developed in some types of group and family therapies in recent decades. But this book doesn't go there. It would be perhaps unfair to use the word 'salacious' to characterise this book's tone. It mentions that marvellous occasion when Marilyn was to, and did, sing 'Happy Birthday, Mr President' to JFK; but it made even that feel just a wee bit tawdry – which it was not!

There are further essays in this book: on analysts' children; patients and lovers; Wolf Man; George Gershwin; and suicide. Their tone has something of that which this carping reviewer has felt when reading the essay on Marilyn Monroe. ■

In the Becoming

By Tom Pow

Published Polygon-Birlinn, 2009.

£12.99

REVIEW NOTE BY RHODA MICHAEL'

(CONTINUED FROM INTERVIEW ON P11)

Tom Pow's poetry has been published in seven collections across the last twenty years. He was 37 when *Rough Seas*, when the first of these came out, already work of maturity, reminiscent, reflective. Most of these collections have attracted the recognition of significant awards. And with each, as they have followed, he has seemed to grow younger yet more experienced; more adventurous but also more confident, and justifiably more assured.

With the publication of *In the Becoming* – New and Selected, the fact of 260 pages of Tom's poems, so well organised within one cover, is an opportunity for retrospect and, even for those who know his work well, for re-discovery. Here is the craftsman of the natural human voice. Here is the voice of a profound sensitivity addressing often the deepest personal intimacies; addressing also the experience of lives other than his own, striving to understand and to represent them fairly.

This collection is not an end-book: it is more a landing platform, a jumping-off point from which he is already advancing to things already in the making, and to come. ■

CONTRIBUTOR'S BIOGRAPHIES

Louise Allardyce –a graduate of Edinburgh College of Art, Louise lives and works in Aberdeenshire. She paints outdoors, capturing the movement, light and freshness of the North East landscape. www.louiseallardyce.com

Jean Atkin lives in Dumfriesshire. Her poetry has appeared in *New Writing Scotland* 27, and other poetry publications. She won the Dartington Hall Ways With Words Poetry Competition in 2008, and she has just this month won the Torbay Open Poetry Prize.

Stuart B. Campbell's most recent collection is 'The Stone Operation' (Dionysia Press). The poems in this issue are from his next book 'In Defence of Protozoans' which is under consideration. On his desk: a hedgehog of vintage fountain pens, a bamboo spring, two football medals (not his), a chunk of quartz . . .

Stewart Conn lives in Edinburgh. From 2002 to 2005 he was the capital's first official Makar. Most recently he edited '100 Favourite Scottish Love Poems (Luath). The poems in this issue will appear in his new collection 'The Breakfast Room', due this Spring from Bloodaxe Books.

Ian Crockatt is a widely published poet. His most recent book, 'Skald', from Koo Press in April 2009, is a series of 30 poems using a form derived from the elaborate form of skaldic poetry discussed in his article in this issue. His next is a selection of translations from Rilke, provisionally called 'Pure Contradiction', due out from Arc Publications in 2010.

Desmond Graham His latest collection, *The Green Parakeet* is just out from Flambard; his *Heart Work* was a PBS Recommendation. Biographer of Keith Douglas. Professor (Emeritus) of Poetry at Newcastle University.

Niamh Latham lives with her family and goes to primary school in a village in the Highlands. She enjoys reading and a wide range of social activities Her first book review is in this issue.

Padraig MacAoidh is a writer and academic, and currently teaches Scottish Literature at Trinity College, Dublin. His Introduction to Sorley MacLean will be out next year.

J. Derrick MacClure, Senior Lecturer (now retired), Department of English, University of Aberdeen. Author of four monographs and nearly a hundred articles on Scottish literary and linguistic topics, Scotland o Gael an Lawlander (a volume of Scots translations from contemporary Gaelic poetry), and Scots poetic translations from (among others) Cecco Angiolieri, Frederic Mistral and Alfred Kolleritsch. Editor of *Scottish Language*. Until 2009 Chairman of the Forum for Research in the Languages of Scotland and Ulster. In 2002 awarded an MBE for services to Scottish culture.

