

The **FREE** literary magazine of the North

Northwords **Now**

Issue 21, Summer 2012

Reflections – Poems by Marion McCready

Interviews with John Burnside and Iain Banks

New Poetry in English and Gaelic, Short Stories, Reviews



EDITORIAL

ONE OF THE many great things about editing *Northwords Now* is getting to learn just how creative people from all around Scotland can be, whether this means the familiar 'names' encountered at literary festivals (see the John Burnside and Ian Banks interviews in this issue) or reading some of the really fine writing that comes out of writing groups and literary societies. Indeed Terry Williams of Ross-Shire writers is a fine demonstration of this 'local' strength. Her story on page 5 is a captivating read.

Northwords Now has also provided a home for artists as well as writers. The tradition of finding striking images for our cover and centrefold continues in this issue. I came across Sian MacQueen's work in an excellent wee pamphlet produced by Artmap Argyll (www.artmapargyll.com). It didn't take long to realise that her generous and eclectic vision of different aspects of the environment would resonate with many of the themes that the writers in this issue engage with: the sea, a sense of home and of travel and, especially, finding new windows on experience.

How Barbara MacAskill's images came to feature in this issue's centrefold is perhaps even more enlightening. Back in April, along with several other representatives of the 'creative industries', I gave a talk at Eden Court Theatre in Inverness to some further and higher education students. A few days later I received an e-mail from Barbara saying how much she'd enjoyed the event and would I be interested in seeing some of her photographs. So I gave Barbara a line from one of Marion McCready's poems and, without making any assurances about using her work, asked her to 'illustrate' it. The result is the wonderful example of the photographer's art you can see on our centre pages. So lots of kudos to Barbara and to her tutors at Inverness College UHI (Midmills) where Barbara has recently completed an HND in Contemporary Art Practice. It's good to know that there are people and places throughout the Highlands and Islands who realise that art isn't a sort of luxury veneer to society; it is part of the warp and weft of our lives. ■

CHRIS POWICI, EDITOR



Stories By The Sea, page 14

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Front cover image

'The Visitor' by Sian MacQueen
www.sianmacqueen.com

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 November 2012

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new books by Louise Miller, Carol McKay, Moira McPartlin, and Lynne Alexander

John Burnside, Creating a World from Nothing



Photograph of John Burnside by Lucas Burnside.

BY MANDY HAGGITH (hag@worldforests.org)

JOHN BURNSIDE is a writer who is drawn by the north, who revels in exploring borderlands and who gets 'lost on purpose, looking for the lithe/ weasel in the grass.'

It is the music that I primarily enjoy in John Burnside's poetry, and he has an ability second to none to conjure a soundscape, and a mood.

*The radio's playing; you've put the kettle on
and, standing in your winter coat and gloves,
you listen to that song you've always liked,
the one about love.
Somewhere outside, in the gradually stilling world,
a bus has stalled, the driver
turning the engine, over and over again,
and someone's dog is barking at the noise,
guarding its phantom realm of bricks and weeds.*

(from Epithalamium)

I'm fascinated by the way he sets his phrases out on the page. In *The Light Trap* (his 2002 collection), there are lots of particularly spacious, airy poems, as if their texture is a net to catch the Fife coastal light. Yet the position of the words is in no way loose, nor is it only visual. Rather it's a very precise

kind of scoring of the music of the poem. I have never quite lost the sense of delight of realising that each space and line-break is a rhythmic representation. Here he is, watching a seal in the harbour. Read it out loud to get the full effect.

*- the dog smile bobbing away
the air
a lattice of waves and movement
voices
blurring in the wind
the fairground music
gusting across the water:
sweetness
and light
(Another Poem About Fish)*

In 2003 a new MSP asked for a suggestion of a poem they might quote from in the Parliament in protest at the use of Scottish bases by American military aircraft. I suggested John Burnside's poem 'History', which describes him flying kites and exploring shells

on the beach in Fife with his son, 'as the war planes cambered and turned/ in the morning light'. It was just what the politician was looking for. It begins with understated observation of the gasoline smell from Leuchars airbase and builds until the poet is 'dizzy with the fear/ of losing everything'. But it is rare for him simply to raise the emotional heat without going somewhere philosophically interesting and here, he takes us to the ultimate question.

*but this is the problem: how to be alive
in all this gazed-upon and cherished world
and do no harm*

John Burnside is not only a poet; he also writes essays, memoir and novels. His latest novel, *A Summer of Drowning*, is set in the far north of Norway, skirting the margins of the North Sea and of the shores between reality and make-believe. His anthology of poetry about the environment, *Wild Reckoning*, with Maurice Riordan, is the best of its kind.

How does he do it? 'The trick', he says, 'is to create a world/ from nothing...'. After a mesmerising reading from his latest novel,

A Summer of Drowning, at the Ullapool Book Festival, I tracked him down for an interview.

You talked at Ullapool about an urge to become lost. Please say more about this.

Well, there's an excitement to being lost, I think. A tension, yes, but an excitement. And there are things we discover when we are lost that we might well have missed at other times. We have been trained from birth to take the world for granted, so sometimes we need a little jolt to look up and see that things are really much less routine an humdrum than we have been taught to make them. Like falling in love, or going on retreat on some lonely island off the coast of nowhere, being lost can do this.

What are you writing at the moment?

I'm working on a book called *I Put A Spell On You*. It's about romantic love, time, belonging, the failure of community, the song 'I Put A Spell On You' by Screamin Jay Hawkins and a 1970s cult based around the figure of harmonica player Mel Lyman, among other things. I'm also sketching out another novel, which is also about what, to my mind, is one of the key questions: how the possibility of an egalitarian society is constantly undermined by money and power posing as 'community'. We see it today in Scotland, particularly, where environmentally damaging 'developments' are eased through by offering very dubious 'community benefit' (often with the benefiting community being quite remote from immediate risks) always with the supposed benefits being enjoyed by the most insider elements of the local community and always the non-human element of the community of life paying the major costs – take, for example, the birds and bats dying and set to die because of a very stupid wind energy policy. I could go on about this for hours, so I better not.

What are you reading at the moment? What was the best thing you read so far this year?

Right now, I am re-reading *Measuring the World*, Daniel Kehlmann's marvellous novel about the parallel scientific lives of Humboldt and Gauss, and their eventual meeting. I read it a couple of years back, I guess, but I have a chance, now, to revisit it – and it's even better the second time around.

Two of the best things I read this year, both by Canadian short story writers, really gave me heart. I love the short story as a form and I am constantly mystified by the fact that story collections do not sell well. Hopefully, *Once You Break A Knuckle*, by D.W. Wilson, and *Light Lifting*, by Alexander MacLeod, (who read at Ullapool this year) will go some way towards changing that.

You are a master of both prose and poetry. I remember once reading something you said or wrote that you don't write them both at the same time,

because each requires ‘a different kind of listening’. Is that right? What influences whether you’re writing prose or poetry?

I do work in both poetry and various prose forms and I do think they require different kinds of listening. For me, poetry arises initially out of the sometimes-underlying rhythms of my entire environment, from conversational speech to the sound of a river or a flock of geese flowing by overhead, and it’s the rhythm that comes first here, before idea and even before language. Whereas, in my own work at least, prose ideas arise out of questions that arise from going about my business – questions about character, conflict, justice, love, time and other day-to-day philosophical matters. Of course, these things emerge finally in both poems and prose, but the order in the making is different, almost opposite, with rhythm and timbre coming first in poetry, then language, then emergent idea, and idea or question developing through language to make a rhythm, or prose style. Still, it’s all rooted in listening to the world and to ourselves – if we listen well, we hear what is just.

Do you ever run out of stuff to write? MacCaig described needing to write a poem as a bit like feeling hungry and needing to eat. Is it like this for you?

The world is forever beautiful, human lives are forever problematical and the whole shebang is eternally mysterious. If I ever run out of stuff to write, I’ll know it’s time to put everything down and go for a final walk up the nearest mountain.

A Summer of Drowning has an artist and paintings in key roles. Do you paint or practice other artforms as well as writing? Is art important to your work? Is music?

I don’t paint; I wish I could. Visual art (painting and photography), music and film in particular are like manna to me. If I arrive in a strange town the first thing I want to know is where the art museums are and, often, in ways that are necessarily difficult to set out, I write in response – though not literally, or descriptively – to an art work. Or rather, to what an art work does to me. Every time I see a Cy Twombly painting or sculpture, for example, I feel that I am plugging into some vast wave of energy that flows all around us and a few poems have come out of that. They’re not about the painting, though. That would feel superfluous to me.

Music – if we mean by that, any organized sound – is a constant in my life, in all our lives. For me, more specifically to writing, I feel enabled to detect rhythms I was missing by listening to Miles Davis, or Steve Reich, or David Lang (to take three examples that have mattered over time for my own work).

Do you speak any foreign languages?

Con conversationally, I muddle about in French and Spanish, things get even muddier in Italian, but I can read them all with a degree of competence. I am trying to improve my crude rudiments of (reading) German at the moment. I studied Classics at school, and

would have gone on in that if I hadn’t got myself expelled. My English isn’t bad on paper but it still needs work as a conversational gambit.

Would you say you’re a political writer?

I do, though not in any party political sense, (that said, though, I’d happily have gone to bat for any official green party worthy of the name).

But, yes, I have always felt political in my work and I hope I am learning to address politics more directly – without becoming too polemical – in my work. If writing has a social context for me, it is in the telling of what we know, and I know that the mass killing of one species by another is wrong, that social justice is possible and is necessary for the good of all, (our most difficult task, I think, is to persuade those sensual and imaginative eunuchs who cling to money and power that their lives would be better within a system that was more just). I know that the system we work with now smothers the potential and imagination of a huge number of people in order to privilege short-term thinking and profit. I know that the society in which I live a physically (though not morally) comfortable life is founded on knavery and grand scale theft and abets despots and warlords elsewhere in order to continue with our profligate ‘lifestyle’. I know that political imprisonment is unnecessary and arises, always, from the injustices perpetrated by a social system and a refusal to listen to the needs, hopes and fears of others.

I don’t know these things because I am smart, I know them because other people struggled, and sometimes gave their lives, (murdered or imprisoned) to win that understanding. I think one of my obligations is to find ways to honour their work. I have struggled in this, I admit but, after a long period of turning away, of nihilism, in fact, I have at least begun to think carefully about the questions again.

You’ve won high-profile prizes recently. What’s your view of the role of competitions and prizes in the literary world. Is it healthy? Are there better ways to support writers?

I have benefited greatly this year from the prizes I’ve received for my work in England and Europe over the last twelvemonth, and I think any society should do what it can to help its writers (and musicians and painters and dancers etc) grow. I’ve just heard that one of England’s finest poets, David Harsent, whose work I very much admire, has been awarded the Griffin Prize, which will help him a great deal to find time for his work. So, yes, prizes help, even though they can sometimes be vulnerable to the personal feelings and peccadilloes of jury members, (not surprising given the way human beings work). I’m not sure that competitions – or at least, those where thousands or more people send in individual snapshot poems or stories are as reliable (though they can cast light on fine emerging talents, like D.W. Wilson, who won the BBC National Short Story Competition).

In the current climate, these are ways in which writers gain support – which, to translate, means time. I love what writers do for any number of reasons – because they renew the language, because they help us to grow in

compassion and so many other things – but it’s good to note that we reverse that capitalist bon mot, Time is Money and say that, for us, money is at its best when we convert it back into time.

All this said, the best way to support writing is exactly that system which would best support all of us, which is social justice. From each according to his / her abilities, to each according to his / her needs. That would suit us all better than anything else we might devise.

Where is your home?

On the earth, under the sky.

What is it like to be a hyena?

I’d give anything to know. But only a hyena knows that. Actually, I’d give anything to be another life form for just one day. A bird or a bat most of all, because it would be wonderful to be able to fly. I’d hope not to get eaten by a cat (or shredded by massive wind turbines) in that twenty-four hours, so I could come back and tell what it was like.

And finally, what does ‘north’ mean to you?

There must be a line on some inner atlas that divides imagined north from imagined south, but I’m not sure where it lies. Is the Departement du Nord, in the northeast corner of France, north? Well, it is for someone from Lyon, I guess. How about when you

go to the southern hemisphere and ‘north’ means the tropics, while ‘south’ is all glaciers and aurora (i.e. the southern lights...)

I think each individual imagination is at least semi-anchored to a place, not necessarily the place of origin, but whatever is home place at any one time, and it sets the imaginative compass from there. North is mostly a state of mind, a set of expectations, a kind of inner, as much as outer, weather. But it’s not just the cliché – the ‘frozen North’, the empty places on the tundra. For me, north can mean a field of willow herb on Kvaløya just as easily as trudging through snow in the dark. And I love both. If I were to choose one image, right now, of what ‘north’ means to me, it would be the field near a house I stayed in once in the Arctic Circle: midsummer, white nights, and out in the high grass and wildflowers of a sub-arctic meadow, an upturned boat, which was slightly mysterious, as we were far from water, almost at the top of Manndalen. I don’t know why this image should come to mind, and tomorrow I might say something else – walking in snow on the Finnmarksvidda, coming down from Ben Cruachan in a sudden mist, crossing the Pentland Firth on a blustery day. The images that come are so many, but finding the essence, well, that’s something else.

What I do know is that there is one thing that gets in the way of the essence for sure, and that’s going north with a set of expectations. The north will always surprise you. If you go looking for north, you’ll never get out of the south; but once you get there, the smell and feel of it is unmistakable. ■

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Poetry

Arduaine

BY MARY WIGHT

Beyond trees
there is always a promise:

windshield-mica on a road
to a place not yet known

a track losing itself
in a cleft of a hill

a smudge of islands
patient on the horizon

sunlight playing
Rock-Paper-Scissors

against fisted cloud
the infinite tease of mist.

Tai Chi by the Bothy at Loch Muick

BY GEORGIA BROOKER

There was no need for torches.
The mint of the moon
rose over our backs
with such clear light,
that it set our shadows down in front of us
and wished its memory under the windless reeds.

The stags bellowed their territories
across the dim glen, theirs until morning,
and the wine-stained dream
of the evening clashed with blunt antlers.

Last time I was here
the loch made a mirror
where I watched my last lover
doubled in the water as he sat
on the furthest stone of an old jetty.

Looking now, from a rock
on the sand by the shore,
the wind skims the surface
to scribbles and shimmers,
writing over and over itself.

The moon's just a bright penny,
sunk in the marsh
where no one could ever spend it.

At Rossie

BY DAWN WOOD

Do you know the Mercat Cross
stranded in the long grass at Rossie?
the weathered lions and unicorns,
two of each, back to back?

I think they look like four poor earls
with withered haunches
or a clutch of village girls,
proud of Mayday posies.

Well, that's where I was,
when I called him back,
but he can't have heard
and he ran anxiously along the burn –

there were snowdrops! –
until I jumped and waved
as if I were bringing a plane-
cum-pantomime horse to land.

No one sees himself as old or fading;
no one knows himself
except in the calling between us
our names set back to back,

no value to our bodies
except that abstract bit between –
he & me and me & him.
We are the same unravelling stuff.

Under The Stars

BY THOM NAIRN

The Moon is prowling.
A white tiger
With bared nicotine teeth.
The black-panther's eyes
Saffron slits
Stalking the forest as knives.
The forest a green sun
Waiting for night
To stretch and come alive.
The cobra is a wild death.
It dances and coils alone
Under flat stars.

On Stirling Bridge

BY JAMES AITCHISON

The Forth is tidal up to Stirling Bridge.
The River runs upstream
on a North-Sea surge,
earth and moon
in interplanetary gravitational play.

A Securicor van
on its way to Cornton Vale
turns left at the traffic lights.

Strip-searched and then watched by cctv
some women –
shoplifters, heroin prostitutes,
mothers whose mothers knew no mothering –
still find ways to kill themselves.

Between tides
a man in waders throws a grappling hook
and hauls out shopping trolleys.

Multiverse

BY GRAHAEME BARRASFORD YOUNG

It says here I've been killed again
as hurricanes pester western coasts,
blizzard brightens autumn hills.
If I survive, speed will get me
(accidents never happen if you're slow),
or a great pandemic, which means
nothing like our headlines think,
will carry me off, and you, and them.

