

The **FREE** literary magazine of the North

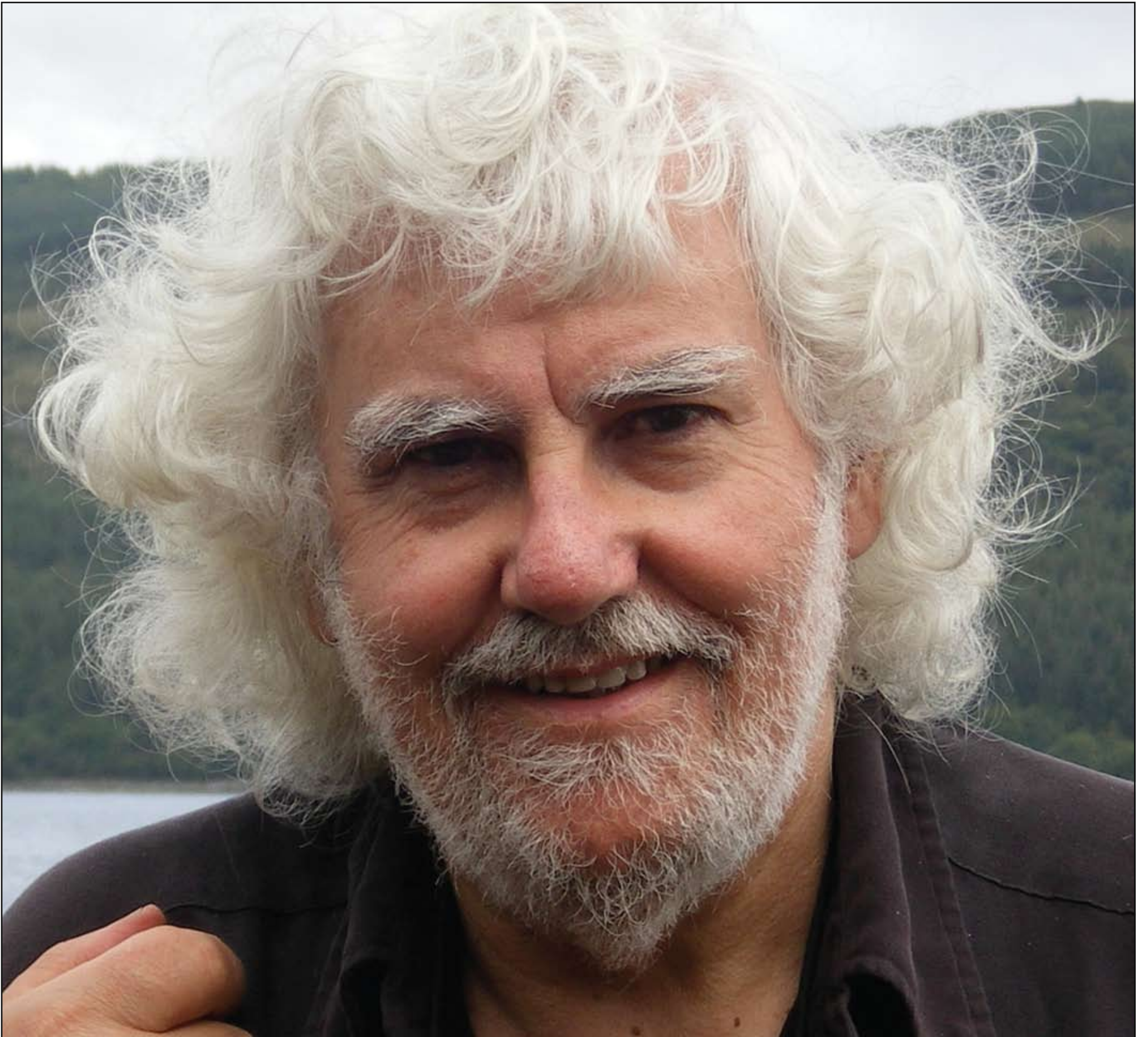
# Northwords **Now**

Issue 20, Spring 2012

**Am Bàrd aig Aois a' Gheallaidh: Urram do Aonghas MacNeacail**

**The Bard at Seventy: A Celebration of Aonghas MacNeacail**

**Kenneth Steven discovers the sound of the north ★ Literature Live On Skye ★ New poetry and fiction including  
Gerry Loose, Lennart Sjögren, Andrew Greig, Meg Bateman, John Glenday and Heather Magruder  
In the Reviews Section: Myles Campbell, Donald S. Murray, Andrew Greig**





## EDITORIAL

**W**ELCOME TO THE 'new look' Northwords Now. Thanks to the artistry of our designer, Gustaf Eriksson, not only has our front cover enjoyed a welcome face-lift, but the layout of the pages themselves has been refreshed in all manner of subtle ways to make them easier on the reader's eye.

It is perhaps fitting that this 'new look' should celebrate the achievement of a 'familiar face': Aonghas MacNeacail. The fact that so many writers have been so keen to contribute work – in Gaelic and English – in honour of Aonghas shows the regard in which he is held. As Robyn Marsack puts it in her appreciation, Aonghas combines 'passionate conviction' with a generosity that is both 'practical and poetic'. This and the other tributes to Aonghas also demonstrate that that sometimes overworked phrase 'literary community' has life in it yet.

Speaking of literary communities, Richard Neath's article on The Reading Room is a terrific account of the enthusiasm for literature on Skye. If you help to organise a writing group, book club or literary society in the Highland and Islands, do feel free to contact at me at [editor@northwordsnow.co.uk](mailto:editor@northwordsnow.co.uk) and I'll spread the word via these pages.

A sense of a community of readers and writers is enhanced by the strength of Scotland's literary festivals. The Ullapool Book Festival opens on May 11th ([www.ullapoolbookfestival.co.uk](http://www.ullapoolbookfestival.co.uk) – see back page advertisement) with a terrific cast of writers from across Scotland and beyond. It's also heartening to learn of a newcomer to the festival scene in Scotland. The Colonsay Book Festival runs from the 27th to the 29th April and features an array of literary talent including Liz Lochhead, Alexander McCall Smith, James Robertson and Margaret Elphinstone. You can find more details at: [www.spanglefish.com/ColonsayBookFestival](http://www.spanglefish.com/ColonsayBookFestival). ■

CHRIS POWICI, EDITOR



The Reading Room So Far, page 10

# Contents

- 3 A tribute to Aonghas MacNeacail featuring Meg Bateman, Colm Breathnach, Deirdre Brennan, Paddy Bushe, Maoilios Caimbeul, John Glenday, Rody Gorman, Andrew Greig, Dòmhnall MacAmhlaigh, Pàdraig MacAoidh, Fearghas MacFhionnlaigh, Crisdean MacIlleBhàin, Angus MacMillan, Màiri NicGumaraid, Simon Ó Faoláin, Tom Pow, Liam Prút
- 5 The Bench  
Short Story by Catherine Strang
- 9 Poems by Hugh McMillan, Daniel Racey, Lesley Harrison, Stephanie Green, Paula Jennings and Bridget Khursheed
- 10 Journey to an End  
Travel Essay by Kenneth Steven
- 12 Fault Lines  
Poems by Gerry Loose and Lennart Sjögren
- 14 Between Sea and Sky  
Short Story by Heather Magruder
- 15 Poems by Derek Crook, Seán Hewitt, Jean Atkin and Eilidh Thomas
- 17 The Reading Room So Far  
Article by Richard Neath
- 18 Poems by Gordon Meade
- 19 Poems by Graham Fulton, Angus Reid, Ginna Wilkerson and Deborah Moffatt
- 20 Reviews
- 23 Contributors' Biographies  
Where To Find Northwords Now

### At The Northwords Now Website: [www.northwordsnow.co.uk](http://www.northwordsnow.co.uk)

Podcasts of Meg Bateman, Pàdraig MacAoidh and Tom Pow

Reviews Extra including Anne Lorne-Gilles on the autobiography of Marjory Kennedy-Fraser; a new collection of essays on modern Gaelic Literature; new books by Ian Blake, Catriona Child and Anne Scott

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#### Front cover image

Aonghas MacNeacail

#### Submissions to the magazine are welcome.

They can be in Gaelic, English and any local variants. They should be sent to the postal address. 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. Copyright remains with the author. The next issue is planned for late July 2012

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ALBA | CHRUTHACHAIL



**HI-ARTS** Highlands and Islands Enterprise  
Iomairt na Gàidhealtachd 's nan Eilean

# Aonghas Dubh Aig Aois A' Gheallaidh/ Aonghas MacNeacail @ 70

dàin le/poems by: Meg Bateman, Colm Breathnach, Deirdre Brennan, Paddy Bushe, Maoilios Caimbeul, John Glenday, Rody Gorman, Andrew Greig, Dòmhnall MacAmhlaigh, Pàdraig MacAoidh, Fearghas MacFhionnlaigh, Crìsdean MacIlleBhàin, Angus MacMillan, Màiri NicGumaraid, Simon Ó Faoláin, Tom Pow

IN 2011, THE centenary of the birth of Sorley MacLean was widely celebrated. In 2012, no less significantly, the greatest contemporary Gaelic poet, Aonghas MacNeacail, is 70 years old.

These pages contain work written in response to the editor's request for poems in celebration of Angus. All the poets, whether writing in Gaelic, Irish or English are proud to be associated with him.

Aonghas MacNeacail, more than anybody, has brought

Gaelic poetry to a wide contemporary stage through international performances and by virtue of the fact that his work has been translated into a variety of languages. His connections through collaboration with music, as a librettist, and the visual arts also represent a significant development of the language's range.

He is also, of course, a thoroughly respected poet amongst those with not a word of Gaelic (which may be the ultimate test of the merit of his work) through

translation but also original work in English. And then, rather astonishingly, in recent years he has acquired a certain eminence as a poet in Scots (as Innes Dow).

Ge b 'e dè 'n t-saothair a tha romhad, Aonghais chòir, guma fada beò thu a' cur rithe agus meal do naidheachd. Tha sinn uile fada nad chomain agus, mar a thuirt am bodach eile, is math beò thu.

RODY GORMAN, Gaelic Editor Northwords Now

## Gaisgich

MEG BATEMAN

Tha e doirbh an samhlachadh san latha an-diugh,  
is clachan an tallachan air an sgaoileadh san fhraoch  
far am b' fharamaich fion is bu drillseanaich cèir  
nuair a mholte na gaisgich a chaidh a dhìth  
an creich is arrabhaig a tha a' cnàmh san ùir  
às an sgiùrsadh an sliochd air sgàth cairte.

Ach chunnaic mi a-raoir iad fo ghrian na h-Afraga,  
air an tanachadh le faoighichean am measg nan sinnsirean,  
deiseil gus an treubh a dhìoladh 's a dhìon,  
deiseil gus leum len slatan san t-streup  
gus nighean a chosnadh le cìochan stòite  
is bòidhchead na h-ealtainn gan iadhadh.

Tha iad nam buachaillean a chaoineas nam bò  
is a dh'òlas am fuil,  
gun diù aca dham fuil fhèin  
a spùtas iad na stuadh ait  
do shiubhal clann nam maghannan  
na shruthadh romhpasan 's nan dèidh.

## Gael and Surma

MEG BATEMAN

It is hard to imagine them these days,  
with the rubble of their halls tumbled in the heather  
where wine was drunk noisily and candles blazed  
and heroes were praised, lost in cattle-raid and skirmish,  
buried in the land their descendants were cleared from  
for want of a parchment.

But I saw them yesterday under the African sun,  
tormented by parasites, thinned by drought,  
strolling calmly among the ancestors.  
They defend the tribe and revenge the tribe  
and leap with their sticks into the fray  
to win a girl with pert breasts  
marked with the beauty of a razor.

Herdsmen who drink blood  
and lament in song the death of their cows,  
they are careless of their own blood,  
letting it spurt in an arc  
between those who walk those plains  
in front of them and behind.

## Magnificat

DEIRDRE BRENNAN

Cathain a chrìochnóidh an oíche seo –  
An chruinne dhubh laistigh díom  
Cathain a anam liom– a bheidh mo lá agam?  
Cathain a ndúiseod ó bheith im dhúiseacht?  
Ní.mé.Tá an ghrian os ard  
Ag baint na súl asam,  
Na réaltaí ag spréacharnach go fuar  
Ag dul ó chomhaireamh orm  
Preabann an croí go rúnmhar  
Thar raon na gcluas.  
Cathain a chrìochnóidh an dráma  
gan amharclann seo,  
– Nó an amharclann seo gan dráma  
Le gur féidir liom filleadh abhaile?  
Cá háit? Conas? Cathain?  
A chait a stánann orm god' shúile na beatha  
Cé atá folaithe id dhiamhra?  
Eisean atá ann! Eisean atá ann!  
Nós Joshua cuirfidh sé an ghrian  
faoi smacht is dúiseod,  
Is beidh sé ina lá.  
A anam, dein miongháire id chodladh!  
Dein miongháire, a anam: beidh sé ina lá!

## Magnificat

DEIRDRE BRENNAN

When will this inner night – the universe – end  
And I – my soul – have my day?  
When will I wake up from being awake?  
I don't know.The sun shines on high  
And cannot be looked at.  
The stars coldly blink  
And cannot be counted.  
The heart beats aloofly  
And cannot be heard.  
When will this drama without theatre  
– Or this theatre without drama – end  
So that I can go home?  
Where? How? When?  
O cat staring at me with eyes of life,Who lurks in your depths?  
It's Him! It's him!  
Like Joshua he'll order the sun to stop, and I'll wake up,  
And it will be day.  
Smile, my soul, in your slumber!  
Smile, my soul: it will be day!

## Faid Shráid Fhaid

COLM BREATHNACH

(do Mary 26-02-2008)

Nuair a thagann tú de shiúl  
feadh fhaid Shráid Fhaid  
faid liom,  
chomh fada liomsa do  
dá fhaid Sráid Fhaid  
is ea is fearr é  
agus mé do d'fhaire  
ag teacht chomh fada liom.

## Along Long Street

COLM BREATHNACH

(to Mary 26-02-2008)

When you come walking  
the length of Long Street  
as far as me  
as for me  
the longer Long Street  
the better  
as I am watching you  
coming as far as me longer  
along the length of Long Street.

## Aonghas Dubh 's e 70

MAOILIOS CAIMBEUL

Aoibhneas ann am facal is fonn,  
Olam deoch-shláinte do shonn  
'N a ghille bha òg ann an Ùig;  
Guidheam dha sòlas is cliù 's  
Horò-ghealaidh air latha a bhreith,  
Aiteas dha 's briathran air leth –  
Siùbhladh iad o 'bhilean gun chleith.

The White Stone

JOHN GLENDAY

when you take it  
in your hand

it will heft smooth  
and hard and cold

as the heart once did  
long ago

before it was first  
touched by the world

A’ Chlach Gheal

JOHN GLENDAY

Nuair a bhios tu ga gabhail  
Na do làimh,

Bidh i faireachdainn mìn  
Is fuar is cruaidh

Mar a bha ‘s an cridhe fhèin  
O chionn ùine mhòr air ais

Mus deach beantainn ris  
An toiseach leis an t-saoghal.

Gàidhlig: Deasaiche

Damhan-allaidh 2010

FEARGHAS MACFHIONNLAIGH

damhan-allaidh mòr  
an teis-meadhan lìn  
an teis-meadhan toll-gunna  
an teis-meadhan dorais-miotailt  
an teis-meadhan bhuncair concreit  
a dh’fhàg na Nàsaich air cnoc-faire  
os cionn fjord Nirribhich.

Spider 2010

FEARGHAS MACFHIONNLAIGH

huge spider  
in the centre of a web  
in the centre of a gun-hole  
in the centre of a metal-door  
in the centre of a concrete bunker  
which the Nazis left on a lookout-hill  
above a Norwegian fjord.

Do Aonghas Dubh aig Aois a’  
Gheallaidh

RODY GORMAN

Aois-dhàna ‘s ollaimh ri filidheachd  
Agus ri seanchas  
A tha thu ann,

An dèidh dhut fhèin falbh  
‘S an dreuchd  
A leigeil a-nuas

Mu dheireadh thall ‘s a-bhos  
Is na leabhraichean a chur an taobh  
Mar a dhèanadh am bodach

Na aon luaireag air teòradh  
Ris a’ bhlàths a-staigh,  
Cha chreid mi nach fhàg sinn,

Mar chomharradh,  
A’ chathair agad  
Falamh gu Latha Luain.

For Black Angus at the biblical span

RODY GORMAN

bold fatepoemtreasure soothsayer and chief-barddoctor  
of philosophyrhymepoetrytunefulness and of  
biographygenealogyhistorytraditionlanguage that you  
are, fond for all that after you have left and let up in your  
dutybusiness at long last hither and thither and put the  
books to one side like the halfbottlespectreoldsealcodboy  
knodding like a child delighting in sitting by the fire off  
with the softwhiteflowerwarmth inside at househome,  
i think we’ll leave, as a printbannervestigetoken,  
your plotcitythronechair in vainwantempty until  
judgementmonday

The Night Beaches

ANDREW GREIG

You find yourself quartering  
the tidal beaches of the night,

Smoo, Essaouira, Tresnish, Skaill,  
wherever you once dropped part of your life,

not searching for treasure, or a tragic wreck,  
not even a miraculous castaway,

but for those moments your feet sink  
into the footprints you once made.