Nora McDermid was born in Sunderland, and has lived in Forres since 1973. Her life is about children and landscape, song and dance. Writing is a relatively recent form of expression for her.

Carl MacDougall has written three prize-winning novels, three pamphlets, three collections of short stories and two works of non-fiction; and has edited four anthologies, including the best selling *The Devil and the Giro*.

Kona Macphee grew up in Australia and now lives in Crieff. Her second poetry collection, 'Perfect Blue' (Bloodaxe) is to be released in February 2010. She's selling her first collection 'Tails' at www.konamacphee.com to raise money for UNICEF.

Jon Miller lives in Wester Ross. He has been published widely in Scottish literary magazines. Currently working on an exhibition of paintings and poetry with the artist Peter White.

Niall O'Gallagher –works as a political reporter for BBC alba and Radio nan Gaidheal. He was recently awarded a Scottish Book Trust / Comhairle nan Leabhraichean New Writer Award, and is working on a collection of poems. He lives in Glasgow.

Donny O'Rourke who has just completed a stint as The Scottish Poetry Library's 'poetry partner' with Renfrewshire Libraries, writes, performs and teaches in Glasgow. He is publisher and editor of 'Bonny Day Books', and Honorary President of the Ullapool Book Festival.

Chris Powici is a poet and teacher living in Dunblane. His poetry has appeared in a variety of magazines and anthologies. The new collection of his poems, 'Somehow this Earth', is published by diehard.

Cynthia Rogerson has had two novels published. Her next is coming out in 2010. Her story in this issue won the V.S. Pritchett Prize in 2008. She is Program Director at Arvon/Moniack Mhor.

Alison Seller lives in Cromarty, teaches Religion and Philosophy, and recently joined the Cloud Appreciation Society. As she drives across the Black Isle she watches the skies perhaps more than she should.

Peter Urpeth is Writing Development Officer with HI-Arts. His novel 'Far Inland' was published by Polygon.

A Glimpse Of The Lighter Side

VERSE FROM DESMOND GRAHAM

Which side

He knew
which side
his bread was buttered

when it was time
to stop
call a halt

he knew
his ps and qs
his onions

he was keen as mustard
hot as chilli
he knew black from white

knew what's trumps
what's what
and how's your father

what he did not know
was neither
here nor there

no two ways
about it
he didn't give a

toss
so what

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GLASGOW

Gaelic Books Council, Mansfield Street
Centre for Contemporary Arts, Sauchiehall Street
Mitchell Library, North Street
The Piping Centre, McPhater Street
Caledonia Books, Gt Western Road
Tchai Ovna Teahouses, Otago Lane
Oxfam Books, Byres Rd and Victoria Rd
Mono, King's Court, King Street
Gallery of Modern Art, Royal Exchange Square.
Borders Books, Buchanan Street
Bookworms, Helensburgh

Northwords Now

seeks an *EDITOR*

The current editor has indicated her intention to step down and the Board is now seeking candidates with a genuine interest in taking on the position of editor of this premier literary publication for the North of Scotland.

The editor has responsibility for ensuring a broad range of top quality content and also writes an editorial. He/she works alongside the manager who supervises production and distribution of the magazine. The editor deals with funding applications, and sets and monitors budgets in conjunction with the Board.

The Northwords Board seeks candidates who can demonstrate skills and experience related to the above tasks and who is an excellent communicator.

There are three issues each year. It is envisaged that the newly appointed editor will work with the outgoing editor on Issue 14, taking on full responsibility for subsequent issues.

Informal enquiries to Rhoda Michael: editor@northwordsnow.co.uk
For an application pack, and further information including remuneration, please download from www.northwordsnow.co.uk

APPLICATION DEADLINE IS NOW 28TH DECEMBER.