Then I think of what's missed:
freezing on a Horseshoe round;
that head-on crash; an exploded jet
just above my head; sinking
three times off Margate beach;
dropping from a crag, each bounce a life.
In how many universes have I died?
In how many not been born?

Bàrdachd Ùr/ New Gaelic poetry

An Spealadair Aonaranach

DÀIBHIDH EYRE

Bho Loch an Tuirc gu Rue Racine
agus air ais gu Loch an Tuirc

agus sibhse aig bòrd
a’ feuchainn ri cuimhneachadh
air turas eile
am measg nan innsean iomallach

latha an t-samhraidh
agus nighean a bha ris an fheur
a’ seinn, tha sibh ag innse dhuinn,
ann an teas àm nan cruachan.

An robh ad oirre idir
a’ chaileag bheag bhàn ud?
Neo an robh i mòr agus donn?
Chan eil sibhse ag ràdh.

Dh’èist sibh rithe co-dhiù
ged nach do thuig sibh na sheinn i
rud a bha fortanach
dhuibhse mar bhàrd.

Oir tha aineolas na bheàrn
a ghabhas a lìonadh le faclan
mar Spiorad ‘s Nàdar
Eachdraidh ‘s Saorsa.

Speal ann an làmh
a’ gearradh an t-saoghal
a’ dubhadh a-mach
loidhne mhì-fhreagarrach.

Thall Thairis

MARCAS MAC AN TUAIRNEIR

Tha mi a’ sgrìobhadh ort,
Fo sholas sèimh na h-uinneig fosgailte.
Tha fàileadh milis an fheasgair,
Lionta le flùraichean spriosraichte,
Gam chuairteachadh.

Tha mi am measg d’ fhaclan,
Cho torrach le ciallachadh is bòidheachd.

Chì mi Gàidhlig ann an leabhar eile;
Faclan den toileachas a th’ orm an seo,
Còig millean de mhilltean
Bho dhùthaich a tùis.

Is na faclan agamsa a-nis;
A’ tuilleachadh mo bhroillich,
A’ bristeadh nan ceanglaichean
Eadar tìr is cèill,
Gus nach eil ann ach faireachdainn m’ fhìrinne
Air fhàgail.

Sneachd’ an Ògmhios

DÀIBHIDH MÀRTAINN

‘S i na seasamh sa ghlàmainn chiùin choimhead i mar a
bha na bleideagan-sneachda a’ tuiteam gu socair air muin
an fheadir uaine. Cha robh i idir eòlach air sneachd’ a’ cur
san Ògmhios agus bha faireachdainn de thoileachas ag
èirigh na broinn fhad ‘s a bha am plaide glas a’ fàs mun
cuairt oirre.

Leis na sùilean aice dùinte, smaoinich i gun robh i air
sgèith tro na reultan, saoghal eile, faisg air làimh. Na
h-inntinn, bha na bleideagan-sneachda mar aingealan
a’ dannsa gu h-aotrom air a falt tana, liath. Fhad ‘s a bha
i a’ tionndadh ‘s a ruidhleadh mun cuairt dh’fhairich i
rudeigin nach robh i mothachail air idir.

Às dèidh coiseachd tron raon-chluiche gheal, ràinig i
dhachaigh ‘s bhlàthaich i i fhèin ri taobh an teine. Chuala
i guth eòlach a’ tighinn bhon t-seòmar-leapa ag ràdh
‘what use is this bloody snow to anybody?’ Shuidh i ann
an sàmhchair, gun chomas càil a ràdh a’ coimhead air an
uisge bho a bòtannan a’ dèanamh lòn air a’ chagailt.

Dìomhaireachd nan Speuran

LISA NICDHÒMHNAILL

Aig deireadh latha Geamhraidh
‘S mi nam sheasamh air tràigh
Nam aonar sa chiaradh
Fàileadh na fuachd nam shròin
Gainmhach fhuaraidh thòrraidh
Is gàire na gaoithe.

Guthan chloinne
O fhad’ air falbh
Solais bhlàtha nan uinneagan fad’ às
Cagair chiùin nan tonn
Mum chasan fhèin
‘S thionnd’ mo shùilean ‘s m’ inntinn
Dha na speuran.

Na ciad reultan a’ nochdadh gu mall
San dorchadas ghlan iomallach dhubh-ghorm
Dìomhaireachd cho domhainn
Ann am mòr-mheud an duibhreis.

‘S thàinig a-steach orm rud a chuala mi –
Gun do bhuail speurair às an Ruis
Ball golf dhan fhànas
Air cuairt shìor na h-iormailt.

Dhan an Nighinn Bhig Agam

LISA NICDHÒMHNAILL

An rud as iongantaiche mud dheidhinn –
Chan ann cho beag ‘s cho brisg ‘s a tha thu,
Ged a chuir sin dragh air mòran,
‘S chan ann cho bòidheach grinn ‘s a tha thu,
Oir bha fios agam gum bitheadh tu.
‘S chan ann fiù ‘s cho gleusta ‘s a tha thu,
Ged is mòr aoibhneas an iongnaidh agad.
Chan ann cho treun ‘s a tha thu –
Do chorp is d’ inntinn làn de bheothalachd.
‘S chan ann cho mòr ‘s a tha mo ghaol ort –
Bha sin nam chrìdhe bhon là a thòisich thu.

An rud as iongantaiche mud dheidhinn
‘S e meud a’ ghaoil às do shùilean fhèin
Cho mòr dìomhair dorch’ nad aodann beag bìodach
Gaoil àrsaidh blàth dìleas trom
A chuireas stad air mo chrìdhe.

Seasgair

JULIAN RONAY

duilleagan an fhoghair
air a’ chabhsair a-rithist
am fuaime sgoinneil sin
an t-siosarnach
nuair a tha thu
gabhail ceum tromhpa
tha ‘n sèasan a’ tionndadh
agus thig an ràithe dhorch’
m’ annsachd
soilleir agus geur
a’ tarraing a-steach
a’ cadal
a’ brùadar

A’ Leughadh Mhapaichean

DAVINE SHUTHARLANACH

Nuair a bha e na bhalach
is èasgaidh, mì-fhaiceallach fhathast
bha motair-bhaidhg aosta aige
pàighte às a’ chiad thuarastal pròiseil.
Bha sràidean cumhang Rois an Ear an cunnart
leis na balaich òga dàna
is iad a’ leudachadh a’ mhapa ionadail
gu Inbhir Nis is Bun Ìlidh,
cladaichean nach fhaca iad roimhe ach bho eathar.
Lorg iad Bearghdal snìomhte cas
is lorg iad dè tha ‘1 in 3’ a’ ciallachadh.
Bha tubaist no dhà ann, tha fhios,
is na caillich a’ crathadh an cinn,
ach slànaichidh cnàmhnan òga gu luath.

II

Nuair a bha e òg fhathast
is ceasnachail is làidir
thàinig cogadh Hitler
agus dh’fhosgail dorsan nam bailtean-iasgaich gu farsaing.
Le deic HMS Enard Bay fo chasan
sheòl e mar na balaich uile
thairis air mapa an t-saoghail
a’ leantainn nan gaothan-malairt
is nan domhain-fhad is leud
bho Jamaica gu Sidney
is falmhachadh Dhunkirk,
a’ cruinneachadh cairtean-mara fad na slighe,
an eachdraidh pàighte leis an Nèibhidh Rìoghail.

Lorg e grìan mhòr eile, dathan coigreach borb,
muncaidhean, cinn-fionn, èisg air iteig,
neònachas a cho-chreutairean,
gràin air bainne san tiona
agus – an t-iongnadh a bu mhotha – gum faodadh
Sasannach a bhith agad mar charaid
fad-beatha.

Agus aig a’ cheann thall is esan fada na bu shine
lorg e gum b’ urrainn do thrì bailtean Gàidhealach
a dhol fodha ann an aon long.

III

Às dèidh sin bha a’ bheatha rud beag cumhang,
is esan aig àird’ a neirt,
ach tèarainte, ge-tà, oir thàinig pòsadh
is clann, is cù, is càr, is eathar crìon
is fàirean cuingealaichte a-rithist:
dìreach sgrìob beag gu Ulapul no Toirbheartan,
gu Bruach nam Frisealach airson an èisg
no Bearghdal – cas fhathast – gus faicinn
‘An dèan an càr ùr (dhuinne co-dhiù) a’ chùis?’

Anns na suidheachai-chùil leanadh sinn nar cloinn
na mìltean draoidheil air atlas RAC
a’ dèanamh fiughair ris a’ chuirm-chnuic letheach slighe.
‘Tha na beanntan bòidheach ceart gu leòr
ach cha bhiodh mi airson fuireach ann an sin!’
An-còmhnaidh tarraing cumhachdach na mara.

IV

Is esan aosta a-nis
is rag leis a’ phian na chnàghan
gun chàr, gun eathar crìon, na shuidhe
aig an uinneig fharsaing air a’ chnoc
a’ leughadh nan loidhneachan-sìde seòlta
air uachdar na linne is san iarmailt,
geòidh thràth air iteig, sneachd’ ìosal air a’ Bheinn:
cairtean neo-chrìochnach nas fheàrr
na an tuairmse air an teilidh.

Tha na balaich dàna eile a-nis uile
còmhla ri an companaich sna longan
fodha cho fada.
Chan eil duine aige tuilleadh a tha eòlach
air na seann sgeulachdan,
no na seann rathaidean,
is Bearghdal fhèin dìrichte, leudaichte a-nis.

Bheir mise faochadh goirid bho àm gu àm
le òirlich air a’ mhapa mhòr OS
is sgrìoban nas giorra
’s nas giorra,
na h-eachdraidhean a-nis ach frith-rathad ùr,
muilnean-gaoithe Àrd Rois, ròin air an tràigh
is easag a’ dol thairis air an rathad
còmhla ri a h-iseanan.

Cha bhi cuairt-bhàta ann san eathar tuilleadh
ged a choimheadas e san linne
na tugaichean laidir trang
is na cruinn-ola àrda
an àite longan,
fhad ’s a bhios a chairtean-mara Dhunkirk nan tàmh
nan aonar
san drathair.

Naosg

PETER URPETH

1.
Geur agus a’ sgreadail mar tharrag a’ spìonadh
cheumnaich an naosg leònte
air mòinteach a’ mhadainn sin,
slaodadh sgiath

bho alt cearbach.
Fo imcheist mar gu tilleadh fadalach bho chiad chladach,
chaith e an latha ud a’ siolpadh
ann an solas seargach,
chaidh an rionnag dhorcha san t-sùil aige
air chall an uamhann fiadhaich, ach

Sheall sinn tron phrosraig gu feansa na croite
gus an robh e dhomhsa na nì an-ìochdmor agus an uair sin
thòisich sinn suas rathad na mòintich ga ionnsaigh
air mullach a’ chnuic ìosal
bha an naosg gam choimhead
feitheamh a’ bhàis bha e a’ smaoineachadh
gun robh mi dol ga thoirt dha.

Ach, ‘s mi nach robh.
Dh’fhàg mi esan ris na feannagan glasa,
foighidneach air a uèir àrd aca.
Dh’fhàg mi e air a’ mhullach leis a’ ghaoith a tuath.
Dh’fhàg mi e airson gun robh e ceart.
Dh’fhàg mi e ‘son na h-aislinge mu dheireadh
mar oidhche bhuig san Ògmhios
dèante airson drumadaireachd
nuair a bha speuran an inbhir a’ boillsgeadh
le sgiathan caoinidh.

Aig a’ mhullach, chunnaic mise Beanntan Chataibh
fad’ air astar, agus chunnaic mi sìol-losgainn ag at ann an uisge
meallach, a’ phuillll-mhònach aosta,
agus chunnaic mi gun do dh’fhalbh na
feannagan gu talamh.
(Dìochuimhnich iad a’ bheatha, mas e do thoil e.)

2.
Chunnaic sinn an naosg air a’ gheamhradh mu dheireadh
nuair a bha e a’ cur an t-sneachd agus
dh’fhurich an talamh cruaidh fad làithean.
Thàinig e chun an taighe, a’ rùrach ann an còinnich ‘s
àiteachan dorcha eadar na clachan anns a’ bhalla-chroite.
Bha sin a’ sealltainn air an unnsa bheatha sin
air chrith, air chois bhrisg a’ lagachadh
ri taobh nam pocannan-guail,
a’ cumail cas filte san fho-iteig aige.

Ghluais griogag reòthta ann an adhar na h-oidhche
agus dhùisg mi air an talamh ghorm chian,
a’ rùrach airson facail.
Dh’èirich mi
agus chaidh mi a-mach
don chamhanaich ghil.
Fhuair mi thu air deigh leacach
do ghob fosgailte
ag èigheachd sàmhchair
do sgiathan, brisg mar an aisling,
sneachd’, do mharbhphaisg
sgrìobhaidh mi do mharbhrann.

3.
Feasgar, agus bha sinn a’ coiseachd suas rathad na mòintich
a dh’èisteachd na gaoithe, a’ ridhleadh air an sgiathan agad.

Chunnaic sinn Fionnlagh,
sgàil a’ coiseachd ga ionnsaigh bho astar
ear gu iar:
Allt Cearagol,
Druim Rèidh,
Linne Sgorach,
Beinn Chaillein,
Druim Cruaidh,
Sithean Airigh Mhurchaidh,
air a’ Chnoc Bhuidhe (féith nan guailnean),
agus dh’iarr mi air an facal Gàidhlig airson ‘snipe’?
‘Naosg’ thuirt Fionnlagh, ‘Naosg a tha seo.’

Eadar Èirinn is Alba

RODY GORMAN

Ar a shon ‘s gun deach an ruaig a chur
Orm go barr nan craobh
‘S ina dhiaidh sin gu na speuran
‘S nach eol dom sa chamhanaich
Dè na tha nam dhán de lòn,
A’ siubhal nan crìochan liom fèin
Eadar Éirinn is Alba
Le solas na gréine san latha

‘S ansin iùl nan rionnagan
Go dtí go mbíonn orm tighinn
Beo air sàl Shruth na Maoile,
Nach bhfuil mé in ann sealltainn
Ar gach taobh ‘s air sealltainn anuas
Orm fhìn ar an talamh
‘S nithean fhaicinn sa dorchadas
Air chleas na caillich-oidhche,

Nam fhear bréige
D’fhear-faire
Faoi scáth bho na creachadairean
I mbun cadal-nan-tonn-slaodach
Nó bun os cionn an crochadh
Is an dara leath den eanchainn
Agam ‘s a haghaidh le gaoth
Rim òran-eunair gan sgar.

ONE SLEET-DANK FEBRUARY day, someone moved in next door to Niall O'Malley. He was indignant. The noises of another person's life – the hiss of taps, the creak of floorboards, the clank of saucepans – were unfamiliar and unexpected. The landlord had kept the other bedsit empty for over a decade, using it to store damp cardboard boxes of books that didn't yet have a place in the shop downstairs. But perhaps old Tom needed the money (Niall had always thought of his landlord as very elderly, but, despite his white hair and hesitant stoop, Tom was probably a good five years younger than him).

Niall could hear this new person moving around. He wished they would settle into a chair, far from the door, so he didn't have to worry about them springing out and wanting to chat when he ventured out for his morning walk. Niall sloshed whisky into a glass. By the time the flat next door settled into silence, it was past noon, and he felt irritated that his routine had been disrupted so. Still wary of accidentally meeting his new neighbour, Niall left by the iron staircase at the back of the building, his fingers catching on flakes of rusty paint on the handrail.

Salt air whipped his face as he trudged past the dormant funfair onto the shingle. Carousel horses, gold manes peeling and faded, quivered on their poles in the wind, and waves slapped at the fishing boats anchored in the bay. Niall looked out to sea and thought, as he often did these days, about those chilly childhood strolls on the shores of Achill. His brother Patrick had always insisted on bringing the homemade kite that, even at its best, would only stream out behind them if they ran very, very fast, before it gave up and plummeted onto the wet sand. Niall had thought at the time they'd all been fairly happy, but when he looked back, he pictured his mother's face red and scuffed from crying. He was now twenty-seven years older than she had ever been. His mother had died one morning while peeling potatoes, the knife clattering to the floor beside her body (which had not been found for two days as her sons were both on London building sites and her husband in Galway, drinking).