In the morning you remember nothing,  
but there’s sand between your toes, salt

in your stubble; behind your eyes,  
rollers of light break out of dark.

The rising waters

ANDREW GREIG

What floats my boat today?  
How much have levels risen, behind the curtains,  
beyond our town, within these walls, outside  
this skin or within – come for me alone or all,  
massing behind the double glazing, rising  
through the floorboards, forcing aside sandbags?  
What for God’s sake  
are these waters – how wide, how wild, how deep?

These are the waters behind the curtains, beyond  
this town, within this room, outside this body and within,  
come here for you and everyone,  
behind the mirror, rising through floor boards,  
shifting those sandbags stacked around the heart.  
Oh for God’s sake  
these are the calm, tumultuous waters of  
a tidal wave the size and shape of a world

flooded with itself, through you my waking friend.

A’ Bhleideag

PÀDRAIG MACAOIDH

Bidh a’ Bhleideag a sguabadh sgoil na Croise  
leis a cuid neoni agus canntaireachd:  
an *hee-dorum* ‘s an *Gaol Dè Gradh Dè*,

a pocaidean làn dòrlain duslaich  
a thog i à Crimea, à Calbharaigh,  
às far an abrar gun robh Blàr an Fhèith.

Leis na balaich bidh i a’ seachnadh na slaithe  
leis a’ chlann-nighean a’ toirt na beum-shùla.

Air an oidhche bidh i a’ cumail bothain –  
am fear as fheàrr ann an sgìre Nis –  
a’ tabhann uisge-beatha le caineal,  
mormanta agus anise.

Gheibh i a leabhraichean, ‘s nuair a gheibh  
stobaidh i iad san stòbh  
cuiridh i teine riutha, cuiridh i,  
teine ri gach mac màthar dhuibh.

The Snowflake

PÀDRAIG MACAOIDH

The Snowflake sweeps Cross school  
with her nothings, and her chanting:  
the heedorum, the God is Love, Love of God,

her pockets full of fistfuls of dust  
gathered from Crimea, from Calvary,  
from where they say was the battle of Fèith.

With the boys she spares the rod  
with the girls shares the evil eye.

And at night she keeps a shebeen,  
the best in all of Ness:  
offering whisky with cinnamon,  
wormwood and anise.

She will be given her books, and then,  
pack them in the stove,  
set fire to them, set fire,  
fire to the whole damn lot of them.

## Photo Shomhairle

CRÌSDEAN MACILLEBHÀIN

Thuir e gum b’ fheudar dhomh tighinn  
na oifis fhèin, los gun nochdadh e rium  
na *photos* a rinneadh nuair a bha esan  
’s a phàrantan a’ dèanamh cèilidh  
air a’ bhàrd mhòr. Smaoinich e, ’s dòcha,  
gur fìor riarachadh a bhitheadh ann an sin  
air mo shon. Nach do rinn mi a leithid  
a rannsachadh mu dheidhinn is mu obair,

’s mo leabhar a’ dol a bhith clò-bhuailte?  
Sheall mi air na h-ìomhaighean, na pàrantan  
toilicht’ is uaibhreach, ged nach b’ urrainn dhaibh  
a bhith cinnteach cho tràthail air  
mar a shoirbhicheadh am mac ’na dhreuchd.  
Ach bha iad earbsach, is bha iad ceart.  
Cha robh facal Gàidhlig aca, no aige,  
ach ann an suidheachadh coltach

bhiodh e air a bhith neo-mhodhail  
rudeigin dhen t-seòrsa iarraidh orra.  
Cha b’ àill leis a’ bhàrd an cur fo iomagain.  
Dh’fheuch mi ri na bha feum air a ràdh,  
briathran cùrteil, freagarrach, gun mòran chèill’.  
Cha do rinn mise fhìn riamh cèilidh air.  
Cha robh pàrantan agam a ghabhadh taisbeanadh  
air dòigh theàrainte, ’s mo mhàthair comasach

air rud sam bith a ràdh gun rabhadh. Thuir i  
cheana rium gur cànan bharbarach a bh’ anns  
a’ Ghàidhlig agus, fa chomhair bodaich a sgrìobh  
uiread a ranntan nach tuigeadh i càil dhiubh,  
dh’fhaodadh dol air adhart a bhith aice  
nach biodh modhail no taitneach.  
A bharrachd air sin, cha b’ àbhaist do m’ phàrantan  
cus ùidh air neo co-roinn a nochdadh

an dèanadas am mic na b’ òig’ aca.  
Cha robh iad ag iarraidh ach morgaidse  
bhiodh ga phàigheadh air dòigh riaghailtich,  
obair mhath, giùlan moralta (san taobh a-muigh,  
air a’ char a bu lugha), dol don aifrinn  
cho tric ’s a ghabhadh sin a dhèanamh,  
is fantainn sàmhach. Bhiodh iad a’ fàs  
nearbhach mu gach dol-a-mach

a bha comasach air aire nan daoine a dhùsgadh,  
is uimhir a chùisean ac’ a b’ fheàrr  
gun robh iad ceilte. B’ ann mar dhaltan a nàmhaid  
a bha am bàrd a’ sealltainn orm, ’s cha robh  
na sgrìobh mi mu dheidhinn obrach  
a’ taitneadh ris, bhon a chaidh sin an aghaidh  
an dreacha ’s an t-seòlaidh a bu mhiann dhà  
thoirt oirre às dèidh làimh. Ach smaoinich mi

co-dhiù gur ann nas fheàrr a bha mo roinn  
na roinn a’ phroifeasair òig, shultmhoir is bhragail  
nach leughadh eadhon facal bàrdachd Shomhairle.  
Oir fhuair mi comas an sìoladh tro m’ mheuran,  
fhaclan, mar gur diasan a bh’ anna,  
am fasgnadh is am bualadh, gus gach brìgh  
shùghmhor, bhiadhchar a tharraing ast’, dam b’ urrainn  
fàs a thoirt do m’ bheatha is do m’ bhàrdachd.

## A photo of Sorley

CRÌSDEAN MACILLEBHÀIN

He told me to come into his office, so he could show  
me the photographs they had taken when he and his  
parents visited the great poet. Maybe he thought I would  
get a lot of pleasure out of that. After all, I had carried  
out so much research on the poet and his work

and my book was about to be published. I examined  
the pictures, showing the parents proud and happy, even  
though they could not have known at such an early  
stage how successful their son would be in his career.  
They were, however, full of confidence, and they proved  
right. They did not speak a word of Gaelic, and neither  
did he, but under such circumstances

it would have been tactless to expect something similar  
from them. The poet had no wish to embarrass them. I  
tried to say what was expected, polite, appropriate words  
that meant little. I had never visited him. I did not have  
parents who could safely be exhibited, my mother being  
capable of saying

the most unexpected things. She had already told me she  
considered Gaelic to be a barbarous language and, faced  
with an old bloke who had written so many lines she  
could understand nothing of, might have behaved in a  
manner that was neither courteous nor pleasant. Besides,  
my parents did not generally show a great deal of interest  
or involvement

in the doings of their youngest son. All they demanded  
was a mortgage that got paid regularly, a respectable job,  
moral conduct (in the public eye at least), going to mass  
as often as possible, and keeping quiet. Any actions that  
might attract people’s attention

made them nervous, given that there was so much to  
hide. As for the poet, he saw in me his enemy’s protégé,  
and was dissatisfied by what I had written concerning  
his work, which flew in the face of the form he had  
attempted to cast on it in retrospect. But nonetheless

I reflected that my share was better than the share of the  
plump, self-satisfied young professor, who would never  
read a single word of Sorley’s poetry. I got the chance to  
filter those words through my fingers like ears of corn,  
to winnow them and beat them, extracting from them  
all the pith and substance capable of animating my own  
life and my poetry.

## Am Bàrd

ANGUS MACMILLAN

Bu tu oidhche seanchais  
gun cheann, lasair  
fir-chlis.

Bhiodh tu càineadh Beurlachadh  
ar teanga, creag a’ cur an aghaidh  
 tràigh nach gabh diùltadh,  
taigh-solas a’ lasadh ‘s a deàlradh  
‘s an dorchadas a’ tarraing teann.

Fiù a-nis, sìnte sa chladh  
chan eil thu air leigeil às,  
sàthadh suas cluarain, droighinn.

## Am Fear a Phòs Fhaireamhair

MÀIRI NICGUMARAID

Cuimhn’ agad?  
Nuair a bha iad nan cangarùs?  
Ise bogadaich na boileagan  
’S esan le grèim bàis air a pòcaid  
Mus tuiteadh e mach?

Cuimhn’ agad?  
Nuair a bha iad nan yuppies?  
Ise sàileadh nan trannsachan le rong oirr’  
’S esan na bhuinn chrepe ’s a bhriogais ghaothach  
Mar pharaisiut às a dèidh?

Cuimhn’ agad?  
Nuair a bha iad nan luvvies?  
Ise gur nan trearach ealain  
’S esan aic’ na shlig’ eigse foidhp’  
Eagal ‘s gum briseadh e?

Fhios agad?  
’N-diugh tha ise na damhan-allaidh  
A’ snàigeadh eigeachan an t-saoghail  
’S esan na eun dachaigh cèidst’  
A’ triutraich ri a sèist?

## The Man who Married His Minder

MÀIRI NICGUMARAID

D’ you remember?  
When they were kangaroos?  
Her bobbing in a frenzy  
And him with the grip of death on her pouch  
In case he’d fall out?

D’ you remember?  
When they were yuppies?  
Her heeling (it along) the corridors with a vital spark to her  
And him in his crepe soles and windy trousers  
Like a parachute after her?

D’ you remember?  
When they were luvvies?  
Her mother-henning the arty artificers  
And him like a scientific egg under her  
Fearing he might break?

D’ you know what?  
Today she is a spider  
Crawling the webs of the world  
And he’s a home bird caged  
Twittering to her tune.

## Do Aonghas Dubh (is e Trì Fichead Bliadhna ‘s a Deich)

DÒMHNALL MACAMHLAIGH

Aonghas Dubh – griseach–dubh  
Dàin bhreac, ghleusda..  
Guma fada mhealas sinn  
againn iad le chèile.

Black Angus – brindled–black  
Dappled sharp poems.  
Long may we have them  
both with us to enjoy

Saoirse an Phiasúin

SIMON Ó FAOLÁIN

Séidtear fút is caitear  
piléir leat:

Amadán ildaite,  
crósán daortha.

Ramhraithe ar mhin bhuí  
Agus éithigh,

Ní thuigir comhchealg  
Go leagtar

ceithre thaobh  
Do chlós sábhálta,

Go tiomántar amach tú  
I ndomhan gan teorann.  
★

I gceobhrán do mhearathail  
Tuislír amach os comhair cairte,

Ach ní óinseach do ghrá geal  
Suite sa díg ina culaith ghlic

Uidhir agus bhreac  
Fad is a phramsálann tú

Thar na bánta  
Id’ phitseamaí síoda.

Glaonn tú ón luifearnach  
go hard saonta,

Ag fógairt do láithreach  
Do chách:

“Kokok!”  
“Tágaíg is maraíg!”

The Pheasant’s Freedom

SIMON Ó FAOLÁIN

You are mocked at  
And shot at:

Fool-of-many-colours,  
Condemned jester.

Fattened on yellow meal  
And lies,

Not kenning conspiracy  
Until they level

The four walls  
Of your safe-house

And you are driven out  
Into a world without end.

★

In the fog of confusion  
You trip out before cars.

But your lover is no fool,  
Hunkered down in the ditch

In her suit of speckled dun  
While you prance

Over meadows  
In your silk pyjamas.

You call out blithely  
From the undergrowth,

Broadcasting your presence  
To all:

“Kokok!”  
“Come and Kill!”

Ceann Loch Reasort

TOM POW

for Cameron

1. The Shieling

All afternoon, we summered  
in that stone womb, lips of light

whispering around us. We felt  
the last of Old Winter’s cold, smelled

the fervid stirrings of spring. Two bulbs  
is what we were, squinting

at daylight and ready to push on.  
It was fifteen minutes, no more,

that we squatted on the cool stones  
and listened to the breathing of the beasts,

they already settled, the milk  
gathering in their udders,

milk songs in the clear water  
of the burn.

But we had no other story

to tell, so we tunnelled out  
of there and pressed on

dithering round a loch – pretty  
but misplaced on our misread map.

2. The Post Stones

Saved by a post stone, thrust  
through the spring of earth, small

as a gravestone, one you might  
put up for a pet – or for

a working dog that had stayed  
with you the whole summer long

often-times your only friend,  
the pair of you slurping from the same

sweet pool. This is where  
he’d seemed happiest, so where

you’d brought him – you, a young lad,  
still not tough enough by a long shot –

wrapped him in a blanket and buried him  
in the peaty earth.

It was long ago

and moss covered the crown of the stone  
so you could almost miss it

and the next one – fifty yards or so away  
of dissembling wetlands – greeting each

with the same excitement, you  
and your son.

And between stones,

the magic: decades falling and rising  
as you leap the dark, deep streams,

testing the sodden surfaces of the earth.  
Between two stones, you hold him

like the boy he’d been and swing him  
over water; between another two

you’re in fear of losing him,  
yet loving too the way he strides ahead

towards the blue mountains, the tongue  
of the distant loch. *Whoa*, he says

when a grouse explodes  
from the heather before him. *Whoa*

you say, when the years explode  
before you. *Whoa. Whoa. Whoa.*

3. The Village

If we lose one stone, no matter,  
another will lie ahead. Besides, there is

no mail to deliver and no one  
waiting for forty years past. Yet,

as we approach the green pleat  
that holds the village, children call out

as they run towards where the river  
brushes the sea. Women stretch  
their bones in the lazy-beds  
as they look for what has startled

their brood. Racks of fish are cooking  
on dead fires.

And one man with sea boots

and a satchel skirts us, lone as a heron,  
around the silence of the shore.

Do Aonghas Úrghlas ag 70  
PADDY BUSHE

So what má tá an dubh curtha go snasta ina gheal ort  
Ag an aimsir? Ní raibh dul amú ort riamh faoi ghile

Nó dorchadas na cruinne, agus níor nós leat taobhú  
Le dearcadh dubh-is-bán na súl géar úd atá dall

Ar an gcrotal glasuaithne i léithe na carraige,  
Dall ar mhaostacht ildaite gach ní inár dtimpeall,

Agus bodhar ar iliomadúileacht leagan an scéil  
Atá á chanadh gan tús gan deireadh ar fud na cruinne.

A Aonghais Dhuibh, a Aonghais Ghil, a ghlaise úir:  
Lean ort ag boilgearnach thar maoil na dteorainneacha uile.

Nár ruga riamh ceartchreideamhacht ort, is nár thaga ort  
Mór-is-fiú na gceannlitreacha nó saothíneacht na lánstad.

For Evergreen Aonghas at 70  
PADDY BUSHE

So what if time has fooled you, and turned the dark hair  
White? You’ve never been deluded about the brightness

Or darkness of the world. But you’ve never given in  
To the black and white view, to those who are blind

To the viridescent lichen in the greyness of the rock,  
Blind to the colour-saturation of everything around us,

And deaf to the myriad versions of the story constantly  
Sung without beginning or ending all over the world.

Aonghas Dubh. Aonghas Bán. Green-reflecting wellspring:  
Never stop bubbling over the brim of all the boundaries.

May orthodoxy never overtake you, may you never suffer  
The self-importance of the capital, the pedantry of the full stop.

Do Aonghas Dubh, am Bàrd  
For Aonghas MacNeacail, Poet

B’ e na seòid eanchainneil, MacGill-Eain, Deòrsa mac Iain Deòrsa, MacThòmais, Mac a’ Ghobhainn agus MacAmhlaigh, a thug gu bàrdachd mi an toiseach len tuigse air buannachdan an fhoghlaim gan toirt air falbh bhon choimhearsnachd, agus air creideamh gan toirt air falbh bhon t-saoghal, ach b’ e Aonghas Dubh a dh’fhosgail mo shùilean gu bàrdachd nach robh buileach cho “reusanta”, agus i stèidhichte air samhlachas miotas nan Gàidheal. Cha b’ e sin an aon bhuaidh a bh’ aige orm, ach cuideachd am brosnachadh fialaidh a thug e do neach-ionnsachaidh agus do fhileantach mar aon.

*It was the intellectual poets, Maclean, George Campbell Hay, Thomson, Crichton Smith and MacAulay who first brought me to poetry with their understanding of how the benefits of education also took them away from their communities and how religion took them away from the delighting in the world, but it was Black Angus who opened my eyes to poetry based on the symbols of Gaelic myth that wasn’t so open to logic. This wasn’t his only influence on me; there was also the generous encouragement he gave to learner and native speaker alike.*

MEG BATEMAN

Aonghas Dubh...His work is so grounded and spiritual...I’ve never been so acutely aware of my absence of Gaelic than when reading him.