An empty carrier bag puffed across the pebbles ahead of Niall, leading the way to Jackson's Bakery, his daily post-walk port of call. It was not a very good bakery – Colin Jackson, the son of the original Jackson, was an unfriendly man with no interest in either being polite to customers or bringing his pasties and buns into the twenty-first century. The window still bore a 1970s 'Naughty But Nice' advertisement for cream cakes. The new bakery in the Old Town, with its artisan bread and fancy cupcakes, the things even ordinary people seemed to want these days, attracted more customers, but it wasn't the sort of place in which Niall felt comfortable. There, the staff were certain to be bright young women with pierced noses, who would smile and make polite, breezy conversation while they slid his cream slice into a bag. They would twist the corners, making jolly little paper ears, and hand it to him, telling him to enjoy his day. He didn't want any of that.

'Next, please.' Jackson never showed a flicker of recognition.

'Cream slice, please,' replied Niall, usually the first and last words he uttered on any given day. Talking to himself didn't count.

The Old Ways

SHORT STORY BY CHARLOTTE HAIGH MACNEIL



Clutching a paper bag containing the cream slice, Niall climbed the iron staircase back to his flat. His knees crunched as though crystals of salt ground between the joints. He was so distracted by the discomfort and effort of climbing the stairs, he completely forgot about the new neighbour, and as he reached the landing he let out an uninhibited huff. Then, with dismay, he registered a presence. The door next to his was open, and a boy, perhaps around 18, leaned against it, watching him silently. He was very thin, underdressed in a holey T-shirt, and his eyes were weighed down with tired grey smudges, as though someone had pressed inky thumbprints beneath them. He looked like one of these effeminate types, thought Niall.

'Hello,' said the boy. 'I'm Marvin.'

Niall nodded at the boy and took a step towards his door.

'I know, right? My parents were soul fans.' He had a metallic southern English whine. Niall had never liked the accent. Never got used to it, even after all these years. 'You must be Mr O'Reilly. Tom mentioned you.'

'O'Malley.'

'What?'

Niall cleared his throat.

'It's Mr O'Malley. Not O'Reilly,' he said, greatly displeased both by the fact of having a neighbour, and by this neighbour being a young man who would probably keep him up late with parties and music. He looked like a druggie. Niall put his hand in his pocket, relieved to feel the chill jangle of keys there.

'Well.' The boy flapped his hands against his sides. 'We're neighbours, then. Maybe not for long. Just until they have me back.' He looked back at Niall, a defiant jut to his chin, eyes glittering. Niall sensed the danger of dialogue opening between them if he answered in the wrong way.

'Right.' He gave the boy a nod and stepped towards his front door, already imagining the cosiness of whisky seeping down his throat.

'My mate's granddad owns this place,' Marvin said. Reluctantly, Niall slid his eyes back to the boy. 'Tom Mullins? He's letting me stay for a while. Thirty quid a week. Room's a dump but I haven't got much choice.' His voice sounded pale.

'Well, I won't get in your way.' Niall lifted a hand to his forehead as though to tip his cap at Marvin, a formal gesture that seemed to have dropped in from a much earlier part of his life. He pushed his door open, gave Marvin a nod,

and went inside. He had taken off his coat and poured a drink before he heard the door of the other flat close.

Sticking to his routine seemed the best way to shake off the prickle of discomfort. Niall switched on the electric fire and shuffled over to the little counter by the stove, where he slid the cream slice onto a cracked plate and poured another whisky. He took both to the table by the armchair and put on the television, ready for the afternoon's western. Then he went to the window and opened it a few inches, and a moment later John Wayne squeezed through the gap and thudded to the floor. Niall had no idea who, if anyone, owned the cat. He liked to think that John Wayne made his own way in the world, relying on no one in particular. For the last three years he had appeared most afternoons and the two of them had settled into a routine together. John Wayne disliked being stroked, but sometimes extended one battered paw onto Niall's foot. When he grew restless, or hungry, he would stand, stretch, and wait, without looking at Niall, for the window to be opened.

'Shane' was on this afternoon. Niall remembered seeing it with Patrick in a Camden Town cinema not long after they'd arrived in England. He thought, briefly, of Patrick's daughter Colleen, whom he remembered as an eight-year-old with freckle-smattered cheeks. About a decade ago, a letter from her had found its way to Niall, scribbled with news and memories. He had not replied, but had buried the note in his bottom drawer, with his mother's jewellery and Patrick's cap. Colleen would now be in her forties, perhaps with children of her own.

Then the film started and Niall didn't have to think about those things anymore. He settled back into the worn chair. The springs dug into his spine like gnarled fists. He was used to it. Perhaps at some point he would ask Tom if he had another chair hanging around somewhere.

He had just started on his cream slice when the boy next door began to shout. There was a pause, then more shouting – he must be on the phone. His voice was heaving in a strange way, and Niall realised with embarrassment that Marvin was crying. He tutted, took a dab of whipped cream onto his finger and held it down for John Wayne, who licked cautiously. No doubt the boy was crying over a love affair gone wrong. What a carry-on.

Niall had loved, properly, once. He was 39 then, hunched up against the world, expecting nothing. But when Jennifer smiled at him that afternoon in the pub, some new thing had flowered inside him. She had, she explained later, been celebrating the all-clear from the cancer that had shadowed most of her youth. Niall could not equate illness with Jennifer – he had never met anyone so steeped in life. She threw her head back when she laughed and always looked happy when she came into his drab flat. But, despite Jennifer, the dark stormy moods continued to sweep in and engulf him, making Niall feel as though he were in a dream in which he could neither move nor speak. When Jennifer said she loved him, words clogged at the back of his throat. As the months passed, he noticed her begin to wilt, and it was no surprise when she told him she was leaving.

'If that's what you want,' he had mumbled, continuing to bleed the radiator.

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A crash from next door shook the room. Niall bolted upright in his armchair, and John Wayne shot onto the windowsill.

‘For the love of God,’ Niall muttered, pushing himself up with some effort. He set the television volume to mute, and stood for a moment, staring at Alan Ladd’s black and white figure on the screen, his thoughts blurring. Silence rang through the building now. Niall considered ignoring the crash and assuming the boy had knocked something over. But his conscience tugged at him. He went to the wall and banged on it.

‘Are you alright in there?’ Niall called. He suspected his hearing had declined of late, so he put his ear against the cold wallpaper. John Wayne watched with a blank yellow gaze. Niall thought he could hear a thin groaning sound. It stopped. Was it the wind? He listened again, and, once more, a strained moan. This time there was no doubting it.

Reluctantly, Niall shuffled out onto the landing, cursing under his breath, and banged on the door of Marvin’s flat. He called the boy’s name, feeling ridiculous, and rattled the handle. Now the groaning seemed to have stopped. Niall bent and squinted through the keyhole. He registered a hand, motionless on the carpet, next to a smashed lightbulb. That was all he could see.

‘Marvin!’ he shouted again through the keyhole. He thought he saw the hand flinch.

Niall straightened up, too fast for his aching back, and pushed his shoulder against the door. He had been strong, in his labourer days, and he couldn’t believe all that physical power had slackened to nothing. He shoved, and a combination of his effort and the shoddiness of the lock meant the door caved away easily.

It took Niall a moment to understand the scene before him. Marvin lay sprawled on the floor, twitching and gasping like a floundering fish in the fading daylight. A belt was looped around his neck and had pressed ugly purple stains into his flesh. By his head lay a light fitting, its wiry entrails spilling around it. Niall brushed away broken glass with his foot and knelt next to Marvin.

‘What have you done, *amadan*?’ He grabbed the boy’s chin and pulled his face around towards the window. Marvin blinked at him, his breathing laboured. But he was breathing. Niall felt a thump of anger.

‘What have you done, idiot?’ he asked again, shaking the boy roughly by the shoulders and trying to pull him into a sitting position. Marvin promptly vomited down his chest.

‘Jesus,’ the boy whispered.
‘Wait.’ Niall heaved himself up and reached for a roll of kitchen paper on the side. He pulled off a few sheets and bent over Marvin to wipe his face. The boy lolled against him.

‘Are you hurt?’ Niall unknotted the belt around Marvin’s neck. It was tight enough,

alright, but the light fitting would never have held his weight, skinny as he was. No damage done.

‘I’m sorry,’ Marvin croaked. ‘I called my dad. I shouldn’t have. He said I was a disgrace. That’s what did it. That broke me, it did. I couldn’t take it anymore.’

‘None of your generation can take much, I don’t think.’ Niall spoke more sharply than he’d intended. He looked around the bedsit, already muffled in gloom. Tom had a nerve charging anyone to stay here, he thought, noticing the mattress on the bare floorboards. He went to the sink and streamed tap water into one of the empty vodka bottles. The boy slumped against him, accepting the bottle like a newborn. Some of it spilled around his mouth and onto his T-shirt, but Niall thought this was no bad thing.

‘Keep drinking,’ he said. ‘Just water, mind. You’ve had enough of the other. We’ve all made that mistake.’ He added the last words in a jovial tone, but Marvin just continued to gulp, staring at the floor between his legs.

‘What about your mother?’ Niall asked, feeling he had to fill the silence. He regretted that, as Marvin began to sob.

‘She said she loves me anyway. To go back. Dad’ll come round, she said. But he won’t.’

By now, Niall had worked out the scenario and didn’t want any further details. He looked down at the boy. Something about the muss

of dark hair reminded him of Patrick. Another one, always so unhappy. Niall had a sudden memory of punching one of the boys who was bullying his brother, feeling the crunch of cartilage beneath his knuckles. Those boys never touched Patrick again. But Patrick didn’t speak to Niall for two weeks.

Marvin pushed the bottle away.
‘Thanks, Mr O’Reilly,’ he said. ‘I’m sorry I’ve bothered you.’

‘It’s no bother,’ said Niall, in what he hoped was a soothing voice. He gently set the boy to lean against the wall. ‘I’ll call an ambulance. You’d better get checked out.’

Later, after the ambulance had taken Marvin away, the crew promising they would contact the boy’s next of kin, Niall went back to his flat. The television, still on with its volume muted, flickered Coronation Street onto the armchair, where John Wayne was curled in a ball.

Niall went over to his chest of drawers. He bent down carefully, his knees creaking. He had to rummage for a few minutes before he found Colleen’s letter. The paper felt crackly, as though it had got damp and dried out again, and the blue biro was smudged. But the words were still clear enough. He took it over to the table, where he kept a pad of paper and a pen, and there, he began to write a reply to his niece. ■

Poems By James Sinclair

What Micht o Been

Look du my boy, da *Laurel*
see her comin in aroond da point.
Has du iver seen siccan fine lines?
Da wey shu slips trowe da waater

da wey shu sits doon wi da starn.
Yun owld Zulu sail-drifters
wir joost da boaniest boats biggit.
When dey took da sail an mast aff

an fitted yun peerie wheelhouse aft
dey wir da most graceful o boats.
Wir Bertie spent da simmer o therty-nine
hit wis da simmer afore da war

wirkin among da herring on her.
Wir midder wis fae da Ness, dat’s foo
he got a berth wi yun Sooth-End men.
He aye said, dat last week o July

is da best week he iver spent at sea.
Dey wirkit alang da aest side o Mousa
wi hardly a breath o wind, dey watched da sun geng doon
nicht efter nicht as dey made good shotts o herring.

Lowrie o Nort-Toon singin fur aa he wis wirt.
Dem gaffin an telling stories as dey hauled
fleets o nets filt we fine an full herring..
Bertie niver cam hame fae da war.

He wis lost alang wi da *Union Castle*
as dey relieved yun poor island fock on Malta.
Willie o Toab wis da second mate on her
He said dey niver hed muckle chance

skirlin Stuka dive-bombers fell oot o da sky
an blew dem clean oot o da waater.
I ay laek tae tink dat whiniver I see da *Laurel*
a’ll see wir Bertie dere, standin on deck smokkin awa at his pipe.

But it is heartnin tae ken
dir wis someen he kent dere, whin he guid.

Dodo, Ninky an Pinder

Wirkin doon da Roost by June
fower ur five buchts tae da scull.
Wir aestmost meid wis Hallilee
da Wart o Scousburgh wi da Sumburgh Light.

Dan du comes ta Hallilee wi da Hotel.
Hallilee wi Scatness
da Wart hill on peerie Lady Holm
an Wart hill on big Lady Holm.

Baitin turbot lines oot wi whole croonik’s
da hyook in trowe da gut hol an awa wi him.
Eicht fish fur wir day, eicht pound a stone.
Haulin back livin croonik’s monie’s da time.

We swappit places i da caavil, took turns on da clip.
Joost different grips o da grund in alang da herd
aa da wey doon trowe da Golden Mile.
Gyaan ten, twall mile aff da Head.

So du got Hallilee at da Hotel
Hallilee in da beach o da Wast Voe
Hallilee at Scatness
An Hallilee ower da Holm.

Key Fur Da Kist

Whit lay lockit under da lid? Wir dey
startched white collars in mothballs?

A muckle black coat, da een
he aye wore ta da kirk on a Sunday.

A pocket watch hung on a gold chain
an twartree weel chewed pipes, smellin o backy.

A Bowie knife wi half an inch brokkin aff da point
hits whalebone handle inscribed wi da wird Alberta.

A bag o unkan pennies gaddered fae aw erts
an a handfoo o postcairds, some o dem braaly filskit.

His seamans pay-aff book, stampit
an a envelope stappit foo o photos.

Picturs o aa da ships he’d sailed on
faimily groups, his bridders weddings

an tree photos teen on da sam day
o a boanie lass wi a sparkle in her een.

Cled in her finest vari-orm
wearin a smile dat lingered in your towts.

Dere buried i da boddam coarner o da kist
a bundle o letters tied in a neat bow.

Wirds dancing ower manilla pages
In exquisite swirls an pirouettes.

Wirds o love an wirds o affection
telling twa different stories?

Growin farder apairt year eftir year.

C LIMBING FAST, AWAY from the fish-stink of the harbour, gulping the sharp mountain air, breath coming hard and deep, Vee tried to outpace her fear. Not until she was high on the familiar mountain did she stop and sit down, her back against a boulder in a steep funnel of scree. It took practice and a steady nerve to venture out on to that loose surface. Even the deer couldn't cross without rattling stones into the corrie below. A solitary raven circled in the bowl of air. Death-bird. If she slipped she'd fall and bounce, and bounce again, until she lay broken among the stones dislodged by the deer. And the black death-bird would watch and wait.

Beyond the corrie's lip and the broad moorland and the salt marsh, a saucer of white sand spilled turquoise, sapphire and jade into the tide. The colours silked and swathed around a small fishing boat that was cutting its wake across the bay. Alec's boat. It shouldn't be there.

They'd listened to the shipping forecast that morning – "...warning of gales... Rockall, Malin, Hebrides..." Vee had said they should stay in harbour with the other boats, she wasn't feeling well anyway. Alec said they couldn't afford to lose a day's work. He said the weather-men were probably exaggerating to cover their backs, and how could she be sick? She was never seasick. Not seasick, she said, just sick, ill. Surely one day off wouldn't bankrupt them? Alec glared at her and she glared back, swallowing a loneliness she was determined to hide. In the end she'd left him at the pier and set off up the cliff path, never thinking he'd go to sea without his crew.

If she went back and apologised, he'd ignore her. There'd be no reconciliation, no emotion. Emotion was even less affordable than the loss of a day's earnings.

She hated that. Loved him. He'd taken her on, a penniless climber with no experience of boats or fishing. He'd been patient as she found her sea legs, had tolerated her early attempts in the galley, when she spilled more mugs of tea than she delivered. He shared his midday sandwiches and his tales about life on the oceans of the world. She learned to handle the crabs that tumbled, outraged and intent on vengeance, from the creels he hauled in. She grasped lobsters that could crush a man's finger, and persuaded them into corners and under buckets to prevent them from fighting. He laughed when she ran out of hiding places and tucked the final lobster of the day into a pocket of her oilskin jacket. They joked and discussed and argued, about anything and everything. In time, he let her take the wheel to bring the boat home, while he tidied the deck, secured the crabs in their boxes, bound the lobsters' claws. Then he would come to stand behind her and wrap his arms about her waist, and she would lean back into him, at peace. By then she was sharing his house, and his bed. But never his heart.

Now she watched the horizon darken. Shivered. She could leave, or stay and make Alec listen. Or she could fall...

No children. He'd said that right from the start. They'd be a good team, good friends and if it turned out that way, good lovers. That was all. Alec loved children, but he would never have any of his own. His father had run away, leaving a young unmarried mother to bring up a bastard, and Alec had never been allowed to forget his illegitimate start in life. No child should have a bastard for a father, he said, and nothing would make him change his mind.

Vee ran a hand over her flat belly. She stood up, giddy with nausea, and staggered as a sudden gust of wind slammed into the mountain. The scree shifted uneasily beneath her feet. Shallow breaths. Focus on the horizon. A dark body of cloud was moving in over the open sea, green water heaving along its leading edge, white streamers of spray beginning to lift and flare like carnival flags in a breeze. This was no breeze, she could already hear the wind snarling among the crags. The weather-men hadn't exaggerated. Alec was right in the path of a full gale, and she knew that with no one to steer the boat, he couldn't move until everything on board was secure. He was pinned to the spot by her absence and

his own stubbornness.

Again the wind struck. A trickle of small stones gathered momentum and disappeared into the corrie. Far below, the raven croaked.

At last the boat started to move. Driven forward by the surging water, it lifted, twisted and dropped, over and over again. Alec at the wheel would be alert to every note of the engine, every tilt of the deck; aware of the swell and hiss of each pursuing wave that passed under his keel. No wake-cutting through blue silk now. This was a battle to stay on course for home as the storm urged tide and boat towards the shoreline rocks.

Vee stood rigid, watching, until the rain swept in and hid her child's father from sight.

As she began to run, the scree avalanched, threatening to carry her with it. Then she was across and moving over bare rock, fighting the thrust and pull of the wind. It snatched her off balance as she crossed narrow ledges. In the sodden peatland it threw her to the ground again and again, until she couldn't get any wetter. When she reached the cliffs, the sea was groping high into crevices, hurling salt spray across the path. Impossible to look out over the bay; impossible in any case to see a boat in that mad turmoil.

Her feet found their own way down the last scramble to the harbour. Alec's boat was tied up at the pier, but there was no sign of its skipper. She found him in the house, kettle in hand, his oilskins and boots dripping in their usual place at the kitchen door.

"Hi. It was a bit choppy out there. You look wet. D'you want some coffee?"

Her stomach lurched.

"I've got something to tell you, Alec." ■

Stony Ground

SHORT STORY BY TERRY WILLIAMS



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Scottish Literary Magazines – A User's Guide

By MANDY HAGGITH (hag@worldforests.org)

LITERARY MAGAZINES COME and go, and at present there are at least 30 titles that fit this description in Scotland. Here is a sketch of the current shape of the Scottish 'lit mag' landscape, with its plethora of online and paper periodicals.

The magazines come in a huge range of shapes, sizes and formats. They range from slim little *Haiku Scotland*, a mere 8 page word document, to the book-sized *Edinburgh Review*, to high-production glossies like *Pushing Out The Boat* and *Earthlines*. Some contain only poetry (*Poetry Scotland*, *Anon*, *Haiku Scotland*, *Earth Love*), some prose only (*Scottish Literary Review*, *The Bottle Imp*), others a mix of fiction and poetry (*Causeway*, *Pushing the Boat Out*, *From Glasgow to Saturn*, *Southlight*, *New Writing Scotland*, *Gutter*), and the rest also include non-fiction prose like articles, interviews and reviews (*Chanticleer*, *Dark Horse*, *Earthlines*, *Edinburgh Review*, *PN Review*, *Chapman*, *The New Shetlander* and *New Linear Perspectives*).

I have to confess that the magazines fall instantly into three categories: the tasteful ones (those in which I have been published); the tasteless ones (those hateful rags to which I have submitted work and been rejected); and the tasty ones, with all the potential promise of the land of milk and honey (those to which I have not (yet) sent work). I see no way of removing this bias, I'm afraid, and I'm sure it colours all my perceptions of the contents of these magazines.

Another bias I have become aware of is a marked preference for magazines on paper – probably because I work all day at the computer screen so it's my least favourite place to relax, sit back and seek pleasure. So I can't deny that I enjoyed the magazines I was sent on paper more than those that either only publish electronically or whose editors took up the option of sending me a PDF to review.

I'll start with one of those I had never heard of until recently: *Causeway*. It's a beautiful object, published by the Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies at the University of Aberdeen. It is slim, with a high-definition shiny cover and spacious layout. Its contents include all the languages of Scotland and Ireland, and the writing quality is superb, giving the impression that the editors are ruthless in selecting only the very best of submissions. This is Scotland with an outward looking mode: here are Scots versions of Korean songs, a version of Odysseus' tale set in the Hebrides and people watching Canadian ice-hockey.

Even more global in its content is *Anon*, a pocket-sized production that packs great value into its diminutive size. It's the most ethical magazine in its selection policy, ensuring that, as its name suggests, all submissions are strictly anonymous and assessed on their own merits, rather than the credentials of the writer. Its contents are all poems, bar a few essays about poetry, and its writers come from Japan, America, Canada, Syria, Lebanon and

France as well as Britain, proving that fairness has international appeal. It's packed full of startling images and fresh writing.

The Dark Horse straddles the Atlantic with Scottish and American content: high-quality poetry and long essays about and interviews with poets. It's a pleasure to handle and read. In the latest issue, there is an insightful exploration by Dennis O'Driscoll of the poetry of Kay Ryan, an exhortation not to forget George MacBeth, along with delicious poetry, including Roderick Watson's 'At the Bridge'.

Haiku Scotland, despite its name, features groups or sequences of haiku or tanka from all over the world, with Scottish poems in a tiny minority. The magazine is taking a break for a while, but will be accepting submissions again from November 2012.

Poetry Scotland does exactly what it says on the tin, and is the bargain magazine with an annual subscription of a mere £5 for which you get at least 5 issues. It is low tech, non-illustrated and unadorned, but stuffed full of poetry. It's not exclusively Scottish, but mostly so. The Spring issue has poems from an Icelandic MP, and a delightfully silly poem about bears.

Glasgow University is a major hub for literary magazines, with at least five magazines produced there. The Association for Scottish Literary Studies produces the annual *New Writing Scotland* anthology, an ezine called *The Bottle Imp*, and *The Scottish Literary Review*. *The Bottle Imp* contains a mixture of articles about Scottish literature and language, with news of publications and reviews. For John Burnside fans, the latest issue has a long piece called *Borderlands*. The student-produced *From Glasgow To Saturn* ezine is full of new voices and up and coming writers, but submissions are limited to present or past students or staff members of the University.

The Scottish Literary Review is right at the most academic end of the spectrum, with no poetry or fiction and I find myself in danger of disappearing into meta-meta-level absurdity, reviewing a collection of reviews of books of literary reviews. So, let's turn to the equally (or even more) high-brow *PN Review*, which has moved to Glasgow with its editor Michael Schmidt. This is a real bastion of the literary establishment, but don't be put off. I expected to find out how the other half live reading about Marilyn Hacker's lunchtime dates in Paris but instead became fascinated as her Arabic tutor got caught up in Syrian protests. I was enthralled by a piece by poet and artist Gregory O'Brien about a Pacific Ocean voyage, and blown away by Hugo Williams poems. *PN Review* is at the expensive end of the spectrum, but it's dense, international and intelligent.

The final Glasgow University production is *New Writing Scotland*, which tries to gather all that's new and exciting in Scottish writing, once every year. The result ranges in quality but there is bound to be something to meet

everyone's taste. However, while its contents include English and Scots, there's no Gaelic – a gap to be filled, surely? George Gunn's 'The Rowan of Life' stood out for me this year.

Another literary bastion is *Chapman*, one of the few magazines that has been around for decades. After a hiatus since issue 110 in 2010, which featured memories of the late Angus Calder, it seems another issue will soon be out.

New on the shelves is *Earthlines*, produced on Lewis but international in outlook, and focused on writing about nature and the environment. It has a few poems (lovely work by John Glenday illustrated by Douglas Robertson) and mostly non-fiction articles. *Earthlove* is at the opposite end of the production spectrum, with a handmade feel, and sadly issue 43 will be the last, except for a farewell anthology of the best of its poems from the past 6 years. All the poetry is about nature and its proceeds have always been given to environmental charities.

With an edgy, urban flavour, *Gutter Magazine* is big, beautifully laid out and packed full of stories and poems. *New Linear Perspectives* is an online magazine with a somewhat baffling array of a huge diversity of material, including poetry. *Chanticleer magazine* (also online) is more approachable and has some excellent poetry in it, and I especially enjoyed those by Richie McCaffery, who must win the prize for the person who appears most in the current crop of magazines.

Several Scottish regions have their own literary magazines. North-East Scotland is blessed by the splendid *Pushing Out The*

Boat, which is lavishly illustrated with new artworks. Poems and stories are given lots of space on the big format pages and, with Doric mixed in with English writing, it has a strong local flavour. So too does *Southlight*, published in Dumfries and Galloway. It's not quite so colourful but is also generously formatted and contains many poems evocative of place, coupled with landscape photographs. *The New Shetlander* has a good dollop of poetry, some but not all in Shetlandic, a short play and book reviews, along with a disconcerting amount of nostalgia in the form of historical essays. I wonder why the south east, north west and central parts of Scotland are not better served by their own regional literary magazines.

The Edinburgh Review is erudite without being stuffy and I enjoyed it immensely. Willy Maley's essay actually made me want to go and read more of Muriel Spark's work. Several excerpts from novels worked both as stand-alone pieces and enticements to read on. But it was the superb poetry that drew me most, particularly a wonderful poem by Charles Doersch. I will seek out more of his work – and surely this, ultimately, is what reading literary magazines is for.

Thanks to everyone who pointed me in the direction of various magazines I had never heard of, and to all the editors who sent copies. And finally, apologies to the editors of the following magazines, which I believe exist but which I haven't been able to get hold of for this review: *Valve*, *Textualities*, *One*, *Octavius*, *Markings*, *The Eildon Tree*, *Drey*, *Profile* and *Product*. ■

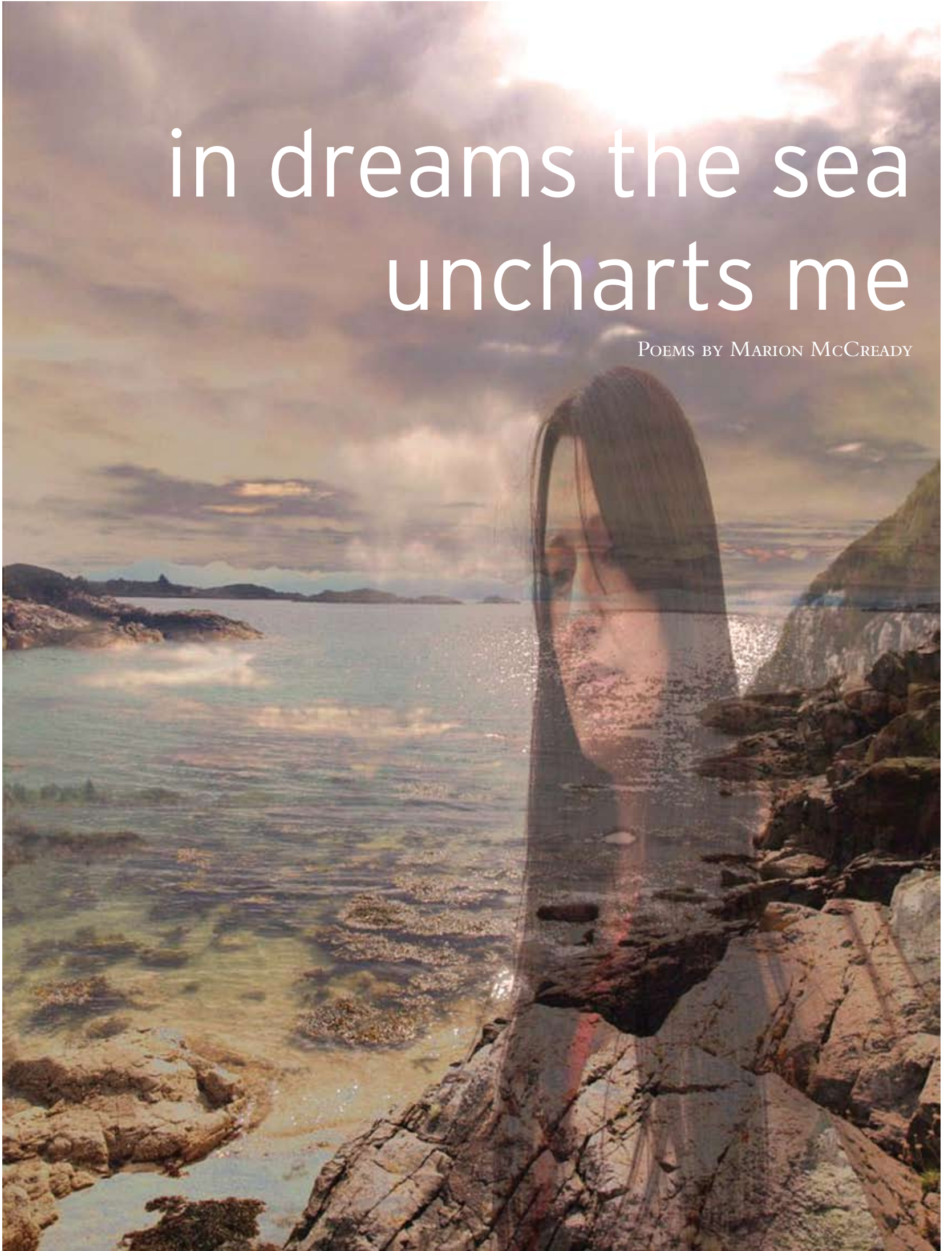
Web Addresses

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Anon
The Dark Horse
Haiku Scotland
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The Bottle Imp
Scottish Literary Review
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Earthlove
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New Linear Perspectives
Chanticleer
Pushing Out the Boat
Southlight
The New Shetlander
The Edinburgh Review

www.abdn.ac.uk/riiss/publications/causeway.shtml
www.anonpoetry.co.uk
www.thedarkhorsemagazine.com
www.geraldengland.co.uk/revs/mg043.htm
www.poetryscotland.co.uk
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www.earthlines.org.uk
www.myspace.com/earthlovemagazine
www.guttermag.co.uk
newlinearperspectives.wordpress.com
www.chanticleer-press.com
www.pushingouttheboat.co.uk
www.dgArts.co.uk
www.shetland-communities.org.uk
edinburgh-review.com

in dreams the sea uncharts me

POEMS BY MARION MCCREADY



Photomontage by Barbara MacAskill email: barbsmacaskill@btinternet.com

Reflections

“Sans sonner: suis-je moi? Tout est si complique!” – Laforgue

1
broken bones storm trees
hieroglyphics on the sky-line

the ghost of a hill
enlarging across the Clyde

estuary

*how beautiful sail the ships
we have missed*

2
the snow hill rises a peplos angel
we are walking towards it walk

we are killing ourselves daily

the white crest of the hill
foams before us

at the end of the road
at the end of the road

3
sea-burned shingle bound by bladder-wrack
the mirror-men cast their nets

their bodies twist turning
into light then shade fishing for ghosts

blood-rock humps hide a shoal of ships
sailing on the sea-bed blazing

with plumose anemones

sea jellies bloom in my hair
my eyes two orange buoys

warn on the horizon

4
magnolia flowers silken birds
fashion the frost-taut grass

we exchange mist with our mouths
your lips canvassing mine

in dreams the sea uncharts me

its tottering blacks call

the blood-waves are coming
the blood-waves widen

the march moon rises out of my hair

★ Without reflecting, am I myself? It’s all so complicated!