JOHN GLENDAY

Sgrìobhadair caidreamhach brosnachail, a tha dìcheallach agus torrach sna dà chànan a thagh e.

*A warm-hearted and enthusiastic writer, who is dedicated and productive in the two languages of his choice.*

CRÌSDEAN MACILLEBHÀIN

I honour Angus and his work for its life-enhancing, heartfelt, dishevelled wonder.

slainte,  
ANDREW G

Aonghas has been an avuncular presence in Scottish literature for almost half a century. By “avuncular” I mean generous, warm and surprising. He has also been what’s best in a Janus figure – drawing from his language and his background, while also facing the

wider world. At seventy, we should celebrate both poet and ambassador.

TOM POW

Chaidh cliù Aonghais roimhe measg Ghàidheal mar fhear a b’ aireadh meas mòr na bhàrd ‘s na phearsa fada mun d’fhuair mis’ cothrom coinneachadh ris son a’ chiad uair ann an 1978 – cliù a sheas bliadhnaichean.

*Aonghas’s reputation preceded him among Gaels as someone worthy of high esteem as a poet and a person long before I had an opportunity to meet him for the first time in 1978 - a reputation of years standing.*

MÀIRI NICGUMARAID

‘Black Angus’ sounded so forbidding that I was quite unprepared for the genial presence of Aonghas MacNeacail, whom I first met in 1997. I was on the judging panel for what was then the Stakis Prize for Scottish Writer of the Year, and we had chosen Oideachadh Ceart agus dàin eile / A Proper Schooling and other poems, non-Gaelic speakers though we were. The

combination of pared-down syntax and explosive emotion presented us with a voice – however filtered through translation – of passionate conviction. And there was an element of sly humour, there, too. It was clear that he had followed Sorley MacLean in restoring Gaelic connections with other poetries, Aonghas looking right across the Atlantic to the Black Mountain and Beat schools.

His connections with Europe and Ireland, with the Celts in Canada, are close and personal, laced with music. I recall his reading with a Sami poet at the Scottish Poetry Library, and the courtesy of his conversation with her in prose and verse: two makars holding to and enriching their languages in an environment often indifferent to them. I have had the pleasure of seeing him beguile a packed audience in Brussels, who were attuned to his language-crossings and warmly responsive to the voice of the Bàrd.

He has been a great friend of the Library – calling in on his way to the BBC, never leaving without buying a poetry magazine! – and to younger poets, from school-age upwards. We salute his generosity – practical and poetic – and hope for many more years of his company and his poetry.

ROBYN MARSACK  
Director, Scottish Poetry Library



They share a bench.  
“That you awa’ then Erchie?” Archie joins them Thursday mornings.  
“Aye. Got the clinic the back o’ ten.” He creaks to his feet. “See ye fellas.”  
“Right then Erchie.”  
“See ye Erch.”

Archie shuffles away, towards the empty road. He disappears behind the wall. They resume their vigil of the play park.

Everyone calls it the Paddling Pool. There was once a pool in the middle, just deep enough for paddling in, but the council filled it in and replaced it with a wee maze, some years ago.

The Paddling Pool is across the road from the loch. It has the tiniest of fences round two sides of it, the rest is bordered by a steep hill of dirt and trees. In good weather the hill attracts midges, in bad, muddy knees.

“Quiet the day Alec.”

“Ach, early yet.”

“Aye.” Ian nods his head.

They are both wearing similarly grey, thick winter coats, though February was a good two months ago. Sometimes the peeling paint from the bench will stick to their coats in flaked flecks of green. The wives usually notice, chide them, then take an age to pick each little piece off, before letting them hang their coats up.

Behind their bench is a tall garden wall, blocking from sight what used to be a B and B. “Did you say one o’ your wee yins has been in yonder?” asks Alec, inclining his head backwards.

Ian, who has been watching the hills, frowns in confusion. “Mine? Eeh... are ye... are ye sure?” His forehead furrows deeper, then, with a sigh and “I canna mind,” it relaxes and he focuses on those hills once again.

Alec glances at his friend, then turns back to the park. “Ach it doesnae matter– just thought you’d said the grand-weans were playing there wan year.”

They return to silence. There are no creaking swings or screaming children at this time in the morning. Not until the school holidays anyway. The noises of the loch rarely disturb Alec and Ian, but they’re still there. The gulls squawk as they follow the fishing boats, the oystercatchers and other birds screech over the shores and water, and the steamboats frighten them all with their groaning metals and loud horns.

The hall to the right of their bench, just beside one of the gates to the Paddling Pool, was once used by the sea cadets for keeping their boats in. Possibly the boats are still in there, but there haven’t been any sea cadets in a long time.

Alec looks at the hall, “I mind taking Cherlie there every bloody week when he wis a wean. It’s a damn shame they dinnae use it any more.”

“What’s that? Oh, aye. It is that. And how’s Cherlie getting on, how’s his wee fla... Ach, whit’s the name? The wean? I know it...”

Patiently, “Don’t worry, there’s that bloody many o’ them, I can hardly mind them a.” They both chuckle and the lines in Ian’s forehead fade again. “Aye, wee Graham. Aye, he’s comin’ along a lot better. Got him back at the school noo. He’s a clever wee lad right enough.”

Ian stops nodding his head. His eyes rest on the empty space of horizon between Davaar Island and the start of the hills. Alec

also throws a look that way, but his head is turned when a car drives by. The road is narrow and runs alongside the Paddling Pool, veering upwards with the muddy hill and out of their sight. The car, a strange shade of yellow, quickly vanishes up that way, towards the jetty and the graveyard.

“Strange shade o’ yella, that yin. Don’t know who it is,” Alec murmurs, more to himself than to poor Ian.

“Hmm? What’s that? Oh, aye... who’s is thats then?”

“Couldnae tell ye Ian,” Alec replies, a touch louder than he means to.

Another car appears, much more slowly, and parks on the pavement. A green car, one of Willie Durnan’s girls, who brings her own wee girl sometimes during the week. Alec watches as she gets out of the driver’s seat, crosses round to the closer side of the car, and opens the back door. There is a flurry of movement and what sounds like a scolding, then a little ball of blonde and white and skipping rope appears beside the mum. She shuts the car door and they head through the open gate.

“That’ll be the end o’ the peace and quiet then,” chuckles Ian, who has just noticed them now.

“T’ll will aye,” Alec agrees. And, as if to punctuate their conversation, the girl screams as she runs towards the see saw.

Ian watches the girl and smiles, “Ach it’s a grand age when they’re like that.”

Alec nods. The mother is heading towards one of the benches in the park. As she catches their eye, she waves. Alec raises his hand in reply, but Ian only realises after she has turned away, and waves at her turned back. He sighs, as though annoyed with himself, and bends over a little. Alec turns to look at him, and realises he is untying his shoe. He watches as Ian takes off his shoe, and hears the crack in his back as he brings it up to his face, peering inside. With his other hand, Ian gropes around inside the shoe.

“Damn thing. Something stuck... annoyin’ me...”

“Here, I’ll get it for ye.” Alec holds out his hand. Ian looks at it, then, with a look of defeat, hands the shoe over. The shoe is also grey, and has splashes of paint on the leather, probably from painting flower pots in the garden. Alec shoves his hand inside the shoe, fumbles for a second, then pulls out when his hand grasps a little chip of stone. “There ye are.”

“Cheers. It was annoyin’ me some.”

Ian looks at his shoe. After a minute, he starts picking at the hardened red paint on it. The day has worn on to early afternoon now, and it has gotten warmer. Alec pulls off his bunnet, and starts fiddling with it, all the while surveying the scene before them. Ian picks intently at his boot, while Alec skirts around the inside of his hat with his thumb.

“And how’s Mary’s sister getting on then?” Alec asks Ian after a while.

Ian stops picking, his brow drops lower and he is silent for a minute. “Well... she did tell

me... she went up tae the hospital, was it yesterday? No, maybe it wis Tuesday.” His brow furrows deeper. “No it wasnae Tuesday ‘cause she went an’ got the shoppin’ an’ she hadnae time tae be gan tae the hospital.” His expression cleared a little. “Aye, aye it wis yesterday. She went up in the mornin’ an’ says she wis lookin’ a bit brighter. She had a word wi’ the doctor, and... naw I canna mind whit he said. But aye, she wis lookin’ a lot cheerier on it.”

“Good, good. There’s naethin’ worse than bein’ stuck up in that bloody ward. Naethin’ but dreich lookin folk on either side o’ ye. Mind when I wis in wi’ ma hip. Och, ye couldnae find a smile among the lot o’ them.”

Ian hums, perhaps in agreement, and bends down to put his shoe back on. His back is stiff and it takes him a while to grasp his laces properly.

“Are ye wantin me tae...” Alec begins but Ian gets a grip of them and ties them together.

“Ach that’s it noo,” he says and straightens up.

“Right ye are Ian.”

They sit a while longer. Two more cars come, children spill out of them and onto the swings and roundabouts and parents station themselves on tables and benches. Alec looks at his watch. “We should maybe be head-

ing off soon then Ian. That’s a quarter to, the now.”

“Already? Quick morning. Who’s coming the morra then? Cherlie?”

“Naw, Cherlie’s on a Monday, we’ll maybe see big Erchie again the morra. Depends on herself’s biddin’ you know.”

“Och aye, of course.”

Alec puts his bunnet back on and gets to his feet. “Right, that’s us then.”

Ian stands up, slower, and pats his pockets. “Aye.”

“Come on.”

They walk towards the road, as another car pulls up. The back door opens and more children whizz past into the Paddling Pool. They don’t notice the empty bench. ■

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# Poetry

## The Hare

By HUGH MCMILLAN

Driving the pass at midnight,  
emptiness rolling everywhere  
like oil, we meet a hare.  
Framed in the false moon of yellow light

it runs ahead of us, keeps close by  
for miles through the glen,  
ghostly in the car's eye,  
wild and perfect

and beyond reach. We stop at last  
and watch it go, wavering still  
between possibilities: the foothills  
and the field of stars.

## Cuthag (Cuckoo)

By DANIEL RACEY

Gawk of a bird, a down beat flight,  
stiff shouldered, staccato,  
heaps you onto a post.

With a lummock's grace,  
you sprawl, spilling  
barred beauty and blank rage.  
On Whitsun,  
your father's song rang the strath,  
calling the melt down from Stumanadh.

And now you:  
spring's promise ripened  
to a thrawn fruit.

## The Njuggle

By STEPHANIE GREEN

At midnight on Hallow'een, my back to the moon,  
I looked in the mirror to scry my lover-to-be.  
His face rose like a drowned man's  
out of a pool, his hair shrouding his head.

At twilight as I walked by the lochan in the hills  
where the curlew's cry curls out  
of the reeds, a piebald pony ambled up.  
His nostrils pulsed as he blew into my hand.

When he lowered his neck, I knew I must mount.  
Below me, his muscles rippled like wind  
over water. His sweat was dank as stagnant pools.  
I rode him through the night until he rolled me over

into cold, green fire. Half-drowned,  
I clung to his neck but it narrowed under my grip.  
Slippery as seaweed, hair encrusted  
with limpets and mussels, he shrank into a man.

As he reared to plunge and drag me under,  
dawn broke. He turned into water in my arms.  
I was alone, calling, with no answer  
but widening circles on the loch.

## Mare Marginis

*in which Giovanni Riccioli (1598-1671) contemplates the Moon.*

By LESLEY HARRISON

Sitting in my high, swaying tower  
I catalogue the silences:  
*Imbrium, Nubium, Humor*  
my pen lifts them from the darkness.  
A sea wind fills the room,  
the old moon rising like an eye, unblinking.

Last night I dreamt I saw  
a bow emerging from the grey:  
a shallop in the swinging tide  
following the earth's curved shadow,  
its hot yellow lamps  
mooring hours later, unseen.

I climb aboard, knee to hull  
and the gentle horizontals of Padua  
glide away, cranes dancing in the reeds:  
*Iridum, Lunicus, Medii*  
we are afloat in a net of stars  
porous and slick as a mirror.

*Crisium, Marginis, Frigoris:*  
our shifting theologies collide  
in this bare, academic light;  
an incubus has gouged the river beds;  
vast mountain ranges vanish  
as the planet rolls, cancelling their shadows.

Now priests and merchants gather in the vennels,  
weighing one silence with another.  
Our mourners howl with joy.  
I am half-born, lost in empty thought.  
A spider draws its web across me.  
I bend my head to pray.

## Cave of the Bats

By PAULA JENNINGS

Towards the end of Lent  
light edges into the fusty cave,  
reveals a gothic architecture,  
fans of wings like thorned traceries.

Roof-strung presences rustle:  
leathery negatives of tiny angels  
inverted in their hundreds,  
each a slung bundle of materiality.

As insects return, winter's torpor  
explodes to hungry attack,  
feasts on the sugars of spring.  
In a danse macabre  
scores of handwings flicker over gunpowder guano,

the cave is wired with bat cries,  
and Echo, with her captured voice, defines each prey.

## The burn bed

By BRIDGET KHURSHEED

The sheets are pulled back  
leaving a scuff of algae  
like the velvet jacket  
on the back of a drunk.

The stepping stones of the ford  
mosaic the mud  
unseen  
for a generation.

That last pool endured  
days of scum and midge  
pokes for fry  
until it too was dry.

Desert scrolls and stones  
litter this new path  
beneath meadowsweet walls;  
the depth of the pot

attracts a shoal of blackbirds  
to hoe its moist furrows.  
Alight  
I wake myself to follow.

## Migration

By LESLEY HARRISON

to move forward with the summer  
to fly down corridors of air  
to let the world fall into place

to watch with your own eyes  
to move in and out of stories  
to cast no shadow

to live in cloud – silvered, indistinct  
to fill distances with starlight, mile after mile  
to draw the known world after you

to press your back into the sky  
to go out in a cloak of daylight  
to leave before leaving; to have already gone.

HAMMERFEST WAS NOTHING more than the stink of dead fish. A long huddle of bleach-white factory sheds, a few aimless streets and the stink of fish. Numberless handlebars of gulls steering low over greyness shrieking Icelandic.

It did not help that I lay face downwards on a pavement or that it was sleeting. It was midsummer morning and I was shivering like some thin, scabby dog. Behind me, the great gleaming crystal of the coastal steamer curved out towards open sea again and boomed twice, long and deep, the last Arctic ports of her itinerary in wait.

I had food poisoning. I was saved by a Danish doctor who dragged me into his surgery and saw to the two ends of me that were leaking. At the same time he took my mind off the discomfort by talking. Danes are almost invariably amiable – the human equivalent of puppies – handicapped only by a language that their Norwegian cousins rudely describe as a throat disease. I wondered why on earth he had come to this jagged fossil dinosaur of a place to work; usually Danes are frightened of hills – after all, if you climb onto a house roof in Jutland you can more or less see the Houses of Parliament.

He had wanted to get away, he said. Well, he'd succeeded there. He'd dreamed of finding the north, the real north. All right, I understood that too. I was there for the same reason. But the illnesses were killing him. What illnesses? Whisky and tobacco; everyone was dying of whisky and tobacco.

When I came out again into the raw aquamarine air of Hammerfest I wasn't altogether surprised. A solitary Norwegian, a hangover from the Saturday night that had just become Sunday morning, was lolling against a high fence like a rag doll, singing. I shivered. I wondered if all this wasn't too much for humanity, a few degrees north of sanity, a place that was never meant to be.

Later that day I drove inland and the landscape changed. The grey canine teeth of the mountains softened into dark breasts of hills, and trees started greening their slopes – tall, jade pines that hid little gems of water. I reached Karasjok in the evening, an evening that didn't get dark but only grew bluer.

Lars, who was the only Sami I had ever known, and the passport for my journey, greeted me like a brother. He had the dark almond eyes of a Mongolian hunter; thin, straight, dark hair. A Norwegian who wasn't a Norwegian, who would have been branded a drunk and a work-shy Lapp (spit) in every town between Trømsø and Tønsberg. Forty years ago. Maybe even now.

He and his wife Biret had a dishwasher, an electric carving knife, satellite television, the internet. "Are you surprised?" he laughed at me, and maybe I looked it. "Nomadic Lapplanders with all the right western toys!" On the table in the living room I saw his traditional Sami costume, a reindeer horn hunting knife and birch drinking cup – and a mobile phone. All in one heap. That was the Sami world I was to keep attempting to sort out in my head time after time over the next days.

But it was *jonsok*, midsummer night, and there was a celebration to join. The back garden crackled and spat with a bonfire, and friends who had come with curiosity to meet the strange traveller murmured in Sami among the long blue shadows. There were fires all across Karasjok, into the hills that



## Journey To An End

### TRAVEL ESSAY BY KENNETH STEVEN

reached towards the Finnish border; amber fireflies with midges around them, the clink of glasses, the echoes of *joik*.

*Joiking* is the way the Sami celebrate their world. At birth every child is given their own *joik*, but the song will grown and change within each individual as he or she stretches towards adolescence and adulthood. When it is sung a last time at their graveside it will be complete, it will form the book of their life, the celebration of their being.