A vision of Sula Sgeir

(for Donald S Murray)

guano rock
shawled by the Atlantic

freckled with guga
a gulp of birds troubling its air

the gannet skerry comes to me
a dark calling

I float through its caves
glitter of gneiss the open tide drift

sea thrift luminous as coral
glows around the bent backs

of the guga hunters
and the crack of gannet wings

as feathers singe and sing
above the peaty blaze

they turn towards me
webbed feet

contorting in the heat and I wake
the heart of a cormorant

beating in my chest.

Orchid

An anemone opening and opening
under the sea,

flowers floating,
stems coveting the air.

I feed them to you secretly,
orchid tubers,

stirring the crushed bulbs
into your tea cup.

And how they grow in me,
the white petal-stars.

Your eyes, now tiffany lamps.

When we kiss, orchids
fall from our mouths.

Tiger tulips

I pass them daily flaming skins igniting the shale braes
I carry them all day in my eyes unfolding and unfolding
opening their sticky hearts to the sky

women of Argos though slaves they parade in style
a chorus of necks tilting towards me bow to the weight
of the holy grails on their heads

take this cup
take this cup away from me

Loch Long

In the bitter chill

of Loch Long

I swim beyond shore-haze,

seaweed-blaze into eggshell blue.

Waves lift my blunt limbs,

the slant boat of my body

sailing towards the estuary.

Sunbathers grow small

at the foothills,

abandoned dolls.

Loch Long lives in my throat.

You are the mouth

I swim towards, nightly.

Stories By The Sea

Nairn Book and Arts Festival to welcome Iain Banks and Kate Adie

BY TANERA BRYDEN

THE NAIRN BOOK and Arts Festival (4-9 September) has just launched this year's programme, and the line up is a lively one; legendary journalist Kate Adie will talk about her life in journalism, while lovers of crime writing will thrill to the duo offered on 'Wine and crime' day, and new work from Kirsty Logan offers a disturbing future vision of Scotland. "We're delighted to have such outstanding writers coming to Nairn this year," comments the new Chair of the Festival, Elizabeth Findlay. "Alongside veteran authors and poets such as Donald Murray and Trevor Royle, younger audiences will love up and coming writers like Kirsty Logan."

Poet, author, and winner of the 2012 Robert Louis Stevenson Prize Donald Murray will read from *Weaving Songs* (published by Acair last year); a tribute to the author's beloved father, a weaver of Harris Tweed. The book contains beautifully crafted poetry and prose which draws on the richness of Donald's experiences as a child in the village of Ness on Lewis, where his career started at the tender age of five with a hand-written comic, sold for thruppence. His recitals will be interspersed with Gaelic singing of the waulking songs traditionally sung while the weavers trod the cloth to soften it in the weaving sheds of Lewis.

Nairn's beaches were used for training regular and commando forces during the Second World War, and haunting traces of this still remain – two mortar bombs from the period were discovered there earlier this year. Acclaimed historian of war and empire Trevor Royle, author of *The War Report* and *In Flanders Fields*, will no doubt touch upon this when he comes to the Festival to read from *A Time of Tyrants - Scotland In the Second World War*. His latest book is an absorbing examination of the country's great strategic importance for conducting naval, aerial and ground operations, and how the impact of the war on politics and the arts still resonates today.

ImagiNation: Stories of Scotland's Future (Big Sky Press), edited by Brian Beattie and Gerry Hassan, is a compelling collection of new short stories, poetry and drama, offering an inventive perspective on how the country might look as we move through the new century. Kirsty Logan, an award-winning young

Glasgow-based writer (whose Twitter account intriguingly states that she 'has tattooed wrists') presented her vision in her thought provoking short story, '100 years of Wifehood'. At Nairn Festival, she will join the book's editor Bryan Beattie to discuss her work.

Headlining the array of authors, poets and musicians heading to the Festival is Iain Banks, whose dual identity as writer of contemporary fiction Iain Banks and science fiction writer Iain M Banks has delighted millions of readers and divided critics. Iain took time out from his gruelling writing schedule – he's currently producing a book a year – to answer a few questions for *Northwords Now*.

What are your thoughts on Scotland's literary scene today?

Very healthy; still punching above our weight. No idea why. Perhaps there's something in the water.

Do you think that modern Scottish literature has a distinctive identity?

No. Just a bunch of writers writing away who happen to live within Scotland, or who were born here. I think you'd struggle to find much to link J. K. Rowling and James Kelman, for example.

You've described yourself as a reluctant supporter of Scottish Independence. Do you think that Scotland's literary industry would thrive in an independent Scotland?

Yes; at the very least it would do no harm, and I'd hope there would be a general cultural renaissance under what, you'd imagine, would be a Scottish government sympathetic towards and supportive of the arts. And I'm really only 'reluctant' because I feel an independent Scotland would lessen the chances of a socialist government coming to power in England.

Some authors choose isolated locations as their preference for work, while others are quite happy at home. What has been your favourite location for writing so far, and if you were able to choose anywhere in



Iain Banks. Photo © John Foley/Opale

the world to go to write your next book, where would it be (and why?)

I prefer to write at home; this means my commute consists of walking downstairs to my study, which is handy. So "here" would be the answer to both questions! I guess I just need to feel settled. Also, my laptop has no forward-delete key. This matters more than it probably ought to.

Authors often keep fairly regular working hours when writing, which people who aren't working in a creative field often find surprising as it doesn't quite fit with the image of the artist being in thrall to the muse. Do you work 9 to 5?

I try, in theory, to work office hours so I'm able to socialise with my pals, most of whom have normal jobs, though in practice I often seem to start work at 4am and finish for the day about 9am. Still need an afternoon snooze in that case though, so it's not all gain.

Who (living or dead) would you most like/have liked to play chess with?

Anybody I'd have a sporting chance of beating.

Which of your characters have you felt closest to? Why?

Probably Weird from *Espedair Street*, because he's a musical genius. I mean, I'm not, but I can dream...

Duality is a recurring theme in your work. Who could you consider to be your alter ego, or the closest thing to one? (If you don't want to name names, can you describe them?)

This Iain M Banks guy that writes science fiction. We are often confused. Or at least I am. Why, I'm confused right now, so there you are.

Stonemouth shares some common ground with Nairn, where you are due to appear at the Book and Arts Festival in September. Coastal towns often have a very particular aura – do you find them beguiling, or the reverse? What characteristics define them for you?

I grew up here, in North Queensferry, on the shore of the Forth (and I've lived back here for the last twenty-plus years), and in Gourock on the Clyde, so I've just always been close to the sea and I like seaside towns and sea shores in general. I like the fact that towns by the sea have this very definite stop-line, this margin where there's just no more town and all the buildings come to an abrupt stop (piers excepted – and I like piers too). ■

For more information about the Nairn Book and Arts Festival visit www.nairnfestival.co.uk

Requests for tickets should be sent to tickets@nairnfestival.co.uk

*There's as guid fish into the sea
As ever yet was taken,
I'll cast my line and try again,
I'm only ance forsaken.*

I

ON HER WAY down from Mormond Hill to the local pharmacy in Strichen, Norma Paterson passed the ancient stone circle just outside the small village. Somebody told her it had once been destroyed by a farmer who wanted to work the land it lay on, but that he'd been made to restore it shortly after. You had to laugh at the thought of him tyaueing away for a job that someone had done near six thousand years before. Norma smiled at the thought all the way into the village.

Inside the pharmacy, she spied Jacqueline Foubister behind the drugs counter. Norma hadn't seen her in years; they'd been at Fraserburgh Academy together decades before and while Norma had become a fisherman's wife not long after she left school, Jacqueline had went on to own a chain of shops all over the North East.

Norma quickly hurried up the back of the shop and hid herself away behind a gondola filled with hair dyes. With her roots coming in white she had a good excuse to feign interest in them before sneaking a look up at the counter. Jacqueline stared into space with her short arms folded under her bosom. A fat diamond hung from her neck and glinted in the fluorescent light.

Norma focused back on the hair dye and read the colour names at random. Flame Red. Henna Black. Mahogany.

Before long, she heard the clacking of Jacqueline's heels.

Debbie, I'm away for ma lunch. Can you watch the counter, please? Jacqueline commanded.

Aye, a young ruddy-faced quine said as she came through from the staff room.

Pardon?

Sorry... Yes, Mrs Foubister.

Once Jacqueline had disappeared from the shop floor, Norma made her way up to the counter, a hair dye in hand. She looked down at the small box to see which one she'd ended up with: her short lank curls would be Dark Plum by bedtime. It might go with her brown eyes, maybe make her look a bittie younger.

Is that ahthing? Debbie asked at the counter.

Oh, and I've a prescription to pick up for Paterson and-ah, Norma said quietly.

Fit's the first name? Debbie asked. She crouched down and began opening the drawers.

Norma, she said gruffly and coughed.

Debbie raked and raked through the drawers.

Sorry, I canna see it. She leaned over the counter and shouted, Mrs Foubister...Mrs Foubister!

Norma winced at the sound of movement behind the staff room door.

Deborah! Jacqueline shrieked when she came out onto the shop floor, hands on her hips. What a ruckus to be making! It only takes a second to come and find me. You and I will be having talks in a minute. As she walked

towards Debbie, she shot a smile in Norma's direction. Sorry about this.

Norma went to say, Oh no, dinna mind me Jacqueline, but stopped herself. She looked over at the exit. It was just a few metres away. She took out her purse and began counting out the change for the dye.

Norma Paterson! Jacqueline's mouth was agape. Oh me, I didna even recognise ye! She came up to the counter with Norma's prescription in hand. It's been so lang since I last seen ye. Far have ye been hiyidin?

Norma smiled. She told Jacqueline that she'd moved out of the Broch, that she bid at the foot of Mormond Hill nowadays, in a cottage among the trees.

Oh, that's right. I think somebody did tell ma that ye'd flitted. And hoo's Frank gettin on?

Fine, aye, Norma said. He's affshore on a rig just noo. He's still learnin the ropes, but he's comin on fine.

Jacqueline tilted her head and sighed.

Does he miss the fishin? Her necklace flashed at Norma. I bet he misses it.

Norma nodded and looked back down at her purse.

Hoo much does that come to, Jacqueline? she asked rapidly.

Jacqueline reached out and placed one of her small hands down on Norma's forearm.

It's sic a shame fit they did to Frank. They were wrang to mak an example oot o him, Norma. Ah them coorse folk that piynted the finger – they were only piyntin it awa fae themsels. They're ah at it wie the black fish still, Norma. I just think it's a damned shame that you've heen to suffer.

Norma stepped back and Jacqueline's hand slid off her. She took a ten-pound note out her purse and laid it on the counter, away from Jacqueline's open palm. She snatched up the dye and prescription and left.

She heard the bell clatter behind her as she stormed up the High Street. She ripped open the prescription bag and pulled out the box of pills inside. They were the same as she'd been taking – Aricept, sixty pills in the box, one to be taken each night – but the dosage had increased from ten milligrams to twenty three. She put the box back in the bag along with the hair dye and sighed with relief at the realisation she wouldn't have to go back for a couple of months; if only Frank had been at home to run in for them this time.

Even though she was pechin by the time she got to the edge of Strichen, she took out her fags and lit one up. As she walked along the country roads, she was careful to let the ash drop onto the potholed tar, rather than the piles of dry leaves at the edge of the woods.

The fag didn't help; she was still shaking when she stubbed it out and headed into the

trees. She waded through the twigs and leaves between the semi-bare oaks. The air was fresher there, and seemed to seep through her body, made her feel light-footed as she roved across the uneven ground.

Looking up through the branches, she could see the war memorial high up on the hill: a figure of a horse made from white-quartz laid out on the earth. It glinted like fresh snow against the purple heather surrounding it.

Distracted by the horse, Norma tripped on an exposed root and landed hard on the ground, her possessions skiytin through the leaves.

Christ's sake! she huffed as she scoured for everything that had fallen out of her handbag: her purse, phone, make up, notepad and pens. Once it was all back in and she'd caught her breath, she slung the handbag back over her shoulder and picked up her prescription bag. She walked on, more careful to look at the ground before her.

She soon reached the pines and the ground turned soft. It was a comfort to tread on the brown needles and smell the refreshing scent; it meant her cottage wasn't far off.

Now and then she came across the stumps of pines that had blown over through the night in a mid-summer storm a few months before. She minded on the morning after the storm when she'd woken up to daylight streaming through her windows: the first time it had happened since she'd moved there. She'd opened the blinds and saw that many of the trees surrounding her house were lying flat on the ground. Their shadows were no longer cast across her vegetable patch like every other morning before. Some of the trees at the front of the house had fared just as badly, leaving gaps that let you see as far through as the nearby farms. She'd grutten down the phone to Frank when he called from the rig.

If you could just see fit nature's deen to ma.

Frank had got home from the rig a week later and they had set out to chop up the trees with a chainsaw to keep the paths clear. They decided to start with the longest trunk, its network of unearthed roots rising high above their heads.

The chainsaw seemed tiny in Frank's large hands as it slowly ate through the bark into the wood beneath. She wandered down to the bottom of the trunk and inspected the roots. She saw that there were large chunks of white quartz scattered through the earth. Whoever had planted the trees in this rock-filled soil had surely been daft: the roots hadn't been able to get a grip of the ground and had spread out sideways. They were lucky the trees hadn't all blown over before.

Her interest was broken when Frank started shouting out to her: the wall of roots was falling towards her. She jumped backwards and it snapped shut on the ground like the jaws of some beast. She was dammert by the rush of adrenaline and took a moment to come to. When she did, she saw that the ground had completely re-sealed, the stump of the tree upright. She shook her head at the sight, imagining what would have happened if she'd been any closer, swallowed whole by the earth.

You could laugh about it now – they all had. The farmer further up the hill had been the first to when they'd went to him with some of the wood.

You fisherfolk, he said, Ye'll never tak to the country waiys. Onybody up here coulda telt ye that the roots would spring back.

She told him that her folk were from St Combs. They'd had boats and crofts, and had ploughed the land and reaped the seas both. If you could master the sea, as coarse as she was, you could surely master the meek land.

The farmer had only laughed again in reply, and she could still hear his laugh now as she passed by the stumps at the edge of her garden.

Inside the cottage, she dumped her bags on the kitchen worktop and put the kettle on. With a cup of tea to warm her, she sat down in front of the TV and opened her puzzle book. They said solving puzzles would help her so she'd being doing them every day. As it grew dark outside, she worked through a few, her finger held in place at the answer pages.

Except for the stars, it was pitch black outside when she woke up a few hours later, the puzzle book down the side of her leg and cramp in her neck. Her phone alarm was beeping in the kitchen and she went bain to check it. The screen read: TAK PILL. She looked at the time: 8p.m. already. She reset the alarm for the next night and then went to get the pills. She opened the prescription bag and pulled out the box of hair dye. The bag was light in her hand, empty of anything else. She looked around the worktop for her prescription, opened her handbag to check it wasn't inside, and searched across the floors in the kitchen and the lobby: it was nowhere to be seen. She picked herself up off the lobby floor and saw the dubs on her knees: she'd fallen – she'd dropped them when she'd fallen. It was too dark to find them now and there were no more ten milligram pills in the house because she'd left it as long as possible to pick up her prescription. She would have to get them back the morn's morning. She wrote a note to remind herself and stuck it on the fridge.

She put supper on and opened the hair dye: something to do. The comforting smell of the venison stew was overpowered by the stench of bleach as she painted the dark liquid onto tufts of her blonde hair over the bathroom sink. While it set, she ate the stew and contemplated sending an email to her quine Meg in Australia.

Norma remembered the emails she got from Meg around this time last year: it would be well into spring in Adelaide once again. Meg had written of the walks she went on in the parks near her house, the waterfalls she'd come across and the small furry creatures she couldn't identify that hid in the trees. You'd like it there, she wrote. You'd go for walks together – once the fishing fine had been paid

►►

► off and you could afford the flights over. Dad could retire there if you both liked it.

As she washed the supper dishes, Norma thought her head had begun to burn with all her thoughts of Australia, but she quickly realised it was the dye stinging her scalp. She left the rest of the dishes to soak and dashed bain to the bathroom to rinse the dye out.

She unveiled her hair from the towel and looked at herself in the mirror. She seemed a different person; the colour made her face look paler and brought out the lines on her forehead and around her eyes. Blow-drying didn't make things much better. She wished she'd never wasted the money.

On her way to bed, she made sure to think through whether or not she'd forgotten to do anything. Nothing came to her.

After checking everything was switched off around the house, she went through to her bed and slept.

II

NORMA WAS WAKENED up by the light streaming in her bedroom windows; she'd forgotten to pull down the blackout blind the night before. Her head spun as she sat up. She waited for the dizziness to pass before heading to the door.

When she stepped out into the lobby, she thought someone had broken into her house: she'd caught sight of a dark-haired stranger out of the corner of her eye. It took a moment to realise it was herself in the mirror. Once she'd calmed down, she stood before her reflection and played with her locks. She pushed the strands from one side to the other until her scalp itched.

Bain in the kitchen, she put on breakfast: rashers of slimy bacon under the orange glow of the grill. She put the remaining rashers back in the fridge and, as she closed it, she noticed a small green post-it was stuck to the door. The note on it read: FIND PILLS NEAR OAKS.

She went to the window and peered out at the ground. It was another dry day: she'd be able to get them back in a decent condition.

In her bedroom, she put on her clothes: fresh underwear, a white blouse and black breeks. She dusted her face with foundation and then went to look for a tammy to hide her hair.

The fire alarm in the kitchen started beeping.

There was a sweet stench of burnt fat as she ran bain to the grill. She pulled out the pan and watched the flames die out. All that remained were three twisted strips of black carbon that hissed as they cooled.

In a frap, she switched the grill off and then fanned at the alarm with a cup towel until its skirlin stopped. She stormed out the room, shoved on her wellies and jacket, and headed out the back door.

Her pace slowed out in the fresh air. She buttoned up her jacket as she headed towards the woods. Disturbed, a pheasant sprinted ahead of her, the oriental reds and golds of its feathers blurring into the trees.

She walked past the stumps and headed into the thick of the trees. The needle floor was spongy against the rubber of her wellies, and seemed to push back up at her, propelling her forward.

It wasn't long before she was deep in the woods and came upon a stag. Intent on scrap-ing the bark off a pine with his antlers, he failed to sense her presence. As he continued to wrestle with the trunk, she made on she had a gun trained on him. With one eye shut, she squinted the other at the beast. Before he could strip anymore of the bark off and expose the yellow wood beneath, she clapped her hands. The sound echoed out and the stag sprung back from the tree. With his head turned towards her, his frame jolted the opposite way. He sped up and dashed through the trees. She jogged as fast as she could in his wake, but it didn't take long before he was completely out of sight. She slowed down to catch her breath and walked on in the same direction. The trees uphill on her right thinned out. She made towards them and came to a clearing.

It was a large patch of tree stumps that curved up the face of the hill. She walked up onto the higher ground amongst them and looked over the trees that still stood. From here, she could see the Broch on the corner of the land. A couple of trawlers lay out on the grey sea beyond the grey town. She thought of all the folk there and all the things they'd be getting up to, imagined what she'd be doing if she was still one of them.

A cold breeze blew against her. She headed back into the trees for shelter, but the further in she went, the colder the air seemed to get. She rubbed at her arms as she walked on.

Coming upon a trickle of water that ran through the trees, she stopped and thought to herself, Fit waiy am I here again?

With no answer coming to mind, she decided to walk on in the hope that a sign would appear to her. She looked at her wrist and saw that her watch wasn't on, then checked her pockets and realised she didn't have her phone. It could have been hours since she'd entered the forest, or just a few minutes; she couldn't tell.

She stopped and looked about herself. Every direction looked the same. How would she get hame?

She walked on. She tried to see up towards the hill, hoping to spot something that could help her get her bearings, but there were only more and more trees. She could only keep going; keep trying to find a way out.

Up ahead, the pines stopped and the oaks began. She came to a large stump, climbed up onto it and sat there.

Hello! she bawled. The only reply was the echo. Hello! She said it over again and again. Hello!

After a while her voice cracked. Silent, she began counting the rings on the stump and noticed that the skin on the back of her hands was as lined and scoured as the stump itself, its grooves darkened with muck. She kept losing count of the rings. There were so many – many more than if somebody was to ever cut her open and count the rings inside of her. She gave up. All she could do was wait; wait for somebody to come across her, somebody that might know her.

A branch snapped close by. A stag wandered down through the trees. His red fur rippled over muscle; his antlers cut through the air. He turned and looked Norma's way but seemed to look through her, to somewhere beyond. Then he ambled past until he was deep in the woods, out of sight. ■

Poems by John Burns

Slatehole

a long room
low and dark
a window at one end
two ragged armchairs
at the fire
fading embers in the grate
a cracked mug
of spills
for lighting pipes
a white enamel bucket
water from the well
a collie sleeps
grizzled
on the crocheted rug
lulled
by words warm
from toothless mouths
words I strain to hear
try to catch again
just the way
I tried to catch
in my hands
the bright clear water
from the well

Heich Abuin the World

Heich abuin the warld she hings
an flichters i the blue black nicht
atween the muin an a bricht white star
that looks down
on steeple, touer, an haa,
the roofs an gables o the toun
the saft kiss o watter
on the herbour waa.
Her gown is siller-emerant
an hauds tae the shape an swing
o her body
as she hauds tae the sweep
o the fiddler's bow
whyle notes poor oot lik siller.
A lover's gift scheenan
i the deep blue nicht.

Poetry

Inverness to Wick

By Amy Anderson

Dingwall, Alness, Invergordon, Tain

Softest green, apple vellum,
water malleted to the smoothest blade.
A hush of rose bay willow herb
drifts to the train's music
a manuscript of trees screens by.

Ardgay, Golspie

The crumb of life is as clear
as the pattern of stone grain,
loss and hardship the twins
of spring's joyous soil,
with wheat, grass, kale
the scent of old trouble,
memories of wet harvests
seeping to earth
faces turning to salt.

Brora

Two seals almost levitate
on a beach of deep gold.
Cormorants, black as commas
gather on a page of basalt.

Helmsdale

The habitat of buzzards, merlin,
shy greenshank
the frontier of new hours
and gorse bones,
where seasoned eyes can forecast
the trajectory of clouds
and spruces mark a boundary
where I watch for daytime owls.

Forsinard

After meadows
of golden delicious
cows of dark felt
yield to Forsinard's dull ruby
a place of scientific interest
for mustard creeping lichen
and rosettes of Sundew
hungry for the phosphorus of beetles.
It is the tiny things that create the whole.

Georgemas Junction, Wick

polished grass and sky,
spun milk churned dark silver,
northern prairies stretch
with flows and greens, always.

The Aftermath of Trout

By Stewart Sanderson

One night he returned with a stag's horn under his arm
and three brown trout, quick punctures in their tongues
which nails might go through. Glittery scales and eyes
half stupid, airy. Suffocated piscine lungs
were not, we saw, improved much by three hot
exasperated seconds before the butt
of the rod came down or gently soaking hands
went tight in a vice to crack their necks like nuts.

That night, in the kitchen, my brother and I watched knives
far sharper than you'd think, work out of them
a disarray of organs – bloodied sides
and bloody boards, there in the space between what men
did in clichés and in life. Their scales were cold
and shone like buttoned finery to wear
slipping through bleak water. In amongst the brown such gold
as suns had been. I would click their necks with flare

myself, years later, eleven and eager for
such hard sensations. Though a kindness was revealed
through hours of practice – soon I couldn't press one bone
up against another, bludgeon something reeled
in lovingly, without understanding what
our father had showed us. Not a vicious act
akin to hunting, shooting, setting locks
which shattered legs. But commitment like a pact.

Corrugated

By Maggie Wallis

This morning I captured an image
on my phone. A piece of corrugated
iron, upright, slanted, on the verge of
a trickling ditch. As I was standing there,
the water danced with tiny steps through
the grass strewn in its path, and high in the
heavens, skylarks manned their operations
of joyfulness. A single goose flew from north
east to south west and a crow sighed across the
sky. Meanwhile, the sky's belly rumbled, digesting
the movement of a plane. I'm sorry that all you will
see is this sheet of metal, rust spots, its jaunty angle.

Gorse

By Fiona Wilson

Could it be that an angry people,
like a flock of green needles,
fell to earth, and grew in a clump,
hugging their tight little Calvary
to the side of every bit hill?

*Oh, but the sweetness of gorse on a cliff by Dunottar,
its familiar exotic: in salt & vanilla in coconut*

enough

By Kathrine Sowerby

that your T-shirt matches the curtains the lettering
crossing your chest matches the cushions qualities that
you don't possess that I wish you possessed like the
colour yellow

that the nightclub where we kissed burnt down
sandstone bricks stained black tequila smoke over
the dance floor a waste ground below street level overgrown
with buddleia heads nodding

that the badger looks asleep on the dual carriageway
driving west to east the sky clouding over
front legs rigid prone stuffed infant arms
keeping the shape of a bottle

The Peroxide in Annie Lennox's Hair

By Fiona Wilson

No matter how she cut it
she simply couldn't keep
the roots from showing through:
rain against rain, the depth
of summer in the Lairig Ghru.

Writing Competition

The Highland Literary Salon is delighted to announce its first-ever writing competition, aimed at encouraging writers from everywhere to celebrate and showcase their best writing. The theme is simply “Highland Life”. Interpret that however you like!

CATEGORIES

There are four categories:

Prose (for adults) – short fiction of up to 2,000 words

Poetry (for adults) – up to 40 lines, excluding title

Prose (for under 18s) – short fiction of up to 2,000 words

Poetry (for under 18s) – up to 40 lines, excluding title

ENTRY

Everyone is welcome to enter this competition. The cost is £2 per adult and £1 per under 18.

All submissions should be sent to the Highland Literary Salon by 30 November 2012, to:

Highland Literary Salon Writing Competition
Moniack Mhor Writers' Centre
Teavarran
Kiltarlity
Inverness-shire
IV4 7HT

Entrants should send two paper copies of their submission along with payment (as a cheque payable to Highland Literary Salon).

JUDGING

Shortlisting and judging – led by a panel of renowned writers and poets – will take place over December and January, and the winners will be announced and prizes awarded at our February salon.

PRIZES

In each of the four categories, the first prize will be £100 and the second prize £50.

In addition, a prize for the most potential by any entrant over the age of 16 will win a week on an Arvon/Moniack Mhor writing course in 2013.

EVENTS

To support you in working on a submission, we will be running special events at our September and October salons to help you develop ideas. These will be led by our judges. Keep an eye on the upcoming salons page or sign up to our Facebook page or newsletter for more information.

Please contact us should you require any further information.

www.highlandlitsalon.com

Poems By Maggie Rabatski

After the Shearing, Pabbay

The last kettle of the day,
not hurried exactly
but with an eye to the tide.

Nobody is saying much.
It's been a long haul
wrestling with Cheviots in the sun,
and these are men
who let words ripen inside
before offering them up.

Looks like Aonghas Ailig
is rolling a cigarette,
not easy with the tremor
in his shearing hand;
and there's Coinneach Iain Sheonaidh,
lean and true as his own shepherd's crook,
watching the sheep stream away
from the fank
past the ancient burial stones
of Teampull Mhoire.

Any minute now, my father
will empty his cup
with a flick of the wrist,
throw a crust to the dogs, a sign
to start moving down to the boat.
Time to give the island back
to its sheep and its deer,
to the fretting seabirds;
time to let shadows slide back
into their own spaces.

At Borge Cemetery, 2010

'An ataireachd bhuan, cluinn fuaim na h-ataireachd àrd.'

After all this time, a bleak day for it:
rain coming down, a grey veil
over sea and machair and sky.

Once, not far from here, you showed me
the position of St Kilda. Nothing beyond
until America, you said. A fact for a child to hoard.

I don't like to think of you in this exposed place,
the Atlantic surge on eternal loop, gravestones tilting
from westerlies, the slow salt-scour fading

of identity. Your slab needs work. Strangely,
the man for it happens to be here today, and yes
he'll see to it...

We stand for a while in small-talk;
above our heads, a kittiwake is keening
into the wind.

December

The small blessing of winter. A time
to die. How to endure if sun
had called him out to the fields, who moved
always to the earth's drum, the seasons' turn.

So the glass, untapped, fell and fell
in the hall; she brought sips and tastes,
the safe news, up to the frail bed, until
one afternoon he drifted somewhere beyond

her words. And soon the end. Modest,
a stuttered breath, a tide falling back in the dark.
When morning rose she saw the land altered,
a bitter sun crossing its fatherless heart.

From the Low Tide of the Sea to the Highest Mountain Tops

By James Hunter

The Islands Book Trust

REVIEW BY DONALD S. MURRAY

I've been thinking about the distant figures of Highland landlords since reading James Hunter's rather garrulously titled new book, *From The Low Tide Of The Sea To The Highest Mountain Tops*. Its pages reminded me of the landlords I became aware of – largely through the pages of the 'West Highland Free Press' – in my later adolescence. They included the improbably titled Sir Hereward Wake who owned Amhuinnsuidhe Castle in the north of Harris. He demanded that the rarely used road that swirled past the front entrance of his home be shifted to its rear instead, preventing an occasional passing car from spoiling his view. There was, too, the notorious, 'Dr No'. Striding around his imaginary domain like some megalomaniac fresh from the pages of a James Bond novel, Raasay's Dr Green had similar reservations about the ferry residents wanted to introduce to provide a link between that island and nearby Skye. Apparently, he feared this might have a detrimental effect on the tremendous vista he was able to see from the windows of his big house. This anxiety might have been more understandable if he ever once chose to leave his household in Surrey to visit his Highland 'home'.

Nowadays, we no longer hear of men like these or the human misery they inflicted upon the residents of some of Scotland's islands. James Hunter's book reminds us that the owners of many of these estates were not simply comical or harmless oddballs. Their inaction had serious effects and implications for those who lived upon their land. The buildings on Eigg, for instance, that were rented out to elderly islanders were neglected and rat-ridden. There were similar problems on Gigha; the vast majority of the estate-owned houses being either sub-standard or 'in serious disrepair'.

Instead, many of these estates are now in community ownership. They range from Assynt in North-west Sutherland to Gigha, Eigg to my own home community of the Galson Estate in Lewis. In each of these places, the ownership of the straths and glens has passed from Lady Phosphate and her ilk to the ordinary people of these quiet places.

James Hunter's book records the quiet revolution that took place to make this happen. Together with politicians like Brian Wilson and even – surprisingly! – Michael Forsyth, he honours island men and women like Gigha's Willie McSporran and Eigg's Maggie Fyffe in its pages for their role in this transformation. He mentions, too, the role of the Scottish Government Land Reform Act, passed in 2001, in bringing out these changes – ones that were somewhat ironically described by Conservative MSP, Bill Aitken as being similar to the 'land-grabs' of Robert Mugabe. The words with which he does this are accompanied by the photography of Skyeman, Cailean Maclean, which are, in themselves, a wonderful celebration of the transformation community ownership has brought about in the Highlands and islands.

Self-confident individuals grin out at the reader among wind-turbines and craft-workshops secure in their place among the scenic grandeur of the Highlands and islands.

An important and valuable book, *From The Low Tide* ... might have benefitted from a brief examination of these 'community buy-outs' which have, for reasons of petty politics or internal squabbling, failed in their attempts to change the mind-set of an island or area's inhabitants. However, that would be to wish it were a different type of book – not the celebration of both an idea and the individuals that caused it to 'be' that this work clearly is. Unashamedly partisan, it underlines the effect that this change in the whole concept of ownership has had on many inhabitants in the islands of the west coast. It can be summed up in the words of Gigha man, John Martin: 'We have been released from chains and given the opportunity to be free.' ■

Sightlines

by Kathleen Jamie

Sort of Books

REVIEW BY LINDA CRACKNELL

'Just having a damn good look', a naturalist friend replies when Jamie asks what he's been doing one afternoon on the island of Rona. In many ways these fourteen essays capture the author's own 'damn good looks' – at icebergs from a boat off Greenland; a Shetland gannet colony; a lunar eclipse from her attic window.