But that night the *joik* told of reindeer, of the ancient world of the Sami, of bears and wolves and the great journeys of the herders across the tundra, right to the edges of Russia:

*Somewhere deep inside me  
I hear  
a voice calling  
and hear the joik of the blood  
deep  
from life's boundary  
to life's boundary.*

*All this is my home -  
these fjords, rivers, lakes,  
the frost, the sunlight, the storm,  
the night and daytime of these moorlands -  
joy and sorrow,  
sister and brother.  
All this is my home  
and I carry it in my heart.\**

I dreamed that night of being among the bellies of blue whales. They were calling to each other across the oceans of the world and though only a few remained their song was made of the same sounds and was understood in the west, the north, the south and the west. I woke up in the morning listening to the thatch of birdsong in the birch trees, feeling clean and scoured as a single bone, washed up on a new and strange shore.

"I'm taking you somewhere," said Lars after breakfast. The morning sky was like a single pane of glass, full of the yellow resin of the pines. The traffic was already loud in the

town streets: Germans with their dormobiles, young Norwegians whose cars thudded with heavy metal, trucks on their way to Sweden, Finland and Russia. We took the road that wound down close to the river through avenues of birches whose leaves glinted like silver coins. Lars stopped the car by the church. "The only building in Karasjok that survived 1944," he said, getting out. "Everything else was burned by the retreating Germans. The Sami went back to the hills, abandoned their settled lives and existed as they always had. That whole winter. Come into the churchyard with me; I want to show you something – the story of the Sami."

We went to the far end of the graveyard, shrouded by older and darker trees. There was nothing – I saw nothing. The ground was covered in leaves and moss. I looked helplessly at Lars as he stood beside me.

"This ground is full of Sami people – men, women and children. They didn't mark their graves in the days before Christianity, they didn't think of it. The people were part of the land, in life as in death."

We walked on, twenty feet, to the first row of neat white stones.

"What do you notice now? What do you see on the graves?"

I looked. *Arild Johansen, Gunhild Rasmussen, Ottar Brekke...*

I looked at him. "Norwegian names?"

He nodded fiercely. "Yes, the whole lot. Not a Sami name among them. Why? Because Sami was illegal, because Sami names were illegal. It was the lowest time we ever knew. Our language was stopped in our throats, and if we were to achieve anything in Norway we had to become settled, we had to become mortgaged to a town. Even then we were still second class citizens; dirty, untrustworthy oddities made fun of in the playground and in the parliament in Oslo. Even the church made us look at ourselves with shame and seek repentance for what we were."

I went forward again along the wavering

gravel path. I was walking though time. Again Lars ordered me to stop.

"This is my generation," he said. "Look very carefully at the names on the stones, the dates. Think about them. Tell me what you see."

At first I saw nothing, except that there were flowers by the stones. Little simple twists of pink and white blooms that whispered in the blue breeze. It was as if they had blown in on a tide.

"All men," I said, shrugging my shoulders. That was all that the names told me.

"All young men. Their twenties and thirties. And all of them died...by their own hands. They killed themselves because their way of life was gone and they didn't know what to do. They were told they could be bank managers and pilots and engineers – but they couldn't be. They went south and got everything that money could buy. They gained the whole world and lost their own souls. Why? Because of this!" He bent down and tore up the moss and heather by his foot with trembling fingers. "Because the land, the reindeer, they were asleep in their blood, they were part of their very heartbeat." He let the moss be carried by the breeze. "And what next? Will there be another generation of Sami at all or will they vanish? If the language dies and the herding culture is forgotten then what do we become? A costume for tourists? Nothing more than a book in which our story is written, a book whose ink is slowly fading? When do a people cease to exist? When do they lose the last of their identity?" He smiled. "I must stop this bleakness. Come and I will take you to meet Magga."

She was the oldest woman in the Karasjok community; an old tortoise who carried the shell of her back painfully but whose eyes slid sideways at the world like new-cut gems. In the early afternoon we sat with our backs to a long curve of the river, a creature low and silted and sleepy with the weight of summer, and rolled ourselves cigarettes as the mosquitoes swivelled and hummed in the still air. England and Sweden were playing football and Magga's son Jostein and Lars were rooting madly for England. Anyone who could humiliate Sweden was to be applauded. Now and again one of them would turn the dial of a radio that lay splayed in the grass to listen to the score. The silence crackled as a finger rolled the dial to find the huge waves of songs, the sound of clapping, the high-pitched singsong of a Norwegian commentator. It was a place so far away it no longer mattered to me; it was a journey on foot, then by car, then three days by steamer, before a final drive home. But it was further away even than that...

Magga asked me if I knew how the Sami had survived.

I sat up in the grass and shook my head. She told Lars in a long string of toothless sentences that were interspersed with gestures and a stamped foot, and finally ended with folded arms. The eyes swivelled to see if I had been listening and Lars translated.

"By the early 1970s the Sami were a broken people. Our language was more or less illegal and could not be taught in school – the whole process of 'scandivisation' was all but complete. The Norwegian Government decided to build a dam in the Alta Valley, a place held sacred by the Sami for centuries. It was the last straw that broke the camel's back – or perhaps the last branch that broke



the reindeer's back, you might say. The Sami, especially the young, came in their native costume and chained themselves to the diggers. They came in their thousands. It still looked a desperate and pathetic struggle. But then the international media got wind of it and they descended with their whole circus on Alta. They asked questions; who were the Sami and why were they being persecuted? Why was this valley being flooded if the people did not want it? The Scandinavians, the great ambassadors for peace and justice everywhere from Cambodia to South Africa, were suddenly discovered with blood on their own hands at their very back door. Even though the dam was built and Alta was lost, a sea change was brought about that has lasted to this day. Linguistic and cultural rights, justice for the reindeer herders, new laws against discrimination...."

Jostein suddenly squealed, his ear buried in the frothing of the radio. "England have scored! England have scored!" Lars and he howled with joy and for a moment, the history of their struggle for self-determination momentarily forgotten in a long, warm babble of Sami delight. Even Magga's eyes disappeared in her face under wrinkles as she smiled.

Lars sat up again at last, his hair tousled. "After Alta, the little Lapplander dared to grow up. But was it the end of the beginning or the beginning of the end? Remember what I told you in the graveyard in Karasjok."

The match ended and the radio lay silent on its back in the grass. Magga said she had something in the house she wanted me to drink. It was clear that I should follow her as she went awkwardly up from the riverbank towards the house. It is strange to walk alongside a human being with whom you cannot communicate at all – silence is loud and odd. Her kitchen smelled of flies and dogs. I was a stranded island in the middle of the uneven floor as she padded round, opening cupboards and cooking something that smelled sour and burnt. She sat me down at the table in the end and presented me with coffee so thick it looked as if it could fill holes in the farm track. In another bowl in front of me were hot oval lumps of something white that smelled distinctly goatly. Lars and Jostein came in grinning like jackals, hands in their jeans as they stood by the table watching.

"Reindeer cheese," said Lars. "Be sure and take lots of sugar."

The cheese balls plopped into the coffee with three swiftnesses of sugar. I blew and drank. It tasted appalling, utterly revolting, and I wondered if I was going to manage to keep it down at all.

"Lovely," I gulped, "it's lovely!", and the three of them rocked on their heels, laughing. Their narrow eyes disappeared in their dark faces as they laughed at me tenderly, like parents at their child.

An hour later Magga fell asleep in her chair and Lars and I slipped away into the still blue glow of the afternoon.

"I have arranged a journey for you, with the only pilot in Karasjok – my brother-in-law! He'll take you right into the heart of Sami country – two hundred and fifty miles from anywhere."

He left me on an edge of forest near his brother-in-law's house where the family was building a cabin. Mikkel hardly greeted me as he staggered past with a heaped hod of bricks,

finished digging a channel and threw instructions to his own father watching on the edge of the plot. The old man was covered in mosquitoes; his whole face crawled with them so his features appeared to be part of some lunatic Dali or Picasso portrait, constantly changing and melting and disappearing.

The wood was so still you could have heard a pin drop in Moscow; the mosquitoes sang and whizzed, the midnight air was hot and lemon. The very pines seemed to sweat their resin and I stood there fighting the mosquitoes with my arms like one drowning while the old man smiled at me triumphantly, the edges of his mouth twisted and buried by a boiling of mosquitoes. It was said by the Sami that you could always recognise strangers because they were the only ones who ever fought the mosquitoes.

We went down to Mikkel's seaplane in the end. It lay like a white insect in a backwater of the river and Mikkel's two young twin sons bounded ahead of us, falling and yapping. They scrambled like cubs into the back of the plane as we hummed out along the river and rose up at last in a clear curve into the luminous Lapland night to meet the last embers of the sun. It lay in a rose bonfire to the west of the world, out on the rim of the sea, and suddenly I saw Hammerfest too, hunched up in the boxes of its fish sheds and its own stink. Karasjok trailed away behind us, nothing more than a cluster of wooden cabins beside a river.

But now the plane was rippled by sunlight and our faces doused in a midnight light like liquid apples. It touched a thousand thousand cups of lakes in the tundra beneath, turned it into a waterland across which the reindeer battled in silver herds. They ran ahead of us, almost as if they were leading us inexorably into their kingdom. And the plane itself showed against the eastern hillsides like a single midge, its drone the only noise in the vastness of that world of moor and lake and moor; and somehow in that moment this little midge became a metaphor for all that we were and represented amid the vast cathedral of that wilderness.

We came down in a single sweep and breathed out over a piece of water that stretched as far as the eye could see. When we climbed down across the skis and jumped over onto the heathery rocks of the shore I was aware more than anything else of the extraordinary noise in my ears. I had never been further from humanity in all my life: Karasjok, Kautokeino, Lakselv and Hammerfest were all beyond the edges of the sky. Fifty miles on every side there was nothing but moor and lake and moor. I had imagined such a place would be composed of utter and complete tranquillity, and to my surprise it was made of nothing but noise.

The trumpeting of whooper and mute swans, the take-offs and landings of ten thousand geese, the bubbling of grebes and phalarope and divers, a polyphony of warblers and linnets and buntings. I stood there, in the middle of a song that had been sung every summer since the creation – unchanged. It was the oldest thing I had encountered in all my life. I looked at Mikkel and his boys, playing together like bears on the windswept ground, part of their kingdom still – its inheritors. ■

\*From the writings of Nils-Aslak Valkeapaa and translated by Kenneth Steven





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# FAULT L

# INE

The centre pages of this issue are devoted to poems by one of Sweden's leading poets, Lennart Sjögren, alongside those of Scotland's own Gerry Loose. I received their respective submissions separately but it didn't take long to realise that here were two poets who, in their different ways, were reflecting on how our 'technological' human world, with all its politics and conflict, engages with that 'other' world of animals and plants, water and stone. Indeed it has become so easy to speak of 'two' worlds existing on the same planet, that the need for poetry exploring the subject seems greater than ever. It didn't take long to decide that Gerry and Lennart's poems deserved to be seen together.

Chris Powici

## Gerry Loose

These poems are from a long sequence about where I live on a boat on the Highland Fault Line near enough to Faslane for it to loom; Faslane, Glen Fruin, Glen Douglas and the flora, fauna, geology, geopolitics and (lost) language of the area are its concern. Each poem has a commentary or corollary; making pairs and therefore 200 poems in total; the pairings are indicated by the hand symbol, facing up and down. The whole 100 set sequence is called *fault line*. These poems are from a self contained extract called *a fault line flora*, touching on, as the name suggests, the flora, but in a lateral way

## 56

242 seasons now  
I've been watching  
it never ceases



begin  
to perceive the name  
this plant  
how it uses water to  
yellow its flowering

then the delicate  
traceries in the net  
that become  
fissionable material

## 58

ever  
& pause  
bombs spawn here  
salmon no longer  
make us fearless  
any old opiate  
or if you wish  
whisky



thrush there first  
crunch underfoot common  
snail hard by common  
tansy jowl by leaf  
with ragwort  
the branch that overcomes  
is a scythe

Photo: Stewart Bremner, [www.stewartbremner.co.uk](http://www.stewartbremner.co.uk)



## 60

grain of the wood  
before it's cut  
still leafed



indigenous microbiota  
flora of the mouth  
seven hundred species  
a meadow  
another attached to skin  
no boundary  
that side of steel mesh  
sanitized annihilation  
this side  
language seed

## 61

once he was a bishop  
once too a boy  
daunerin Glen Fruin  
a place



not us  
not even our view  
of us  
declining  
cockroach  
but yellow star  
petals fallen on concrete  
& tender every year  
iadh-lus tenderly  
binding  
not us  
world

## 63

& she who was once a bride  
I walk past without checking  
my stride



Lysimachia vulgaris  
leaves broad lanceolate  
black dotted  
sepal toothed  
lus-na-siochaint  
peace speaking plant  
as if for

## 64

as if for trees themselves  
that conversation  
the commons  
as if for eels in the sea  
as if for gulls  
& buzzards in those trees  
consciousness  
delusional



semantic field  
harrowed  
large or conspicuous  
heads or spikes  
in clusters or solitary  
star-like  
saucer shaped  
bell shaped  
cup shaped  
lusan  
common places

## 65

stockpiling  
3 bowls on the unlit  
autumn stove  
green tomatoes  
green-red snow white apples  
from the tree at the shore  
red ripe tomatoes  
deterrents



in full bloom  
plundered  
blàthan  
agus plaosgan  
seeds left

## 66

7 herons  
in the meadow  
horse & rider  
cantering  
across the bay  
by the old fish yair  
Gartness fault



he's been by  
with the petrol strimmer  
by the fence  
a foot wide  
by 125 paces  
ten species  
dead or threshed  
could name them all  
called friends  
am I foolish

## 67

a gannet collapses herself  
falls to ocean brim  
rheum-eyed age plunging  
back upwards  
officers on deck



splitting wedge  
& grafting knife  
tongue & pen

## Lennart Sjögren

These poems have been translated by Robin Fulton Macpherson from Lennart Sjögren's collection *From The Human World* (Bonniers, Stockholm, 2008).

## The Clouds

The clouds pile up  
and even if there won't be thunder tonight  
it looks like it  
and even if earthquakes don't usually visit  
around here  
the tremor is coming closer and closer  
the sky itself is such a one.

A drowned man tries to drag up a drowned man  
but it's no use  
remnants of destroyed lives gather round  
insomnia gets worse  
disbelief, deceit, the abandoned arrange to meet.

To death we who gather here this evening  
beneath the restless clouds  
have a highly unclear relationship

to the colour of sulphur the yellow  
to the colour of storm the violet.

## After The Barricades

We who don't directly belong with the  
revolutionaries  
we who devote ourselves to lower excesses  
and are seldom seen at the barricades  
we who seek comfort rather among the insects  
while our lives weather away.

We dream perhaps of a slower current  
gradually transforming the ocean floors  
and letting the promontories  
for reasons not visible  
draw closer to  
or further away from each other.

History's black holes reach the eyes of us all  
whether we're in the ranks of the deserters  
or in the ranks of the heroes.

Yet we dream of the sharp edge  
of insect wings  
that grind down the mountains to sand.

## Reprieve?

As if in passing and with utmost indifference  
the death sentences are enacted  
rather more slowly but just as effectively  
the trees condemn their leaves.

Yet there remains the surprise  
at the course of the seasons  
and the rumour of a secret reprieve.

## The Scales

That scales should fall from the eyes  
as happens to the blind  
when they regain their sight.

Insects would then appear  
with thin spindly legs  
and the northern lights glitter  
quite differently.

## The Sand

I find it hardest to understand  
the stones and the tall cliffs  
I can't follow their breathing  
and their extremely slow voices

the sea is at least easier  
with its perpetually shifting faithlessness

but when they observe me long and intently  
we recognise in the weathering each other.  
In the sand  
I sift between my fingers  
we have a meeting-place.

## Much Ado

If the clouds were now to scatter  
and in the gap between their heavy mountains  
a creature became visible  
with fish fins  
and stag head  
and human hands

then a great anguish  
and a great happiness  
would spread across the world.

## The Dead

How could the dead  
bother to go on being dead  
if clear wonderful dreams  
weren't reflected in their eyes

each night and each dawn.

IT'S SEVENTY YEARS ago now, and still she remembers what it was to feel her father's rhythm at the start of a day, to eat with him and walk with him and feel the flow of his voice, deep and rough, rolling over her, to watch him push away from the shore and to think nothing of it. The eldest of five, and, like her father, not in need of much rest, Agatha often found herself awake with him whilst her mother and her sisters slept. She and Da stepped into the dark of many mornings, the scent of seaweed pushing in on the wind and the smell of the dark muck and dung rising to fill their noses and lungs and to wake them fully as they lifted, with winter-worn hands, rough turves of peat, dried and stacked neatly outside. Inside again, they rebuilt the fire Da smothered before bed every night while her sisters tucked in to each other, filling the space Agatha had left. Across the cottage, alone in the bed she shared with Da, Agatha's mother curled into herself.

In those days, in their cottage and most of the others on Skye, you saw a man's head first. The thatched roofs hung low, forcing the doors to be built even lower, so anyone of much height, meaning any man and a good many women, was forced to hunch and, before his body hurried in after him, present his face. This is what Agatha's father did after his day of work, and men like Angus Donald, who flipped off his grey cap and let his black hair unfurl into their cottage before he pulled in his body and took his seat by the fire. As the flames flicked, never quite as large or as warm as they might have liked, the men told tales about those they claimed had built cottages like theirs on the west of Skye, the little people, fairies, in the days when it had been safe for them to be seen on the land, before they'd been forced to live within the hills. It seemed obvious to Agatha, though, that the low-slung shelters just made sense – the thatch not too high to patch and the ceilings low enough to hold down around them the heat from the fire and from their own selves and the breath of whoever was the tale teller of the night.

Before it was theirs, the cottage belonged to Agatha's mother's family. Her grandparents claimed it when they brought their family to an easier life, sailing away from where generations of them had lived, twelve miles further out to sea on The Shiant Isles. They brought with them the clothes on their backs and their resilience and their tales, gathered from myths of the great Celtic warriors, men like Ossian and Cuchulain and women like Sgiathaich – The Warrior Queen, and from their own families.

Of all the tales, the one Agatha's mother most often asked her father to tell was not of any of the Celtic warriors or queens, but of themselves, concerning their first encounter on Skye, after both families had moved. When Da told it, he referred to himself by his whole name, as though he was telling it about another person entirely.

"Calum Stuibhart could not recall a day without Morag McLeod," he'd begin. "Until, that is, the moment his father made him and the rest of the Stuibharts huddle into their boat and roll over the waters to Skye."

Although in later tellings, Da spoke in English, he preferred the rhythm of the Gaelic as he told of the waters that looked like the great Cuillin mountains near which

# Between Sea & Sky

SHORT STORY BY HEATHER MAGRUDER



they would settle, dark grey and jagged and under caps of freezing white.

"A strapping lad of thirteen," he went on, "with nearly black hair and flinty eyes but tall already and broad, young Calum pined for the lovely Morag."

He claimed that, all the time on the waters and then searching for a cottage and through the months of repairing the thatch and cutting and drying and stacking the peat and all the other loads of things he'd to do to help his father make the new life they wanted on Skye, Calum imagined Morag's thick, auburn hair, her waist, already taking the shape of a young woman, her freckled hands. Though he'd known her from their youngest years, he realized in those months of cutting and stacking and thatching that he missed her in a different way than he missed the others he'd either left behind on The Shiants or been separated from on Skye. He began, too, to think of all the new lads on Skye whom she might be meeting.

"Young Calum worked harder," he said, "looking for the day his own father would be satisfied that they'd made a good start and allow Calum to roam free for a bit."

He tried not to think about the fact that there were likely thousands of boys his age on Skye, rather than the few in the ten-or-so families with whom he'd shared The Shiants. And he tried to work away his fear that one such boy could have distracted Morag, perhaps even making her forget Calum altogether.

"Three months, Calum had, to think about Morag and whether she'd forgotten him and what he might do to make sure she remembered him over whatever others might come to meet her. By the time his father turned to him, a turve of peat in his hand and said, 'Well done lad. Away you go and have some fun,' Calum knew precisely what he'd do.

"He ran up over the hill and down to the shore, pinched a rowing boat not nearly sturdy enough for Skye's southwestern waters, whose moods change faster than a toddler. Calum was equal parts luck and determination, though, and made the most of both to reel in three salmon so big they looked as though they'd been about those waters long enough to think themselves safe from man and bird. With these fish in hand, Calum Stuibhart replaced what could then be safely called a borrowed vessel and marched himself from the rocks, across the field to Morag's cottage. Upon encountering the low-slung door, Calum first thrust through the fish and then his face, ducking as though he was already a man."

Da told how he found Morag and her brother and sister hunched by the fire. Her father mended a net at the table and her mother stood mixing the flour and butter to make a dough.

"Is mise Calum Stuibhart. Ciamar a tha sibh." I'm Calum Stuart. How are you?

"Tha mi gu math." Morag giggled, saying she was well.

"De an t'aimn a tha oirbh?" he asked, as

though he hadn't known her name from its very beginning.

"Is mise Morag." She threw her hair back over her shoulder and stood.

I am happy to know you, he said, still using the formal Gaelic.

Agatha's grandfather might have thought him soft in the head and sent him packing had he not had those fish, which were then duly cleaned and gutted and smoked and Calum, of course, not only invited to stay and partake of them, but celebrated as the provider of fresh flesh in the middle of a harsh winter.

They would be married before he brought more fish like that to Agatha's mother, but when he did, he did as he had that first time, presenting the fish and ducking his head and removing his cap as though he was a stranger come courting and introducing himself afresh in hopes on winning the lassie's heart. "Is mise Calum Stuibhart," and always ending the exchange as he had that first time: I am happy to know you.

This began a tradition that continued whenever Agatha's father came through the door with an especially good catch.

There is no need, these long decades later, for Agatha to duck her head when she passes through what used to be the doorway of the cottage. The roof is gone; one wall has crumbled almost to the ground. Agatha paces off the interior edges of the cottage, her hand in the air next to the wall or the gaps in it, formed in her absence, as though to trace it. She sits in the space that held the bed on which she and her sisters slept. (If she lay down here, pulled her jacket around her tightly, pressed her head to the floor, who would come looking?) She recalls lying there, body warm in the blankets, face chilled, hearing her father whisper to Angus Donald, who'd stayed too late the night before to make his way back to the village.

"Angus, how's about a bit of fresh?"

She needn't open her eyes to know that they sat, already, side by side by the fire.

"Is it not too cold?"

"Ah come on, just the pair of us, gaining on the waters and the wind and bringing a wee surprise, eh? A lovely belly warmer?"

Her mouth tingled, the memory of a bit of freshness rekindled just at the time when she feared she might have lost altogether the feel of tender flesh against her tongue. They were, by then, more than a month past the solstice and the night had begun to part earlier and allow the day in longer. Still, though, it was a long way to spring.

The full moon and the nearly clear skies drew the pair of men to the waters. Agatha wanted to be any part of it that she could. She slid out and over to the fire and felt her da's hand, calluses catching in her hair. "You'll be wanting to help, then, doithín," he said. "You'll keep our secret – let her try to suss for herself where we've gone." He nodded over to her mother. "If I'm lucky I'll have a great big catch before she's sorted it out."

Agatha pulled on her sheepskin mittens, struggling against a sudden gust of wind to wrap extra woolens around her. She tramped, guided as much by memory as by their lanterns or the moon, down to the shore with them.

Agatha rises now, following her own old steps, taking care to look before each foot-fall. Funny, she thinks, how her memory can guide her to the precise spot on the shore, but each movement of the foot must now be watched to be sure her body properly connects with land, propels her forward instead of resulting in a fall.

She sits just to the edge of the place where she gave her father and Angus a last push with all her might and watched them row away into a perfect light breeze. It wasn't the season but it wouldn't be the first time her father had come in with a fistful of salmon when others came back with nothing but a salty burn on their faces and empty nets in their hands.

Just after midday, she finished spinning the last of the yarn that had been cleaned and carded after the last shearing. Her mother stood at the table, making bannock but flinging flour when she should have been letting it settle, thinking Da had gone away into Carbost with Angus. The two sisters closest in age to Agatha had already run off, over the hill somewhere. The baby stood on a stool, side-by-side with her mother, imitating her every flail of the arm. Agatha made her escape then, down to the rocks in search of some good skipping stones and maybe a glimpse of Da and Angus, making their way back in the distance. She found a good perch and a few lovely flat stones and Dairmid MacKimmon as well.

Dairmid and she had been born on the same day, he in the cottage by the shore and she in hers. His mother took ill and so her mother nursed them both for months. When the time came for him to go and sleep in his own house the pair of them were said to have keened louder than a caoineag, a witch who visits in dreams and visions, crying out a portent of death. Dairmid and she kept their keening going and refused food until they were brought back to each other. Agatha had no memory of a day without Dairmid, and, that day, they threw stone after stone, not having the need of saying anything. They could have gone on like that for hours, only something caught her eye, a dark patch on the sea. She watched it spread, whitecaps rise, and she pointed. Dairmid lifted his cap and they both sat, staring at the black clouds reaching long wisps like witches' fingers down to the waters, seeming to call the sea skyward. Something shifted in her gullet, low, and she thought she should maybe spoil the surprise, tell her mother that her father wasn't gone to into the village, back to Angus' house after all. She stood.

She told Dairmid she had spinning yet to finish and turned back towards the cottage, still small enough to make it through the door upright.

As though she didn't believe it, Agatha's mother set out in the direction of the shore. Agatha went behind and saw her mother find the boat missing, smile and then look out to the sea, the squall already gone, "Is mise Calum Stuibhart."

Agatha's mother took to an extra sweeping out of the cottage and another milking of the cow, to take up the time until her father came.

When the night began to creep in, she went down the shore with her light and waited, as she had so often, to guide her husband in.

After the dark settled in fully, Agatha went to the rocks. Her mother, silent and still, held the lantern high and her face straight out towards the sea. She did not shift even her eyes to acknowledge her daughter there. The wind lifted their hair, swept in under their shawls, rising as it often did with the moon at that time of year, gathering chill from the waters beside her, blowing steadily, which made her somehow comfortable in it. As Agatha made her way over the rocks towards Dairmid's cottage, though she felt hurried, her movements appeared fluid and unpanicked.

Dairmid's father opened the cottage door. "Young Agatha." He smiled.

Dairmid turned from banking the fire, rose, knowing she should have been scraping the scales off some big, bulgy-eyes fish by then. "Is he not back?"

In the time it took her to shake her head and turn outward again, Dairmid and his father had on their heavy sweaters and boots and caps. In the time it took her to get back to the cottage and send word to Angus' family in Carbost, Dairmid and his father had their own lanterns lit and were pushing away from the shore. Her stomach clenched at the sight of them, even though she knew they'd hug the crannies of the coastline and leave the further out places to a bigger vessel and more men from the village, if necessary. The smell of seaweed cut into her, no longer seeming fresh and full of possibility, but overwhelmingly pungent and salty, like aged winter meats; it wrapped around her, a clinging slimy scent that would not release.

The next morning and early afternoon, she picked back and forth between her mother and the cluster of larger rocks at the edge of the bay, resisting the impulse to jump into the waters herself and swim until she found them. When she could no longer stand neither being able to do nor see, she climbed the hill on the south edge of the bay, scrambling along the path the sheep made, slipping more than once, her hands landing in watery grass and dark muck or sheep dung. She didn't care so long as she was moving to a better vantage point. From the top she could see west and south easily and a little north up the minch between Skye and Lewis. She watched the trawler from the village pass inward, men scurrying about on board. Below her, Dairmid's mother came out and wrapped a blanket around her mother. Through the lot of it, Agatha's mother stood, lantern in hand, not moving even as the tide came in around the rocks, bringing closer and closer the idea that Da was gone.

Agatha watched Dairmid climb towards her, his head angled towards his feet as though it was his first time on the land. When he reached the top, he stood, his jacketed shoulder catching her dark shawl. He handed her a pebble, smooth and flat, opened his palm to show he had one as well. Together, they cast them out, watched them fall to the wide waters, too far below to hear when they sank. Dairmid plunged his hands into his pockets, lifted shoulders earward. "My ma says I've to tell you to tend your sisters."

She did as she was told, though when she got there she found there was no need; someone, or they themselves, had tucked them into the big bed and smothered the fire. She lifted

the peat and built it back, as though it was morning again, as though she'd hear his whisper, as though they could just start that day fresh. She sat the night there, where she'd last felt her father's hand and voice on her. She dozed a little, and wakened to the faint whisper of the wind rising with the sun.

She looked over the beds, counted four on the big one and none on the other. She forgot about starting the porridge and went, instead, to the rocks. Her mother stood there still, keening by then for the one soul who knew her beyond the marrow, straight through to the rock and the roaring air that made her who she was. Agatha's mother stood through the day's search and until darkness fell again, still weeping, whispering, "Is mise Calum," again and again until she fell into the arms of a man from the village whose name Agatha did not know, come to offer condolences. He carried her up the hill and tucked her in beside the other girls.

In the morning, while her mother still slept, Agatha lined the sisters up in front of the fire and told them their father had been claimed by the sea, that he wasn't bringing fish or himself across their threshold again.

"D'you mean he's been caught?" This from Mairi, then five.

"Caught?"

"Aye. Instead of him catching the fishes, they've caught him."

"You might say. Not the fishes though but the waters themselves have taken him."

Mairi nodded as though she understood and then her face turned to tears. She gasped. "Will they scrape him and split open his tummy and cook him?"

"Ah no doithín." Agatha pulled Mairi into her, sitting on the floor in front of the fire. "It's not like that at all. He's only gone into the waters, become part of the lovely waters now, instead of being part of us."

She fell silent then. Young Morag joined her on Agatha's knee and Anna tucked in on the other side. Aileen, only two years younger than Agatha, climbed back into bed with their mother.

Mairi brightened a bit and said, "Maybe our da will become a selkie and come back to us." Da had told many a selkie story there by the fire; conjured tales of the magical creatures who came onto land and captured the hearts of men or women and lured them out to sea.

Dairmid's mother saved Agatha having to spoil Mairi's fantasy of not only having her father back but of him also being magical when he came. She came along with Dairmid behind, carrying food for them as though they'd none already put away for winter. Agatha's mother slept through them and several others, only sitting up at dusk and sliding out from under the blankets and taking her lantern down to wait by the rocks until the dark settled completely. When she came back in, she stood and stared at the five girls by the fire as though she wasn't sure how they'd arrived there.

"You'll want your tea," she said, and set the lantern on the table, all that electric energy she'd had before suddenly gone, depleted by trying to will her husband back from the sea.

Three days later, while Agatha's mother waited with her lantern, the sea delivered to an inlet just southwest, one splintered oar, not near any known hideaway for fish of any sort. The waters would not return the bodies of

Agatha's father or of Angus or any other piece of their boat. Her mother moved through those days as though she was no more in her body than Da must have been by then, coming back to herself as the night began to settle and marching to the rocks to keen and light the way for a man who could no longer see.

It fell to Agatha, the eldest, ten years ahead of the youngest, to become something between mother and father whilst her own mother stood still, her tears washing amongst the tide flowing in around the rocks. It fell to Agatha to slide from bed before light and wrest from the stack the peat that had been cut and dried and stacked by her father's hands during the summer. She lifted that peat that had last been touched by him, imagining that touching the peat with her hand was as good as touching his own hand. She stepped into his footprints, back to the cottage, over to the fire, handling the tools that had been his to make the fire roar, ready for her mother to awaken and lift the pot of oats that had been soaking overnight. Except her mother slept, so after Agatha put her hands and feet where her father had put his, she did the same for her mother, making the porridge hot in the morning and helping move them through the days until it was time to tuck in her sisters at night and then to smother the fire and the day. These things and more fell to her and so, by the third day she decided that it also fell to her to dig from her mother's treasure box under her bed, the address of her Aunt Wina and Uncle Donagh and to write to them, in Glasgow, to say that her father was dead.

(Would she have written had she known they would come to Skye and take them all away back to Glasgow, and that it would take her exactly seventy years to get back?)

Agatha presses to standing, there on the rocks. Her knees crackle. Gulls circle overhead. One swoops low, calling as though berating her for failing to bring something from which a crumb or two might fall. She steps to the edge.

February waters, the same grey green, lap at her feet, cold enough to feel through Wellington boots and thick socks she spun and knit decades ago, darned again and again to keep them functional. She uncoils the rope, heaves it into the little boat, cranes her neck slightly to make sure both oars are there.

Her fingers gain leverage against an edge of wood on the bow. *Clinker built*. The details return as she feels the smooth wood against her hands. She lifts. She watches her feet disappear as she steps across the seaweed and in, placing the little skiff – *sgoth niseach* – in the perfect amount of water to allow it to remain stable enough for her to enter, yet become buoyant with one mighty shove of oar against pebbled sea floor. She pushes back a wisp of long, white hair and with it the tickle of a thought that, had she waited another year, she might not have had the strength to lift the bow far enough or plant the oar firmly enough to roll out, as she does now, against the tide. She takes her time. She has plenty of it after all. She can wander between sea and sky for as long necessary, until she finds the place where the waters will give her what she needs. ■

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# Poetry

## Croftscape

BY DEREK CROOK

He inherited a croft  
Defined by gap-toothed walls  
And weary fences,  
Pockmarked with reed clumps  
And, in the summer days,  
Flooded by the bitter yellow  
Of the ragwort: an inheritance  
Of defeated and slipped-under lives.

Later, forty three years later,  
Forty three years and twenty days  
According to the Registrar of Births and Deaths,  
Fences were old but taut,  
The walls lichened but firm,  
The land was sweet and reed free,  
Though never free from debt,  
Subsidy and grant.