The lean prose style, as in *Findings* (2005), is one of the book's great charms, but Jamie's metaphors often tumble us into new ways of seeing: how the vertebrae of a whale skeleton process, 'like a single file of Romans marching by'. Icebergs approach, 'with the hauteur of a huge catwalk model,' or appear as a 'preposterous cake'. This refreshing of vision is perhaps at its most powerful, and beautiful, when a reversal of scale is involved. On a visit to a pathology lab following the death of her mother, the inner surface of a colon is revealed as rippled sand on a beach at low tide; cells in a tumour as a shoreline. In a later essay, her passage through a Spanish cave is like moving intimately through a body's 'ducts and channels and sites of process'.

As the wide-eyed non-expert herself, she acknowledges countless mentors: the naturalists who say, 'keep looking. Keep looking even when there's nothing much to see'; or archaeological surveyors on St Kilda who 'taught me to change my focus'. She shares access to esoteric professions, joining conservators in their task of cleansing skeletons in the Whale Hall of Bergen's Natural History Museum, where the bones and the hand-forged chains from which they hang combine as a joint memorial to whale and blacksmith. This fascination recurs in her journeys, such as the 'cleits', dry-stone, turf-roofed stores unique to St Kilda, which are 'half nature and half culture'.

Each narrative meshes with a sense of the writer's life and character, from the 17-year-old school leaver digging for Neolithic remains in a Perthshire field, through the 'baby years', to a mother of children who overtake her in height. The exhilaration and wonder

in some of her accounts of nature are earthed by an appealingly non-romantic stance: 'Bird shit and pink thrift, the smell of summer'; and in pragmatism. Nature is perceived in bacteria and life-threatening illnesses as well as in 'primroses and otters'. She admits to the human-bound ways we interpret our wild world; but also reminds us that we have animal bodies. 'At least you know you're alive,' Jamie tells a terrified fellow-traveller on a trans-Atlantic flight.

Sightlines encourages us to liberate ourselves from the expected, adopt 'a fresh eye, or a looser mind'. A bird-ring on the carcass of a storm petrel found on Rona reveals its journey from the Shetland island of Yell. The two places, known to Jamie but entirely segregated in her mental geography, are suddenly linked 'by a flight path, straight as an arrow', making this sea-wed bird seem 'even wilder than before'. The resonance of this book, along with gannet glitter and the low blowing of orcas, will be for me the tangible thrill at such extensions of the imagination. ■

Tales from the Mall

by Ewan Morrison

Cargo Publishing

REVIEW BY PAUL F COCKBURN

Caithness-born Ewan Morrison has been thinking a lot about the future of the novel recently, from his attention-grabbing talk on "the death of writing as a profession", at the 2011 Edinburgh International Book Festival, to his more recent Guardian essay on how the 'traditional' novel risks being left behind by our increasingly online, 'multi-screening' quest for information. It's apt, therefore, that his latest book, *Tales from the Mall*, is a mixture of creative fiction, reported anecdote and factual essay, with the video-loaded app ebook edition building on — and indeed influencing — its print foundations.

In a recent Guardian essay on 'Factual Fiction', Morrison referenced Douglas Coupland's *Generation X*, Dave Eggers' *Zeitoun*, James Frey's *Bright Shiny Morning*, and Michel Houellebecq's *The Map Is Not the Territory* for the ways the authors have blurred the boundaries between fact and fiction. But you can go back much further: Herman Melville's iconic 1851 novel *Moby Dick*, for example, features numerous, largely factual divergences into the nature of whales (which only underline how little we knew at the time about creatures we were hunting to near-extinction) and the whaling industry of the period.

Nevertheless, Morrison has produced something really special with *Tales from the Mall*, even in its decidedly analog, "dead tree" format. In one sense, this collection of "fictions, facts and confessions from the secret world of retail" is actually rather old-fashioned in its Reithian intent to "educate, inform and entertain" (in that order). It's to Morrison's credit that he has created an engrossing book which will change, to just a small degree, how you will look at the next mall you enter.

At the core of the collection are ten short stories; these are the equivalent of the shops in the mall and, superficially at least, are tales

told with a wide range of styles and voices. Yet, underneath the overt differences in their characters, situations and narrative styles — their stock and displays, you could say — these tales have much in common, not least the connections existing between them in the subtlest of details.

In his previous novels, Morrison's clear talent has been to portray and explore how people relate to each other over time; here, he expertly expresses people's conscious and unconscious relationships with where they shop, and how the rise of service industries has affected our sense of identity. As one story underlines, not even the Scottish Highlands have proved sufficiently immune to this particular retail epidemic.

Excellent though the stories are, some of the most amusing and thought-provoking elements are actually the reported anecdotes; these numbered "Incidents" open up the world of the mall on an intrinsically human level. If there is a subtle hint of disgust and anger in the factual history, the reportage — perhaps even more than the stories — displays Morrison's tenderness and understanding of how changing retail patterns affect real people's lives.

A genuinely exciting and thought-provoking work. ■

Saorsa

Luchd-deasachaidh: Joan NicDhòmhnaill & John Storey

Foillsichear: CLAR Ùr-Sgeul

ISBN: 9781900901819

REVIEW BY MORAY WATSON

Tha leabhar eile air nochdadh o chionn beagan mhìosan fo sgeith Ùr-Sgeul, an iomairt aig Comhairle nan Leabhraichean a chaidh a stèidheachadh gus rosg ùr a chur an clò airson inbheach. 'S e Saorsa an dà chuid tiotal agus nàdar an leabhair. Tha iomadh seòrsa 'saorsa' ga sealltainn san leabhar, bho na suidheachaidhean anns a bheil na sgeulachdan a' gabhail àite gu na caractaran eadar-dhealaichte agus an caochladh stoidhlichean innse – eadar aithris an treas pearsa agus aithris a' chiad phearsa, agus feadhainn le measgachadh de na dhà. Tha trì sgrìobhadairean deug air sgeulachdan a chur ris an leabhar seo, feadhainn air nach eil sinn uabhasach eòlach fhathast agus feadhainn eile a tha ainmeil gu leòr (uaireanan ainmeil air adhbharan eile, ge-tà). Tha e furasta fhaicinn gu bheil cuid mhòr de na sgrìobhadairean a' dèanamh oidhirpean sònraichte: mar eisimpleir, a' feuchainn ri rudan a dhèanamh a tha eadar-dhealaichte bho na bhite a' leughadh ann an sgeulachdan a chaidh fhoillseachadh sa chànan roimhe seo, a' feuchainn ri tèamannan is cuspairean ùra a thogail, a' feuchainn ri bhith ùr-nòsach ann an dòigh air choreigin, agus a' feuchainn ri spòrs is dibhearsain a thoirt don leughadair. Leis a sin, tha cruthan is structairean eadar-dhealaichte anns an leabhar. Tha cuid de na sgeulachdan, mar eisimpleir, a' leantainn ris an stoidhle shean fhasanta a thaobh deiridhean-iongnaidh. Air an làimh eile, tha feadhainn dhiubh a' seachnadh structairean Aristotlach uile-gu-lèir.

Tha an luchd-deasachaidh, Joan NicDhòmhnaill agus John Storey, air obair ►►

► ionmhalta a dhèanamh ann a bhith a’ taghadh sgeulachdan cho eugsamhail bho raon cho farsaing de sgrìobhadairean ach, aig an aon àm, a’ cumail ìre de cho-leanailteas ris an leabhar. A bharrachd air sin, tha an deasachadh fìor mhath a thaobh nan cùisean beaga mar litreachadh, rud a tha cho connspòideach cho tric ann am foillseachadh na Gàidhlig. Bhon a chaidh Ùr-Sgeul a chur air dòigh, tha sinn air fàs cleachdte ri leabhraichean fhaicinn a tha air an dealbhadh agus clò-bhualadh gu grinn is gu snasail, agus tha seo fìor a-rithist leis an leabhar seo. Tha dealbh air a’ chòmhdach a tha a’ toirt oirnn smaoineachadh air na h-institiùidean a tha a’ nochdadh ann an cuid de na sgeulachdan, institiùidean a tha gu tur an aghaidh saorsa an tiotal.

Am measg nan sgeulachdan, tha tè ann a tha stèidhte air planaid eile, tè mu dheidhinn ‘dèirceach’, còrr is aon mu dheidhinn murt agus co-fheall, tè stèidhte ann am Berlin aig àm a’ Mhùir, còrr is aon mu dheidhinn nan iomsgaraidhean ann am beathannan dhaoine eadar-dhealaichte, tè no dhà a tha caran feallsanachail, agus tè mu dheidhinn teaghlach a’ cluich geama còmhla. ’S iad “Saorsa gun Chrìch” le Micheal Klevenhaus, “An Dotair Eile” le Pàdraig MacAoidh, agus “Chanadh gun do chuir i às dha” le Meg Bateman as inntinniche, is dòcha, ach tha tòrr rudan a tha math anns na sgeulachdan eile cuideachd, agus tha an leabhar seo a’ dearbhadh gu bheil rosg na Gàidhlig fhathast a’ dol am feabhas anns an fharsaingeachd.

Tha ro-ràdh goirid ann le Aonghas MacNeacail, anns a bheil e a-mach air na beachd-smuaintean a bhios ag èirigh ann an inntinn ùghdair, agus na rudan a bhios a’ brosnachadh dhaoine gu bhith a’ sgrìobhadh gu cruthachail. Thug MacNeacail seantans dhuinn a tha math air tuairisgeul a dhèanamh air Saorsa: “‘S e nì àraid a tha ann an sgeulachd ghoirid, le riaghailtean teann a thaobh cruth is aithris, ach am broinn nan cuing sin, tha farsaingeachd dhòighean air an sgeul innse” (t.d. 8). ■

Sorley MacLean Caoir Gheal Leumraich

Edited by Christopher Whyte and Emma

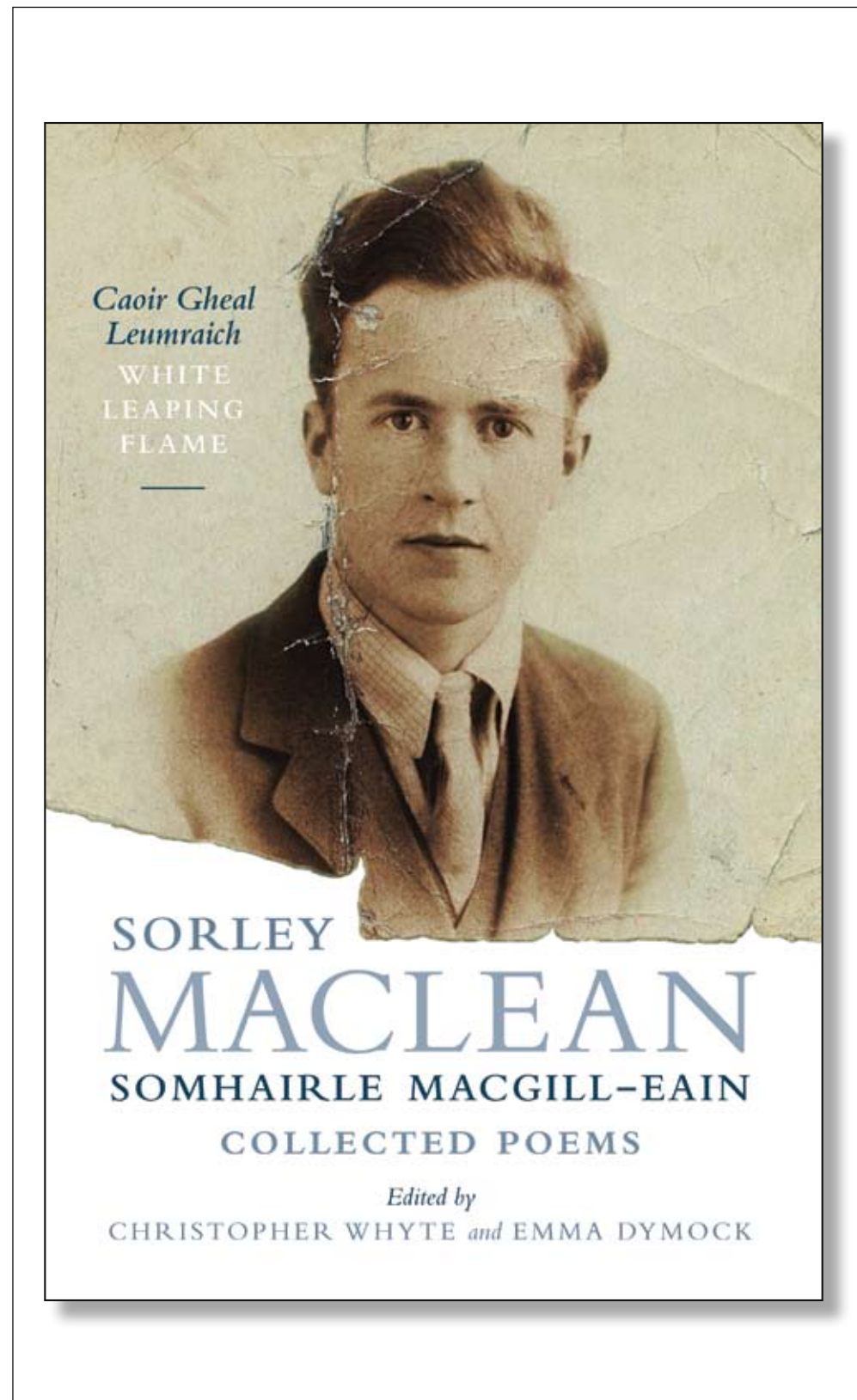
Dymock

Polygon

REVIEW BY RODY GORMAN

In 2011, the centenaries of the poets Czesław Miłosz and Elizabeth Bishop were celebrated throughout the world. Nearer to home, that of Sorley MacLean, who died in 1996, was also celebrated. In Poland, Miłosz’s commemoration attracted billboards, mugs and t-shirts from admirers and detractors alike. Whilst the celebration of MacLean was not quite so exuberant – Sorley fridge-magnet, anyone? – it did inspire a profusion of publications and provide a certain amount of fresh illumination.

The collection of essays on Modern Gaelic Literature, *Lainnir a’ Bhùirn*, for example, includes a piece on the liminal symbolism of MacLean’s epyllion *An Cuilithionn* and an exposition of Julia Kristeva’s theories of abjection by Emma Dymock as well as a piece in Gaelic amounting to associative criticism with a discussion of the paradigmatic and



syntagmatic by Peter Mackay (who has also produced a book on MacLean). There is also a piece on the “oscillation between apostrophic address and third-person description” of the “paradisiacal dwelling place” of the Woods of Raasay with its “abundant flora” and “bounteous femininity bestowing lavish gifts and sure protection” and its subsequent “calamitous effect” and the relation the poem has with “traditional Gaelic poetry, where nature responded metonymically to good stewardship on the part of the rightful sovereign by blossoming fruitfully in various ways, including exuberant birdsong, and conversely by withering when he died” by Irish academic Máire Ní Annracháin.

Now we have *Caoir Gheal Leumraich*, Sorley MacLean’s Collected Poems, edited by Christopher Whyte and Emma Dymock. (It has been posited that the title contains an incorrect form of the adjective *leumrach*, where a prepositional has been misapprehended as a nominative but it also appears on p.405

as “chunnaic mise leumraich/air sliabh a’ Chuilithinn and on p.407 as chunnacas an nathair a’ leumraich”, as a verbal noun, so it may be that and not an adjective in either case that is being employed, but I digress). Christopher Whyte, “probably the greatest living expert on MacLean’s poetry” is known as a poet in Gaelic and novelist in English whilst Emma Dymock has produced a school guide on MacLean, also in 2011. Whyte discusses the “colonialist appropriation” of MacLean but it is the case, it seems to me, that several learners of the language (as if that description did not include each and every speaker), including Meg Bateman, Fearghas MacFhionnlaigh, Whyte, myself and others have acquired the language to a sufficient degree of competence to write and publish in it in a process not dissimilar to a colonialist appropriation.