And when he, not defeated,  
Not by debt nor subsidy nor grant  
Nor reed nor rotting of the wood  
Nor rusting of the wire and gates  
Nor lack of parts for the old Fergie  
Nor the indomitable wind  
Nor ruthless rain  
Also slipped away and under  
To crumble with the rot,  
The rust, the Fergie,  
Time and authority  
Dithered who was best  
To husband fruitful land

And while they dithered  
Rot and rust and reed seeped back,  
Neglected dentistry once more  
Allowed walls to decay.  
The shoulders of the fences  
Slumped in dumb despair,  
The roots of rushes tightened  
And the pretty poison of the ragwort  
Spread its yellow sores.

## To a Barn Builder in Cumloden Wood

BY JEAN ATKIN

You must have had plans  
when you stood in the purple foxgloves,  
sharpened your saw, and cut  
through railway sleeper walls  
to make this squinting window.

The corrugations of your roof are warmed  
by early sun. The rivets in your gables  
keep their grip. Your barn sags  
only slightly to the left. A rush of ash  
has seeded through its footings.

I peer in through a gap,  
where a sleeper sags outwards  
like a tooth. Inside, the silence  
of people like you, who've left,  
and left their tools.

A wash copper. A cast-iron range you heaved  
from a farm kitchen and stored  
for later. Your trowel, set neatly on a shelf.  
Also an owl, which leaves suddenly  
through the open doorway at the back.

## Blasket

BY SEÁN HEWITT

The boat to the Blasket swung  
Like a child in the womb;  
The water, wildly, bucked  
Its moving troughs and us.

Trout-like and firm, the sky's  
Underbelly courted  
Our noise, but the cormorants  
Paid us no attention:

They rose like burnt paper  
At the word of the wind.  
The quay, O cut theatre  
Of rock, closed our mouths.

Even the dog hushed and could  
See all those houses, white and  
Empty on the hill, gaping.  
The whole island was a church

To silence; reverently,  
We turned the motor off,  
And floated on the cold  
Unconsecrated sea.

## Jenever

BY EILIDH THOMAS

You're a culinary delight with cream  
in a berry sauce, an ancient northern spice

spilling across the roasted flesh  
of deer that grazed your succulent cones.

Unbroken by winter snows you cling  
to the open hill, a blue-grey

bloom of spiny leaves migrated  
from a dusty land where once you sheltered a virgin's son.

Or you're cleansing in byre and home  
an aromatic ritual to wipe out all plague

renewed with Celtic Samhuinn fire  
and Bealltainn feast.

Your unlicensed demise came ungoverned  
in a cocktail, distilled

and illicit, adulterated  
with turpentine and sulphuric acid –

Jenever, laid to waste in Hogarth's lane, until  
quinine soaked, you sweat for empire as a tonic

for malarial heat  
now chichi in a bottle of sapphire blue.



# The Reading Room so far...

Richard Neath on Skye's exciting, new literary venue



From South Carolina to Skye - Baker Prize Winner, Heather Magruder

IN THE SPRING of 2011 an excited writer drove over the Skye Bridge in the early morning mist. He travelled the twisting roads from one side of the country to the other, bound for the BBC Radio Scotland studio in Inverness. He got lost (several times) and, in a fume of frustration and words choice enough to make most dockers blush and at total odds with the literary world, blundered from street to street until, finally, sweating profusely and rapidly running out of time, he pushed open the doors of his destination and entered the lobby...

I was that excited writer and, at that point in time, I knew nothing of literary salons apart from the fact that I was due to read at one that very evening in a hotel somewhere in the city. In the lobby of the studio stood a group of people. I recognised one face: Peter Urpeth of Hi~Arts. He duly introduced me to the rest of the group and I duly forgot every name I was given. And then, in a small room on the first floor with a desk, a microphone a pair of headphones and a couple of chairs I met Kristin Pedroja, the lady responsible for setting up and running the Highland Literary Salon.

Also in that small room was a dark haired lady with a lilting Irish voice and an impish, cheeky smile desperately trying to cover her own nerves: Orla Broderick.

The radio reading went well and, during lunch with Orla and Kristin, the literary salon idea began to gain some semblance of order in my head. I gradually began to understand the thinking behind the whole idea. Basically, like-minded people with a love of books, literature, poetry and writing in general (Orla coined the phrase "all things writerly" and it stuck for many months) got together on a regular basis and discussed their passion. Writers and poets would visit and read their work, discuss their thinking and their processes and in doing so, the beauty and depth of the written word would be shared and, by being shared, its impact and effects would spread between people like a well-meaning virus.

After the evening reading, a meal and a pint or two, Orla collared me and went for the kill. Having already run one successful

event on Skye she was desperate to make it a regular event but realised that she needed help. I liked the idea but really had too much on my plate already, what with work and all the other commitments that cling to modern life. No, I really couldn't get too involved.

Did I mention the lilting Irish voice and impish, cheeky smile? Orla can be a difficult person to say no to...

The early events were fraught with a frustrating limit to our resources; we didn't have enough time, help or cash, but, despite these issues, they went well, with getting on for forty people attending individual events. We heard tales from the bicycle saddle courtesy of Kevin MacNeil when he visited to promote his new Anthology *These Islands We Sing*. We were reduced to tears of laughter by Mark O. Goodwin reciting his work and, in the same wonderful evening, reduced to thoughtful musing over the wonderful penmanship of Myles Campbell. Meg Bateman and Alec Findlay entertained us in a joint event with Atlas and, for one night only, even the Salon's founder members got in on the act and read passages from both published and unpublished work.

It must have been early Autumn when it became all too apparent that things were getting too big, too complicated and simply way too involved for Orla and myself to manage on our own and so, we decided, with a nudge and a prod from Peter Urpeth, that we had to get serious.

I'll mention, at this point that, during our initial discussions when Orla convinced me to get involved, I had one simple reservation to the whole project. Being a solitary fellow with an aversion to rules and regulations, my one stipulation was that I absolutely, definitely, categorically didn't want to get involved in a committee. But we'd got to a point where we needed a more formal arrangement. We needed administrative help. We needed access to funding and more structure.

I could see where it was heading.

An initial steering committee was duly formed (Charlotte Johnson, Iona MacDonald, Val Fellows, Orla Broderick and myself) and several meetings followed where we discussed,

tweaked, cajoled and slowly sculpted what was to become, at the inaugural meeting in December, with the edition of another two committee members, Liz Shaw and Sarah Lister, The Reading Room.

One of our most pressing issues was *The Baker Prize*. At its inception, it was simply a daft idea, a throw away comment, a reason for a bit of a jolly. We'd launch a writing competition with categories for prose and poetry in both English and Gaelic, with the resulting entries assessed by independent judges. We thought we may get a little interest and a few entries, even thought at the time that we may enter ourselves. What we didn't expect was the level of interest the competition would generate. Admittedly, the real influx only came after the Baker Prize appeared on the Cuillin fm website but, my-oh-my, once the World Wide Web got involved, how the interest soared.

Some days, while working in my home office, I'd get an enquiry or an actual entry every few minutes, the little message at the bottom of my screen flashing to tell me I'd received another email. One after another they flooded in, from all over the country and several from overseas. We even had one from a lady in South Carolina and I remember joking that if she won, I only hoped she didn't expect us to pay her travelling expenses.

Well, after a couple of months, the deadline came and went and, with the help of my wife Max, I set about compiling individual entries for the different categories. Over 140 pieces of work, sent, on the whole via email, from across the vast expanse of cyber space to land on my pc to be judged and awarded their place in the very first *Baker Prize*.

Niall Gordon came in top place in the Gaelic poetry category, Andy Jackson put in a fine performance by taking top honours in English poetry and landed a highly commended into the bargain.

And what do you know, that lady from South Carolina just went right on and won first prize in the English Prose section with her short story 'Payline'. "Oh well", we all thought, "we'll have to choose someone to read her winning entry on her behalf."

And yet here the tale of the *Reading Room* so far, like a well written, page turning thriller, takes a final plot-turning twist and that lady from across the pond, the highly talented Heather Magruder, joins us at the Skeabost Hotel to claim her prize, read her work and, simply by being there and by making such a monumental effort, helps the *Reading Room* grow a little more.

And, you know what? I think the best really is yet to come... ■

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# Poems by Gordon Meade

## Zen and not Zen

I am afraid  
I just cannot see  
more than what is  
in front of me

and more  
often than not  
it is the sea.  
I know the drill –

before you start  
practicing mountains  
and rivers are  
mountains and rivers –

and when you are  
practicing mountains  
and rivers are no longer  
mountains and rivers –

and after you stop  
practicing mountains  
and rivers are mountains  
and rivers again

but not the same.  
And a part of me  
gets all that. But  
before during

and after practicing  
for me the sea will  
always remain  
the sea – both real

and imaginary –  
both coming  
and going – both  
breaking and calm.

## Divine Thoughts

I remember watching a cat  
playing with mice in my father's  
store-room; pouncing

on them, pinning them down,  
trapping them by their tails, releasing  
them, and catching them again.

All of this set against a back-  
drop of sacks of grain, illuminated  
by the odd shaft of sunlight.

Looking back on it, it was  
my first memory of how I thought  
a god might behave.

## Love Apples

Our desire for cheap, home-  
grown fare has overridden our love  
of the dramatic view.

Two tomato plants are vying  
for the distinction of obliterating  
the sea. Just a few weeks

in situ and they have already  
greened-out the bottom row of panes.  
I can still see the tops of the waves

and most of the sky. The rocky  
shore and the breakers have disappeared,  
as has the breakwater, my constant

companion during the last few  
years. It is that length of rock and concrete  
that I shall miss the most. I doubt

if the taste of our garden salads  
will be able to compensate for the loss –  
the salty water sliding over it,

the occasional cormorant drying  
its wings and the single heron perched upon  
it, before deciding where to fish.

## On Reading *The Peregrine*

*for Geoff Wood*

I did not know, until today,  
that a falcon was a female peregrine  
nor that a tiercel was a male. I was also  
unaware that they liked to bathe,

vigorously and often, searching  
everyday for a body of water, no less  
than two inches deep and no more than  
twelve. I was also shocked

to discover that sometimes,  
after a kill, they will stand above  
their victims, stunned themselves by what  
they have done. As if they, too,

are surprised. It is only  
when the blood begins to flow  
from the bodies of the dead that they will  
rouse themselves and start to feed.

## Four Candles

Friends of ours have given us four square  
candles, each with a single word written on one side  
and the Chinese symbol for that word printed

above it – Peace, Energy, Wisdom and Love.  
Each of the candles is individually wrapped in cellophane.  
In order to light one, we would have to unwrap it,

tease out the wick, strike a match and watch it  
burn. In a given number of hours, the candle would be  
gone. There would either be no more wisdom left,

a distinct lack of energy, a cooling of our love  
or, worst of all, a declaration of war. We have decided,  
for the time being, to keep them under wraps.

## Heredity

To my father, animals  
were animals and humans,  
humans. Slugs were slugs.  
And worms were there  
to be dug up and used  
as bait to catch fish.

To my mother, humans  
were not to be trusted  
and animals were easier,  
by far, to live with.  
She believed she could talk  
to them and that they listened  
to her. They understood.

Like most of us, I have  
a bit of both of them in me.  
There are some humans  
I feel I can count on and some  
animals I think I can get  
through to. I have never liked  
eating fish, and worms  
are best left, well alone.

# Poetry

## Marmalade

BY GRAHAM FULTON

my mouth tastes of marmalade  
although  
I've not eaten marmalade  
for months  
it's like  
a ghost trace  
of some life I've just come out of  
as I lie  
looking up at the ceiling,  
the switched off light  
attached to the ceiling

at the hardly moving  
green flowered curtains  
wondering  
if it's raining outside  
or sunny or snowing  
or some other manifestation  
of weather I've never seen before  
that's never been seen  
by anyone before,  
something  
new  
falling from the sky,  
skimming the surface,  
with my unwashed mouth  
tasting of marmalade  
from one of those little jars  
you can buy in a supermarket,  
a remnant sense  
from a dream I've just come  
out of  
as I lie  
on the white unstained sheets  
we washed yesterday  
in the washing machine,  
listening  
to the sound of  
my stomach rumbling,  
the sound of a far away car  
moving along a far away road  
hardly there at all,  
hardly here  
at all, hardly thinking enough  
to even exist

## Last Day in the House

BY GINNA WILKERSON

I try on all my hats.  
Not one is worthy of packing.  
I could put them in a box for charity,  
but I hang them back on the wall instead.  
I sleep peacefully to the sound  
of a neighbor's morning lawn mower,  
loving the stillness of the physical.  
My cousin once cut off her toe with a lawnmower.  
She could still walk, though – and I thought her  
brave and beautiful, forgetting the ignorance  
involved in mowing the lawn with bare feet.  
Sometimes I wish for life in a wheelchair.  
Maybe I could ignore my body then,  
and everyone would be proud of all  
I could accomplish in spite of the chair.

# The Neighbours' Buddleia

BY DEBORAH MOFFATT

In a neighbour's garden, a long-neglected buddleia lies sprawled across the grass after a storm, elegant and indignant as an inebriated debutant, a heap of leafy petticoats and pendent blossoms up-turned, slender roots still clinging petulantly to sodden earth.

Nothing was ever quite right there.  
The sagging roof, the zig-zag cracks in the harling  
that no amount of paint could ever disguise,  
the gate that squeaked at night, too often and too late;  
so many small deceptions, such great aspirations.

Their one big moment was the garden party at Holyrood:  
a chauffeur-driven limousine arriving at their gate,  
your woman a vision in pistachio and white,  
spikey heels and a too-wide hat,  
wasp waist and spindle shanks.

Months later now, and that buddleia is still lying there, brown leaves shrivelling, falling into the long grass, the thin sapless limbs, hard as tines, uselessly forking the air, a blowzy old bush, longing to be remembered as the beauty they once believed it was.

## Sonnet 114/365

BY ANGUS REID

look!

a successful Scottish	C olony
like Kilda-folk standing	O n a clifftop
in a blue parliament harebells like	M en
accustomed to	M aking their own music
to making the best	O f a break in the
weather and belonging to no	N ation
on the thinness of that standing thread	H anges
a sense of purpose a song	A nd sounding
in the echo of itself it	R ings its
bell its own	E xquisite manifesto
what if the harebell had been the	B lueprint
for Darien what if that	E xample
of Scottishness were the unRoman	L aw
by which was told how to live and	L et live



**Island Conversion: The Transition of a Gaelic Poet from Sceptic to Believer**

By Myles and Margaret Campbell

The Islands Book Trust

REVIEW BY DONALD MACLEOD,

FREE CHURCH COLLEGE

This book works on several different levels. Jointly authored by well-known Gaelic poet, Myles Campbell, and his wife, Margaret, it gives a fascinating glimpse into their personal life-stories. But it also describes two different routes to faith, one via science and philosophy, the other via remarkable shared experiences; and, to add yet another level, their journey back to faith is enmeshed with their journey back to each other after a brief youthful romance.

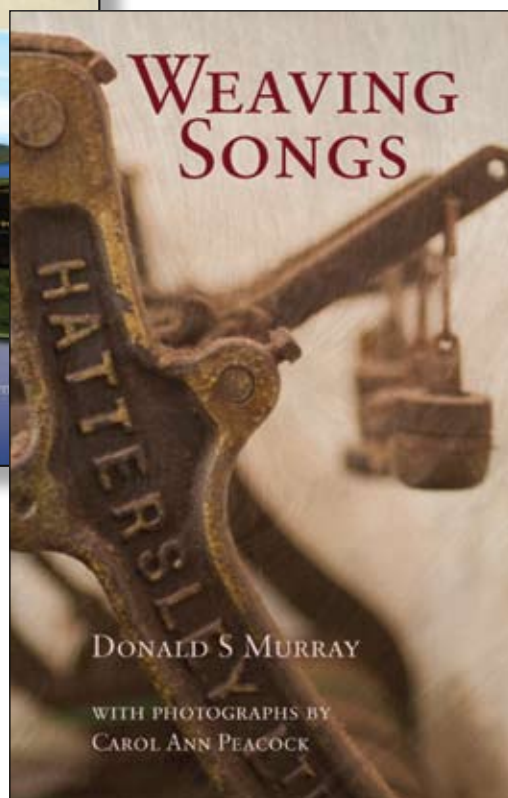
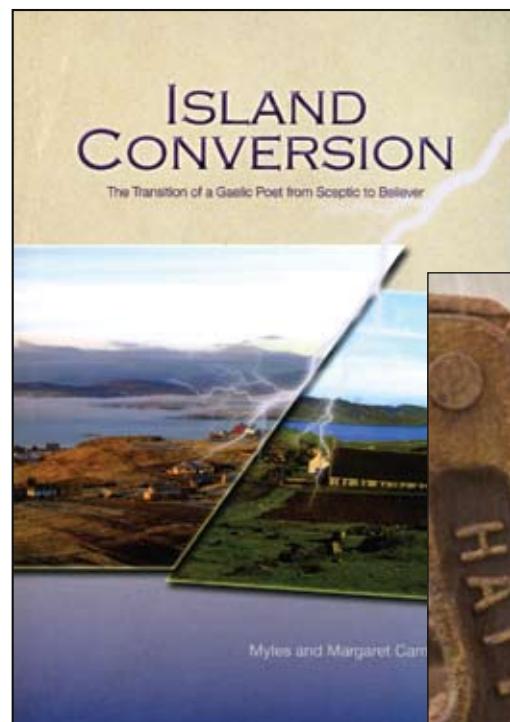
Both authors were brought up in devout Highland Presbyterian homes, Margaret in the Free Presbyterian Church, Myles in the Free; and both rebelled in their teens. Margaret professes to have a 'simple faith', but that could certainly not be said of Myles. He is widely read, particularly in philosophy, psychology and science, and this reading played a major role in his journey from agnosticism to faith. This is what makes his pilgrimage so unusual. The common modern narrative is that science undermines faith. In Myles's case, it helped restore it, leading him to doubt Naturalism (the assumption that the world explains itself) and convincing him, instead, that 'Nature' itself is a miracle. The 'Big Bang' theory fitted in well with the idea of creation, and the complexity of the living cell cried out for a designing mind.

Such arguments, as Myles presents them, are both coherent and convincing. But from his own point of view they were not the main thing in his journey: a journey which eventually linked up with Margaret's. The key thing for them both was a series of what they saw as divine interventions in their lives. They are wary of bracketing these experiences with the 'second sight' so often associated with the Highlands. But they are firmly convinced that they were supernatural.

They were of two kinds: events for which there seemed to be no possible natural explanation; and events which could only be seen as extraordinary coincidences ('synchronicities', Myles calls them, after Jung). The narrative of these happenings will be, for many, the main interest of the book.

It begins with a dream and a gate, and then proceeds via a postcard that demanded to be posted, an unexpected phone-call, a red calf which appeared on cue on an island road, a stick that mysteriously jumped out of its place whenever they talked about writing a book, an insistent telephone number in a minister's head, a baby crying when there was no baby there, and a cat called Sguab going berserk at a spot where Myles had heard footsteps when, again, there was no one there.

These and other similar occurrences convinced Margaret and Myles of a supernatural presence in their lives, and though the full cognitive force of such happenings can be felt only by those who experience them, they certainly confirm that, 'There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy.' That apart, the story itself with its



twists and turns, tensions and set-backs, is a gripping one: with the added bonus that at any moment you may bump into Kant or Jung or Henry James; plus, a Gaelic 'poem-sequence' (with English translation) based on the authors' experience.

At journey's end, they have found, 'The glory of the Being behind all beings'. But there is a final twist: a shrine (in a Presbyterian home!), consisting of a 'small but elegant table', positioned near the stick, with a candle, an illustration of the Turin shroud and a white stone. Why these Three? ■

**Following Our Fathers – Two Journeys among Mountains**

by Linda Cracknell

Best Foot Books ([www.lindacracknell.com](http://www.lindacracknell.com))

REVIEW BY STEPHEN KEELER

Beginnings and endings are rarely clear-cut, discrete or readily identifiable. Towards the end of the first of the two accounts which make up this heart-warming little treasure of a book Cracknell suggests that she 'set out on this walk principally for a holiday'. It is clear from the outset, however, not only that she set out for rather more than a holiday but also that she had 'set out' long before she arrived in Norway to do it.

Cracknell's first account, 'Losing my footing, finding my feet again', is of her 'walk' in the footsteps of Sven Sømme, a Norwegian biologist arrested by the German forces occupying his country in 1944 for photographing a torpedo station near Åndalsnes. An activist in the resistance movement, Sømme escaped during transportation to the regional military

headquarters for summary trial, and headed for neutral Sweden across Norway's backbone of high fells and towering alps. His compelling and deeply personal account of the arduous and hazardous trek was published in 2005, as *Another Man's Shoes*, and is Cracknell's companion guide, along with Sømme's daughters Ellie and Yuli, on a commemorative walk, sixty years later, to 'reinforce their father's route', to create their own 'pathways of personal meaning', and to 'reclaim Norway as a country to which [they] belonged'. Heady stuff, even for readers not prone to vertigo.

Cracknell's skill as a writer is to combine the poetry and the prose without appearing to have to try too hard. The hills may always 'tremble with promise' but they never cease to be what Robert Louis Stevenson called 'granite underfoot'. The Norwegian west coast evening 'stretched out long and late with its layering of blue-island silhouettes reminding [her] of the Summer Isles', but 'the path crosses a featureless plateau, and circles behind a small hill, after which we descend back towards the lake through rocky outcrops'. Unsurprising that her desk and computer seem 'remote and irrelevant', that she should contemplate, in the silent sleeplessness of the high alpine valley, not only the Sømmes' genetic legacy stretching back like the valley itself, but eventually that of her own family. Just like Sven Sømme, Cracknell's father died of cancer in 1961: 'Although he was a keen mountaineer, I know little of what and where he climbed. I have no scent or record of his adventures. For all I know, he might have climbed here in Norway.'

And so, of course, the seeds of Cracknell's second piece are planted. Lying awake in the

chill of a high Norwegian mountain pass, she is inclined to think of her 'valley' as 'strangely punctuated', as something of a terminal moraine, perhaps, and of herself as 'a full stop': 'I returned home thinking about this. I wanted to follow more whispering ways; to seek out stories that still echo underfoot...'

The second piece, 'Outlasting our Tracks', is the story of Cracknell's attempt at the Finsterahorn, in the Bernese Oberland (Switzerland), and is a mountaineer's account of a serious climb, full of the insights and detail an armchair climber longs to read: 'The rope makes a team of us, pulling us out of individual reveries and slow waking with the need to communicate. Like riding a tandem, pauses will need negotiation.' It is also an account of Cracknell's attempt to 'colour in the shaded outline in [her father's] photograph', for at half her age he had led an expedition to the Finsterahorn, in 1952, and this was her answer to the call to follow him.

Her account of the climb, of fewer than forty rather small pages, soon has me breathless. By the time they reach the crest I – merely a reader – am exhausted by the terror, the effort and the concentration, and I am about to be assaulted by a 'dark twist' in the narrative which will replace triumph with solemnity. There is, however, a sense of loose ends being knotted, a tidying of affairs: 'this experience will echo on. A spell has been untied; a story retraced and given words out of silence.'

I finish, and put my copy of the book aside with a sigh. Some readers will find the photos and maps that occur at various places in the book add little, and may even detract. They do, however, emphasise the personal nature of both the writing and the subject matter. There is a particular tenderness when Cracknell considers fathers and their daughters, as far removed from sentimentality as it is possible to be. There are gentle insights into the deep-rooted bonds of kinship, and a merciful absence of fashionable angst. This is a book to take with you somewhere quiet, but take a notebook, too, so that you can jot down your plans to follow, metaphorically at least, in the author's footsteps. ■

**As Though We Were Flying**

By Andrew Greig

Bloodaxe Books

REVIEW BY STUART B CAMPBELL

Andrew Greig has recently been heralded as 'the poet laureate of climbing', but entertaining and inventive though his collections connected with mountaineering were, in this new book he transcends that singular definition. There is only one poem ('This Pilgrimage') which relates to climbing and seems to draw on similar sources which his novel *Electric Brae* was based on. That might be unexpected, given that being part of the climbing community was a significant aspect of Greig's life. The poems nonetheless are biographical and Greig perhaps felt he needed to present himself in a wider context.

In 'A Simple Evening', Greig asks, 'what kind of life does not bear itself / as both content and witness to its own passing'. It is a question that a poet who takes his or her own experiences as subject matter, who is



both the observed and the observer, cannot avoid. Greig does not provide a direct answer – for himself or the reader. At one level, every conscious life inevitably provides its own self-commentary; the question that might be more usefully asked is not ‘what’ but ‘how’ life is to be borne and expressed. In these poems Greig illustrates how; it is not comfortable.

These are poems of retrospection, but not of intent; they take the past as their subject and remain there. There is some delight to be had (for baby boomer generation readers) in the reminiscence provided by cultural markers: ‘Stingray’, ‘Vimto’, ‘Brylcream’, ‘Stella [smiling] invitingly from last night’s lager can’. They seem, however, to provide little solace for Greig; their purpose seems to be more about locating a time, rather than offering comfort. Similarly, place-names – Sillar Dyke, Queensferry, East Fife, Ben Wyvis, the Bay of Skail – fix memory to geography, ‘as though memory were a frozen loch’; all are places to return to.

The word ‘dreich’ crops up often enough to be noticeable. For someone like Greig who has lived much of his life around the Firth of Forth, that sort of weather will be familiar. A line like ‘wondering when life ends, or will finally begin’ (‘Wynd’) might just sound as gloomy as north sea haar, but that (apart from it being quoted without a context here) would be too simple a reading of these poems. There is rather a sense of resignation. When Greig revisits his home-town in ‘The Tidal Pools of Fife’ he finds the community has ‘thinned out, disappeared, were not replaced’. The last stanza of ‘A Girl I Knew’ gives:

*Our friends the dead are swimming from us now.  
Their disappearance I can understand;  
the reappearing act,  
I don’t know how they do that,  
nor how much more often I can applaud*

Greig describes himself as being in his ‘late middle years’, yet many of these poems feel as though they have been written by someone at a much later stage of life. That in itself is not as important as the perspective taken; Greig seems to feel the weight of a ‘Deep Past’, ‘time pressing on your neck. In ‘In Endcliffe Park’ Greig proposes ‘we who see ourselves as moving through the world / are better seen as receptacles, hosts / of the becoming that moves through us’. This is the observer who feels he does not influence the observation, someone to whom things happen. This is less about deliberate detachment and more about fatalism and this retrospection speaks of somebody struggling to integrate life experience; to find contentment with what has been. Only in ‘An Edinburgh Encounter’ do we see a flicker of generativity, ‘Love beyond reason’, as a possibility, but within the context of the other poems it too is tinged with sadness. In these poems Greig seems to try to gather up his past – people, like Alex Watson, Eck Hutchinson, Mr Duncan, Mal (Duff, the mountaineer) and places: Park Mill, Stronsay, Hallaig, Shetland – as if by doing so he will be able to reconcile himself to them. It is impossible to know if he achieved that – that is for Greig, not us – but what he has given us in *As Though We Were Flying* is a collection of poems that are not elaborately written,

but honestly confront the past; ‘you can see clearly how it was’. ■

### Weaving Songs

By Donald S Murray  
Acair

REVIEW BY JOHN GLENDAY

Donald Murray has become something of a caretaker for the heritage of the Hebrides. His book *The Guga Hunters* won acclaim for its careful depiction of the annual gannet hunt on Sulasgeir by the men of Ness, Lewis. It sparked not a little controversy, and gathered a good deal of praise for its detailed and honest description. His newest collection of poetry and prose – *Weaving Songs* – focuses on the tweed weaving industry. Murray’s father Angus was a weaver in Ness and so these are both historical and deeply personal poems for Murray, who describes them as ‘narratives in verse’.

The text is beautifully complemented by the photographs of Carol Ann Peacock, who manages to tease out not only the astonishing colours and textures of the trade but also the character of the crofters engaged in the weaving. This is one of the main attractions of the book – both writer and photographer celebrate the activity and industry of weaving, but retain as their principal focus the people involved. Peacock has a gift for taking us close up to her subject – so close we can almost smell the cloth as it is worked and hear the rattle and click of the loom. For his part, Murray is careful to remind us that this is not an illustrated book of poetry, but rather two separate but linked artistic enterprises.

Murray has bold aspirations for the book – stating at the outset that he hopes it will contribute to the renaissance of the Harris Tweed industry. I admire that – it’s a way of requiring the poetry to work for a living. It reminds me of the statement of Czeslaw Milopsz – ‘What is poetry that does not save/ nations or people?’ The acute observation and detail in the well crafted poem can be part of a process of redemption that helps preserve both culture and individuals from History. In that respect, this is an important book. It serves a real purpose and Murray is to be commended for that.

The trope of weaving is in all things and holds the collection together, but in the end the true strength of this book resides exactly where it should: in the quality of its writing. The poems are succinct, compelling and lyrical, though never nostalgic: ‘You were there at my birth. You will be/ present at my death, the one whose mortality/ gave me life and whose presence has been/ passed onto my children.’ (‘For my Father’)

Although at first I was hesitant about such a mixture of poetry, fiction and factual account, it all blends together well, as a good weave should, and leaves us with a worthwhile, enduring record of an industry and its people:

“The weaving of the tweed – the sweetness of that song

*Which grants movement to the tapping foot,  
the human heart, the hand,*

*and clothes us with fine rhythms  
which resonate from sea and land.”*  
(‘Music of the Tweed’)

### Fathoms and Metres – An Odyssey of Island Stories. Traditional Stories Retold by Ian Stephen

audio CD, Tob Records, TRCD0032

www.ianstephen.co.uk

REVIEW BY MEGHAN McAVOY

When I was growing up there was a tourist attraction near Ballachulish called Highland Mystery World. It celebrated that mystical, mythical, magical dimension in Scotland’s traditional culture. Inside was a seaweedy world of kelpies, selkies and clootie wells, where storytellers in the characters of witch-like women and druidic men would pass on their tales to children and adults alike. This non-tartan fantasy world is one that the Scottish tourist industry hasn’t managed to capitalize on, and it would seem that Highland Mystery World didn’t either; it is now closed.

However, Ian Stephen’s CD provides a way for these stories to continue to reach those who want to hear them (anyone else who has visited Highland Mystery World will recognize ‘Uist Selkie’, albeit in a slightly different version). His careful pacing draws the listener into that world of the sea and of the eerie traditional stories which have circulated in fishing communities around the coasts of Scotland, Ireland and Scandinavia. Their eerie supernaturalism, manifest in continual hints that some characters are not quite human (suspected selkies are distinguished by their webbed fingers), will be familiar to those who know the medieval Scots ballads. And that is not all the stories have in common with the ballads – both enjoyed a revival in the 50s when Hamish Henderson started collecting the indigenous culture of Scotland from farm workers and travelers. Indeed, one of Ian Stephen’s sources for his stories is the School of Scottish Studies archive recordings, which consist in no small part of stories and songs collected by Henderson.

Apart from their mysticism, there is certain canniness about these stories. In ‘Three Knots’ Stephen announces to the skeptical listener, that if they are willing to believe that a pack of drunken sailors would remember every item on their wives’ shopping lists, that to believe in magic knots on a bit of rope which can make a boat go faster when untied, really isn’t much of a stretch. Stephen takes the listener into his confidence in the manner of the best ceilidh-house yarn-spinner. His repetition of statements such as ‘but that’s not what happened’ and ‘I don’t know if...’ create the sense of a narrator who is limited and yet trustworthy – not an ‘unreliable narrator’ but one who seeks to separate the ‘facts’ of the tale from ‘conjecture’ in such a way as to suspend the listener’s belief (or lack of it). He frequently draws the listener’s attention to the contemporary equivalents of his stories’ settings – including Stornaway port with its forklifts – as a means of leading into a tale, thus juxtaposing the old and the new; the real island world and the world of the stories. In these stories, as in the ballads, the boundaries between a recognizable reality and a supernatural world become blurred.

The CD is recorded at Martyn Bennett’s former studio in An Tobar, and contains music at the beginning and end of some of the tales. Julie Fowlis’s whistle reels accompany one tale, Peter Urpeth’s jazz piano accompanies another. This mixing of old and new seems in keeping with the spirit of transmitting an ancient storytelling tradition – via the untraditional means of CD – to a new audience. ■

*The sunshine flavours of  
Elizabeth David  
The jaunts of Henry James  
Inspirational art in prehistory caves  
And the chic chateau of  
Miss Josephine Baker.  
Sunflowers, vineyards, country markets;  
Southwest France awaits.*

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charming stone cottage with panoramic  
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IT IS A sad fact that Lizzie, the one-eyed prophet of Inverfarigaig, remains less well-known than Nostradamus and the Brahan Seer put together. Yet she foretold the death of the geologist James Bryce in the Farigaig pass. ‘That man will fall to his death if he clambers about on those cliffs. You mark my words.’

However, the most fascinating of her tales concerns ‘a practitioner of the hidden arts who will direct power through cables of copper, thereby bringing light and heat to the homes of both Highlanders and strangers.’

While she did not name this ‘practitioner’, few people seriously doubt that the prophecy has come to pass in the form of Greensparks.

For electricity under control, contact:



Electrical, environmental and general services.  
Inverfarigaig, Loch Ness,  
07712589626

OLD HAMISH MACFEE trundled his barrow down Barron Tailors Street in Inverness.

‘Whit have ye in there, ma loon?’ asked Mrs Harkes, pointing at his empty barrow.

Hamish set his barrow down. ‘Light,’ he said. ‘The last load of light today.’

‘Whit fur?’ quoth the crone.

‘It’s for that wee shop round the corner, in Drummond Street. They gather the light into threads and weave them into clothes.’

Mrs Harkes nodded wisely. ‘I kent weel there was a trick to it. But why d’ye walk so verra slowly?’

He lifted the handles of his barrow and moved off. ‘It’s not light, you know.’

Clothes made of light. Sounds far-fetched? Well, it is.

**Farfetched**  
**Funky clothes for funky people.**  
**Nestled round a corner off Baron**  
**Taylor’s Street, Inverness.**

## ► From the Sublime to Clydeside

POETRY REVIEWS BY MANDY HAGGITH

If you want assurance that Scotland's poetry scene is alive and kicking, the harvest of 2011's pamphlets is a good place to look.

For a book of only a few poems, *The Six Strides of Freyfaxi* (Oystercatcher Press [www.oystercatcherpress.com](http://www.oystercatcherpress.com)) is rich and far-reaching. Nigel Wheale writes from Orkney, of 'unreal, holy Hoy dressed in azure and gold', children out riding on quad bikes and throws menacing walkers along the shore. The markings on a fulmar egg transport us all the way to Tsinghua in China and there are glimpses of the deep mesolithic past among the 'thin bone-scatter of hills and skerries'. The title poem combines equestrian factuality with mythic grandeur. 'Dear John', in the form of a letter to artist John O'Neill, is a vivid painting in words of an island scene: 'The shoreline rocks are full of waiting./The Flow tenses around the wake of a single vessel,/and the numberless dead of the sea fix her with their empty gaze,/here, where seas have bled upon skerries.'

From the sublime to Clydeside, *The Zombie Poem* (Controlled Explosion Press [www.grahamfulton-poetry.com](http://www.grahamfulton-poetry.com)) is Graham Fulton's long telling of the casting for a zombie movie, *World War Z*. The writer joins 4000 contenders to be one of the 1000 extras in the film, 'the perfect job the dream job / become / an oatcake-faced Scottish zombie / shambling the grey streets of Glasgow'. Irony bites at the horde of unemployed Glaswegians lining up for work as living dead. Laugh, or cry.

*The Ruin of Poltalloch* (Controlled Explosion Press) also by Graham Fulton, is really a pamphlet of photographs, but it sneaks into this review thanks to the long poem at the start. The subject is a grand, ostentatious mansion near Kilmartin, Argyll, built in the mid-nineteenth century and 'abandoned to nature' a century later. It celebrates how vegetation, 'a benevolent cancer', is recapturing the space: 'ferns and junk and /fairytale trees/ coiling/ around the stone, snaking/ the silver stillness'. The poem echoes the ruin's sprawl, 'left like a gift/ to the ghosts, witches,/ children of imagination.'

Poetry and images should mix more often. In Lyn Moir's *Velazquez's Riddle*, (Calder Wood Press [calderwoodpress.co.uk](http://calderwoodpress.co.uk)) the cover image of the painting 'Las Meninas' is invaluable. Half of the poems are written from the point of view of characters in the painting, encouraging us to look ever more deeply at the picture and imagine who they were, what is in their minds and what the artist is trying to say. The remaining poems all refer to related paintings by Picasso, although the lack of reproductions of these denies us the corresponding pleasure. The poet engages the painters in a three-way dialogue about their art: Velazquez, the 'looming figure, in whose hands/ the whole illusion rests', and Picasso, 'dressed/ like a sailor, short, monkey-faced'. Under the scrutiny of the poet's eye, their great paintings seem to have the capacity to yield 'the answers to questions/ that haven't been asked.' Turning a painting into a volume of poems is an ambitious idea and Lyn Moir pulls it off with good humour and a ventriloquist's skill.

Poetry goes well with other media, and jazz seems to be music's closest branch to the world of verse. Rondacora Press supply Rab Wilson's 1957 *A Flying Scot* (Rondacora Press [www.hughbryden.com](http://www.hughbryden.com)) complete with a Jazz CD to listen to while reading. The music by Ben Bryden is smooth-running, like the classic bicycle which is the subject of the poetry. This is a highly-engineered production, featuring Hugh Bryden's linocut prints. It's a 'sonnet redouble', a sequence of 15 sonnets, each last line acting as the first of the next and the final poem drawing the lines together. All three artists have worked within the same formal constraints, showing how the wheels of form provide a remarkable degree of freedom.

In *Spellwinders* (Dreadful Night Press), an anthology celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Glasgow Jazz Festival, a medley of writers respond to musicians and gigs. Like the best of festivals, voices new to me share the programme with well-known names, such as Alexander Hutchison, as usual 'getting us deeper in', and Gerry Loose on Thelonius Monk: 'there's not a note in his head/ apart from years of music'. Clare Quigley gives the anthology its title: 'Spellwinders in/the spotlight dark/with reed-blown/incantations'. Read this with your favourite jazz on LOUD!

Jim Carruth (who edited the anthology), also has a new pamphlet full of cows and sheep, with farm implements instead of page numbers, and if you like your poetry earthy look no further than *Working the Hill* (Mariscat Press [www.mariscatpress.co.uk](http://www.mariscatpress.co.uk)). This is writing straight from the field, its author 'standing behind the shearers/ fleecing their moments for verse'. Each poem is shaped to suit its contents. There are gentle elegies and short blasts of wicked humour, like 'The Back End', rhyming in perfect symmetry. In the splendid rant of 'Field Holler', he uses indentation as if to suggest the volume with which the lines should be read out. 'Stack' recalls the work of packing straw into the loft of a big shed, in stanzas as chunky as bales, while a lamb's frail struggle into the world comes in hushed, short lines, and two twin lambs:

*yin and yang  
coughed up dead.  
Sling them  
in the back*

*there's the living  
to be fed.*

Marion McCready takes us down to the shore with *Vintage Sea*, much of which trawls 'the beach's broken steps' of Scotland's coastline. Here are selkies, a riddling outcrop of dangerous rocks, Brenhilda found by Nessmen sailing to hunt for gannets, a cockle picker's wife, a herring girl. I love the strange love poem, 'We met by a Charm of Crossbills':

*'The blood-birds kiss the air  
as they fall from cone to cone*

*their warp of mandibles  
freeing the fruits, shucking the shells'*

This poetry is full of confident play with words, deep connections with nature, especially the sea, and vivid images evoking joy

and agonising loss. In 'Looking Beyond', 'the sky drips with clouds, blown beyond wing tips' and 'I see an image of me / in the water blossom / of your eyes.'

Pippa Little is a sensitive and contemplative poet, who began life in southern Africa, coming to Scotland in childhood. In *The Snow Globe* (Red Squirrel Press [www.redsquirrelpress.com](http://www.redsquirrelpress.com)) she shows us this place through fresh, perpetually surprised eyes. 'I see yellow fields, black pines/ and beyond both, a strip of *North Sea*'. Somehow that italicised North Sea could be the name of a dangerous disease. This is poetry to read over and over, resonant and deeply thought. In 'Colonial Returning' she writes about writing about these things: 'returning to the storehouse,/treasure chest, depleting it year by year,/a gentle, loving weakening...'

*The Reiver's Stone* (Ettrick Forest Press [www.efpress.com](http://www.efpress.com)) is, like *Spellwinders*, a mixture of poems by well-known and new poets. It's a welcome levelling of ground and it is good to see often-published writers like Penelope Shuttle, Kenneth Steven and Des Dillon between the sheets with people like Michael Curran, just publishing his first chapbook. In 'Rotten Leaves and Pigeon Bones' he approaches a chimney, bends down, inserts himself and climbs up, up and out, 'and the sun/ is there/ I think it is there / and it sticks/ to my / face'. Half way up, he reflects, 'Children did this'. Brilliant.

*Writing Ground* ([www.vivienjones.info](http://www.vivienjones.info)) is a short collection of nature and land lyrics by four women poets. All the language is expressive of place, from Shetland to Dumfriesshire. Two linns, where a rush of water slows, act as a centre of gravity around which the words of the four poets flow. There are splashes of vivid writing among these poems and an overall sense of rural landscapes freshly drafted by discerning eyes. Here's Fiona Russell's 'Sheep bones': 'Harsh days./Too cold for some./The remnant bleached helmet/and a railtrack of bones close by,/picked clean.

Marion Montgomery's *Lyart* (Red Squirrel Press) is also full of little snapshots of Scots, in mostly formal, rhyming verse forms: a second world war veteran, a disgruntled neighbour of Greenham Common, an unemployed school leaver, a perplexed Saint Andrew. Among them she acknowledges the unheard voices of youth, for example in 'Rendition': 'Your friends – the ones whose signed petition /we reject – are only children with no voice. // A plane awaits, you have no choice.'

In *The Heavy Bag* (Calder Wood Press [calderwoodpress.co.uk](http://calderwoodpress.co.uk)), Ross Wilson gives us taut, fit poems from Fife – moments and characters from a world of boxing, factories and building sites. Amid memories of past generations of miners there are bright cameos of school mates, boxing buddies, trainers and dreams of a future 'full of girls and fighting'. And broccoli, 'like decapitated heads / fresh from a gallows.'

Alistair Noon, in *Out of the Cave* (Calder Wood Press), takes a cynical look at the world, sometimes in full rhyme. Some of these poems, like the 'Ballad of the Burst Main', are silly but fun. There are also moments of profound insight. 'What matters is the flat,/not the hurtling lift,/ not where I've travelled,/ but where I've lived.'

*A Natural Curiosity* (New Voices Press

[www.writersfederation.org.uk](http://www.writersfederation.org.uk)) is a label that could attach to the poet A C Clarke, or to the objects in a Museum of Anatomy she describes. Shifting between organs pickled in bottles, the people and creatures they once belonged to and other observers in the museum, her point of view swerves like a hand-held camera, as if in acknowledgement that looking too long at this subject matter is uncomfortable. This poetry is not for the squeamish, though it is not sensationalised gore, but a genuine effort to find, or make, 'sanctuary / among these displaced body parts.'

Ann Ryland's, *The Unmothering Class* (Arrowhead Press [www.arrowheadpress.co.uk](http://www.arrowheadpress.co.uk)), is a fascinating take on motherhood by a childless woman. Exploring all that mothering could mean, she looks into the lives of women in her family tree, going back five generations. The result is a rich social history told in believable voices of women revealing the difficult seams in their lives: 'No-one would hear if I sorrowed/yet I'm not so far from the women/who blanket-wrap their child, a gift.' This is a brave and readable response to the dilemma of life in the Unmothering Class and a very welcome addition to the sparse literature on childlessness.

By contrast, the poetry bookshelves strain with books about childbirth, as if creation of a child spawns a corresponding need to create baby poems. *Love-in-a-mist* (Red Squirrel Press), by Anne Connolly, has a baby in the womb, getting its nappy changed, being prayed for, being mourned. It also has glimpses of scenes as disparate as Agincourt, Omagh and Sarajevo. There is love long and love lost. It's a book of wide-ranging, carefully crafted poems:

*tonight I have pleated up  
the warmth of tradition  
held the chill of it  
in my own two hands.*

In *Wherever We Live Now* (Red Squirrel Press), Elizabeth Rimmer looks intently at the world.: 'A stealth of snowfall/dizzying into the dark, drops/a boa on the boundary wall...' This is musical and often startling writing, geo-poetry at its best. The past stands in amongst the present, with people from the fringes of Scotland living on in shipwrecks and ruined stone buildings. They are joined by characters from myth, notably Orpheus, and brought into the current with shrewd observations on social injustices and the contradictions of modern Scotland. ■

SIGURD THE UNWORTHY's long golden braids trailed on the rug before the huge log fire. His head was in his hands.

'The taste of this life is like that of gristle too long chewed. The wonders of Asgard are as a tale told and told again. There is nothing new in all the world.'

Tyr the Twice Delighted replied to his complaint. 'They do say,' she said, 'That in Midgard there is a place full of cantrips and trifles of delight to make the heart sing.'

'Midgard, you say? Can I get there by Yggdrasil?'

For the rest of us, it's rather easier than climbing down the great World Tree:

## Babalu

Chock full of things you will want.

So full, it has moved into a bigger place,  
just across the street.

Now at 68 High St, Forres



CONTRIBUTORS' BIOGRAPHIES

**Jean Atkin** has been working on her new pamphlet *The Dark Farms*. She is the author of *The Treeless Region* (Ravenglass Poetry Press 2010), and *Lost At Sea* (Roncadora Press 2011) which was shortlisted for the Callum Macdonald Memorial Prize.

**Meg Bateman** lectures at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig in Skye. Her most recent poetry collection is *Soirbheas/Fair Wind* (Polygon 2007).

**Colm Breathnach** is an Irish-language poet, novelist and translator. His latest collection ‘*Dánta’ agus dánta eile* is due out soon.

**Deirdre Brennan** is a widely published poet in Irish and English, whose collections include *I Reilig na mBan Rialta* (1984) and *Mealladh Réalta* (2000).

**Paddy Bushe** writes in both Irish and English, and has published eight collections of poetry, the most recent of which is *My Lord Buddha of Carraig Éanna* (Dedalus, 2012).

**Maoilios Caimbeul** is a part-time tutor at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig. He is currently working on a Gaelic novel for children.

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**Derek Crook**, originally from Wales, settled on Mull twenty years ago after becoming entranced with a landscape that tolerated people but did not allow them to dominate it.

**John Glenday’s** most recent poetry collection is *Grain*.

**Rody Gorman** edits the annual Scottish–Irish Gaelic poetry anthology *An Guth*.

**Stephanie Green** lives in Edinburgh. She received a Creative Scotland Bursary in 2011 to fund time in Shetland working on her first collection.

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**Paula Jennings’** poetry collections are *Singing Lucifer*, Onlywomen Press (2002/2007) and *From the Body of the Green Girl*, HappenStance Press (2008). Paula lives in the East Neuk of Fife.

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**Gerry Loose** is based on the west coast of Scotland. His innovative work is as often found in the landscape or in gardens, inscribed on wood or stone, or gallery spaces on the wall, as on the page. He is the author of 12 books, including *that person himself* (Shearsman 2009). His awards include a Robert Louis Stevenson Fellowship and a Creative Scotland Award.

**Dòmhnall MacAmhlaigh** Born in Bernera, Lewis, 1930; taught in Universities of Edinburgh, Dublin and Aberdeen and retired from Chair of Celtic in Glasgow in 1996; published two collections of

poetry: *Seòbhrach as a’ Chlaich* (1967) and *Deilbh is Faileasan* (2008).

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**Angus MacMillan** originally from Lewis, has lived in Dumfries for the last thirty years; he writes poems in English and Gaelic, and is co-editor of *Southlight* magazine.

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**Professor Donald Macleod** teaches Systematic Theology at the Free Church College.

**Meghan McAvoy** is a PhD student at Stirling University, working in contemporary Scottish writing. Her other interests include fiddle music, Scots song, and left-wing politics.

**Hugh McMillan** has published five full collections of poetry. *New and Selected Poems Thin Slice of Moon* is out in April 2012. He lives in Penpont in Dumfries and Galloway.

**Gordon Meade** is a Royal Literary Fund Writing Fellow at the University of Dundee. His latest collection, *The Familiar*, was published in 2011 with Arrowhead Press.

**Deborah Moffatt** was born in Vermont and lives in Fife. Her first collection of poems, *Far From Home*, was published by Lapwing (Belfast) in 2004.

**Màiri NicGumaraid** Mary Montgomery belongs to the Lochs district of Lewis where she was born in 1955 in Arivruaich and where today she lives in the village of Balallan.

**Richard Neath’s** second novel *Breakfast Will Do* is due at Easter. He’s lived and worked as an architectural draughtsman with his wife Max on Skye since 2005.

**Simon Ó Faoláin** has published the poetry collections in Irish *Anam Mhadra* (2008) and *As Gaineamh* (2011)

**Daniel Racey** grew up in Aberdeenshire and Sutherland. He has been a zoologist, a drop-out and a primary school teacher. He is now a doctor.

**Angus Reid** is a writer and filmmaker. He has published two volumes of poetry, *The Gift* and *White Medicine*. His films include *How to Kill*, *Brotherly Love*, *The Ring*, *Bengal Bicycle Diary* and the forthcoming *Primary School Musical!*

**Lennart Sjögren**, widely acclaimed Swedish poet and painter, lives on the Baltic island of Öland, where he was born in 1930. He has published over twenty books of poems.

**Kenneth Steven** lives in Highland Perthshire; he’s a poet, translator and children’s author. His collection of short fiction, *The Ice and other stories*, appeared from Argyll in 2010.

**Catherine Strang** graduated from Stirling University in 2011 with an honours degree in English Studies. ‘The Bench’ is her first published story though she intends there shall be more to come. She lives in Kintyre.

**Eilidh Thomas** lives near Inverness. Find recent and new work in *Sentinel Literary Quarterly*, *Winter Words Festival*, *Whittaker Anthology*, *The RightEyed Deer*, *EveryDayPoets*. Eilidh is the winner of a Poetry Kit Award 2011.

**Ginna Wilkerson** is pursuing a Ph.D. in Creative Writing at University of Aberdeen, where her research focuses on Gothic motifs in contemporary poetry.

**Tom Pow’s** *In Another World - Among Europe’s Dying Villages* (Polygon) will be published in June.

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Oxfam Bookshop, Raeburn Place

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The Village, S. Fort Street, Leith  
Filmhouse, Lothian Road  
The Forest, Bristo Place

Glasgow

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Tchai Ovna Teahouses, Otago Lane  
Oxfam Books, Byres Road & Victoria Rd.  
Mono, King’s Court, King St, Glasgow  
Gallery of Modern Art, Royal Exchange Sq.  
Glasgow Film Theatre, Videodrome, Rose St.



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