There is a duplication, for reasons I do not understand, of the allusive *An Cuilithionn* (*An Cuiltheann?*), including the parts no

longer “tolerable” to MacLean himself. (By a similar editorial process, a whole section of *An t-Àilleagan* is conflated in *Nighean is Seann Òrain*.) *An Cuilithionn* is, of course, about the Cuillinn, that is to say “Cuilitheann gorm an Eilein/agus dà Chuilitheann eile,/Cuilitheann na h-Albann aosta/is Cuilitheann a’ chinne-daonna”. It is a reaction to war and Nazism, a targeted poem but what exactly, for example, “brochan breunaid”, “boile brèige” and “boglach ruaimle” actually represent is not that easy to determine. The bourgeoisie – is that word still used seriously? – are “a’ plubartaich am Mararabhlainn”, the primordial morass visible from the summit of the Cuillinn. A lot of the personal invective and slightly embarrassing political attitudes in the poem are based on misinformation and one can only speculate how different it might have been in the world of social media today. It is, however, as designed, “a long medley with lyric peaks”.

The uncollected material includes quite a few “vituperative epigrams” à la the apostrophe to Marjorie Kennedy-Fraser (surely an unconscionably easy target). This is more a work of historiography than anything although it does contain gems like *Don Neach nach deach...* with its atavism – àrdan and uabhar appear time and again here – and suppressed supremacism (notes might have helped in this case, as specific as the one which identifies the ‘eatery’ in which another poem is situated). Similarly the poem *Bha connspaid eadar mo chridhe,/m’ eanchainn is m’ fheadail* (discovered as recently as March 2011). Some of the previously unpublished poems were better off that way, however.

Reference has been made to MacLean’s encratic language. I prefer to think of it not as synthetic or even schematic but as an elevated, inappropriable idiolexicon – aigeannach; allaban; àmhghar; ànradh; àrdan; bàrcadh; breannachadh; bruaillean; càir; ciùrradh; creachainn; deiltreadh; diùchd; dòbhaidh; drithleann; eagnaigh; eucail; faileadh; falbhach; foinnidh; fòirne; foistinneach; gais; gaoid; giamh; glomhar; grabadh; iargain; labhar; laomadh; lì; lòghmhor; luaineach; luasgan; luathghair; màbadh; meangach; meapaineadh; mosganach; siathadh; sireadh; staimhte; stòite; suaimhneas; tàrladh; torchairt; tùirling; uaibhreach; uamhalta; ùdlaidh and so on. The lexicon is so rich as to include no less than 4 words – fahair, faobairne, fuamhair and fuirbidh (used adjectivally as well) – for a giant. One of the corollaries of this is, of course, the tendency towards hyperadjectivalism (*Coilltean Ratharsair, Am Botal Briste* etc). The language is literally violent with frequent references to ciùrradh, coirbeadh, creuchdadh, lot, màbadh, milleadh, truailleadh and so on.

The translation process has produced what to a non-Gaelic readership must be neurologically tantamount to listening to fado. It is a commonplace to hear after a Gaelic reading the like of “The sense? But what matter? It’s the music of the long vowels that counts, dahling, the music of the long vowels!” I assure you it is not, dahling. There is a force of concealment as well as that of revelation to the Goidelically challenged. For Gaelic readers it is intraspecific although I cannot imagine that a fully literate comprehending audience in that language amounts to more than a

couple of dozen people. The translations by Douglas Young and Iain Crichton Smith of the shorter lyrics may read best as poems but the slightly wooden, sometimes comical, versions by the poet himself and the editors of this volume best represent the originals not because they, the originals, are wooden or comical but because they are fiendishly difficult to translate. Christopher Whyte acknowledges this when he says that “the difficulties of coming up with adequate English versions highlighted the complexities, the richness of reference, resonant lexis and intricate poetic thought”.

Instances of orthographic irregularity – perhaps in some cases for metrical purposes – here include an uair; aon-uair; bànrighinn; beothach; bial; briag; ciad (for ceud); crìdh; cùibhreann; diochainich; fiach; fòdhpa; giar; gu ‘m faighear; gu robh; iadach; iadhadh; lias (on the same page as leus); ma ‘s eadh; na ‘s urrainn; neamh; òir; riabadh; rùiste; spreaghadh; suim; thun; Tómas; tosd. I don’t see the point of prescribing a normative orthography for a language if it’s not going to be applied to what will surely become one of the most commonly read texts in that language. These usages are debatable. What are not and are unpardonable are the typographical errors: ancaoraich; bànn (for ban); Gàidhealteachd; gun fàg; leirsinn; man (for nan); mfhadh; Sasann; sgriosaidh; seòrssa; Spainne; srath (for Srath); toiseachaidh; tughadh (for tugadh) and so on. In the light of the proliferation of typos in the previous collected edition of MacLean, O Choille gu Bearradh – somebody, was it Ronald Black? counted them – this amounts to contumely for Gaelic. This may be just another poetry collection in English but in Gaelic it is a momentous public event, probably the last of its kind in the language and which, therefore, should be punctiliously correct.

Considering examples of recurrent imagery, the àigeach represents the mount, associating it with the peaks of human endeavour and the sexual act. It is also involved in the toponym An Eist Fhiadhaich as one of the great extremities of MacLean’s island. Equine imagery is invoked further in references to “seित्रich Eist Bhatarsteinn air srèin”; the “eistir fuirbidh” as though elements of the panegyric code and the pejorative use of the word gearran. I take it to be a form of the libido. The same code is also invoked in the negative antithesis of Clann Ghill-Eain. for example. Another cipher is Maol Donn and an dà Phàdraig which I take to represent supreme artistic accomplishment. There is a similar leitmotif of the “aodann àlainn” – “mìorbhail aodainn àlainn”; “suaimhneas geal an aodainn àlainn”; “s tu mo bhrèisleach, aodainn àlainn” and so on. The “slighe chrìon” appears in the Cuilinn 1989 poem on p.387 and echoes the path chosen by the “còmhlan” of Auden et al – ‘beneath contempt’, MacLean wrote in a letter to Hugh MacDiarmid – in Choisich Mi Cuide Ri Mo Thuigse.

Crocean lyric peaks, to my mind, would include Am Buairadh, Am Bàta Dubh, Fuaran, Abhainn Àrois, Sgatham, Nuair a Labhras Mi, Am Mùr Gorm, Fo Sheòl, An Ìomhaigh, Reothairt, Glac a’ Bhàis, Latha Foghair, Anns a’ Phàirce Mhòir (a Gaelic sonnet); Àrd-Mhusaem na h-Eireann, Dàn,

Creagan Beaga, Calbharaigh, An Tè Dhan Tug Mi, Nuair Chunnaic Mi ‘n Cùl Ruadh, Ma Thèid mi Suas and Trom-laighe. I disagree with the editorial judgement that Dàin do Eimhir and An Cuilithionn 1939 are “equally important peaks” and a lot of the poems referred to above are, of course, from the Eimhir sequence – given here by Latin numeral and not first line – which might in itself be read as a lament for the mutilated body that is the Gaelic language. Equally the Spanish Civil War may be read as the internal conflict from which poetry emerges, not unlike Miolsz’s daimonon. The early poem A’ Chorra-ghrithreach has a counterpoint between the moment and Metaphysical grace in verses 1 and 2, if read discretely, and the lack of the lyric voice in “anfannachd an strì”. In Nuair a Labhras Mi...the opposition is not brought to its logical conclusion of equivalence between the majestic Cuilinn, the poet’s personal Parnassus as it were, and the primordial morass, surely better to conclude with the ambiguous cho math? but rather a sort of rhetorical dénouement.

Ronald Black said in a recent review that some of us have been waiting a lifetime for just the notes in this edition. They are not as comprehensive as one might wish and I for one am still waiting for the definitive Sorley MacLean. We need what I might call a Fuller MacLean. Nevertheless, that these poems should have emerged from a language, which with 60,000 speakers accounts for less than the membership of the Orange Order or the Union of the Armenian Evangelical Churches in the Near East, is – it becomes more obvious with each passing year – an astonishing accomplishment. ■

Stabs and Fences

by John Manson

KENNEDY AND BOYD

REVIEW BY JEAN ATKIN

Stabs and Fences is a collection spanning a lifetime’s poetry, durable as John Manson’s crofting, full of character and integrity.

This attractively produced book is divided geographically – Sutherland, Fife, Edinburgh and then Dumfries and Galloway. There is an excellent and informative introduction by Alan Riach, which helps to set John Manson’s work in a larger context. John Manson has been both farmer and scholar. He is a poet of great scope, a noted translator from Bertolt Brecht, Pablo Neruda and others. His poems in Scots are vivid, emotional, and catch you in the gut: ‘The ins and outs hae aa faded/I ken I wis wi ye agane/I heerd yir vyce rise and faa/Shaal watter owre slack stanes’

John was born into crofting in 1932 in Caithness, later moving to Sutherland to croft there with his mother. His poems are deeply observant, sharply true, on the realities of farming, its hardships and its rewards: I hung that gate/I laid that pipe/I built that barn/I felled that tree/I cut that divot/I shot that stag’.

John told me once about ‘old Baby’ (he knew I keep a few sheep) – and her fate. She was of course a bottle lamb, useful to have in the flock later, as it makes them easier to manage. She became, of course, ‘old’ Baby as

time passed. The poem is full of feeling of a kind not easily expressed aloud by farmers:

*‘So old Baby had to go into the ring too
The flock had to be sold
The first time off the land
She was bred on
Who should have gone back into it
In a hole dug in soft ground’*

But there is no sentimentality. John knows and respects the lore of the sheep: she knew ‘Where to lie on wet nights/How to scaff for pellets’.

Throughout the collection the poet’s voice is both persistent and gentle: there is a wonderful dry wit in poems such as ‘In The Library’, which turns on a superbly obscure joke about Hugh MacDiarmid and the Monmouthshire Labour News. There is political sophistication – ‘Middle East Peace/A forced handshake/In Washington’ but you sense too an unshakeable faith in humanity, and the poet’s defence of it. The collection’s title poem ‘A Stab In A Fence’ concludes: ‘A man is not a stab in a fence/He is made into one.’

There is a consummate command of language at work. It’s deeply economical, but when he uses imagery it catches fire: And it can be steely: ‘her well-filled teeth/in her false face’. Yet there are love poems too, of a perfect, moment-capturing sensitivity: ‘Suddenly/I met you/In your white suit/Like a crocus’

Stabs and Fences is a collection for the long haul. Here is poetry that is beautiful, certainly, but it’s also a poetry to remind us always to think, about what we are, what we can be. As John Manson says, ‘Conformism, keep it’. ■

The Ninian Plate

By Alistair Christie-Johnston

Shetland Times

www.shetlandtimes.co.uk/shop/books

REVIEW BY CHRISTIE WILLIAMSON

Priests, treasure and murder most foul!

Alistair Christie-Johnston’s second novel *The Ninian Plate* begins in the late seventh century AD, and ends in the home of a thoroughly twenty first century web designing telecrofter. These disparate worlds are connected by the Ninian Plate of the novel’s title. It’s a book of two halves, and indeed a book of two books.

Book one imagines the arrival of the priests at St Ninian’s Isle (or “Sheep Island” as the local pict’s know it in the book). They bring the silver plate with its purported magical powers. The fusion of Christianity with the pre-existing belief systems of the North Atlantic tribes allowed the former to swell its numbers and the latter to retain a great deal of symbolism and even observance of ancient calendar points.

Christie-Johnston acknowledges the transition probably took longer than it does in his account. It may also have been less harmonious. But the telling of this part of the tale captures prehistoric life so well, and generates such sympathy for Caolum, the young man on whom greatness is thrust, that it is well worth it.

The Pictish conversion to Christianity is a warm up act for the arrival of the big hairy men from the east. The fear of Viking raids, the successful and the unsuccessful superhuman efforts at survival, the living with the constant look out, the certainty that trouble is coming and the not knowing when, all this is brilliantly captured. This section of book had me reading as I walked along the ►►

Mythology tells us of the Red Bag, which can hold anything that is put in it: food or clothing or weapons. Even an entire boat with provisions and galley-slaves! Yet one man can carry it.

It is said that a careless traveller dropped his red bag in Drummond Street, Inverness. It had a cargo of clothes and trinkets.

Unlikely? Well it is far fetched.

Farfetched

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Electricity: an interpretive chain
Walt Whitman – Poet:
I sing the body electric, The armies of those I love engirth me.
Ray Bradbury – SF writer:
Agatha is an orphan with an an Electric Granny.
Lana Del Ray – Singer:
Whitman is my daddy, Monaco’s my mother.
Roddy Wiseman – Master Baker:
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road, a dangerous pastime reserved for real page turners.

Book two doesn't have as much to do, as it is set in modern Shetland. We don't need a way of life carefully constructed for us in the same way. I'm slightly sceptical anyone's life is quite as idyllic as Babs and Gavin's, even in the west side. But the characters are believable, and the idyll is shattered soon enough.

Without giving too much away, what shatters it is a good old fashioned murder mystery. We get shady characters and strange co-incidences. We get blood, betrayal and tension. We are even treated to a world weary cop flown up from Inverness.

The second book left me wanting more. It's only half as long as the first book, meaning there's little room for much development of all but the central two characters. But the payoff for that is some sharp wit, and more of the pace which earlier on had me taking chances with the traffic. If the end was always coming, it wasn't clear how it would until it did.

It could be clearer how Book one and Book two relate to each other, and Book Two did sometimes feel a bit stuck on. But *The Ninian Plate* is a well written book which will be of interest to anyone with a knowledge of Shetlandic history. It strikes a happy balance between the past and the present. I look forward to more from Christie-Johnston in the future. ■

Poetry Reviews

BY SALLY EVANS

It is a sign of the recession that of the twelve items sent to me for review, only three are full books, while eight are pamphlets, and there is one CD – the last being readings from past and present members of Edinburgh's Shore Poets. Its title is, somewhat predictably, *From the Shore* (CD available from spoets.wordspress.com), and if you have it you can treat yourself to a Shore Poets session, complete with their regular musicians.

Of the eleven paper items, only two are by women. I hope this is not going to become another effect of recession, for there are more competent women poets around than ever before (and thus more chance of inspired ones). Two of the books come from south of the Border.

Ian Crockatt's translations of R. M. Rilke, Rainer Maria Rilke, *Pure Contradiction*, are published by Arc in West Yorkshire (www.arcpublications.co.uk). A translator can benefit from the stature of his subject, and this is the case with Crockatt, a hard working and determined poet from the Highland region. He has put together a remarkable group of translations, revealing Rilke's labyrinthine themes. The book also carries the Rilke text, which bulks it up from what would have been sixty pages to 115 pages. Translation is a dangerous game, a battle of minds as well as language. Crockatt has a wonderful time interpreting Rilke by juxtapositions, placing poems from Rilke's French alongside the more important German ones, titling the book *Pure Contradiction* (the rose is addressed as 'oh reine Widerspruch' in Rilke's self-epigraph) and supplying a substantial and interesting introduction. The excitement is catching.

That Rilke is at the heart of European poetry is shown by his many other poet translators, who include Michael Hamburger, Don Paterson and Jo Shapcott, and all of whom Crockatt generously acknowledges. If only Rilke had written one or two poems in English alongside his French ones, we'd see better how he really wanted to position words.

Oversteps Books of Devon (www.overstepsbooks.com) have published A C Clarke's new collection of poems, *Fr Meslier's Confession*, about Meslier, the intransigent French country atheistic priest. It is no secret that A C Clarke is Anne Clarke, the active poet from Glasgow who is present at many poetry community events around Scotland, who very often wins prizes, and has said that she tries to write two poems every week. Her writing is impeccable in short poems, but this book also benefits from the thematic interest in the quiet adventures of her priest. It makes for an interesting and complex story, with its perennially topical theme of radical versus establishment, atheism versus religion. There is a cast of parishioners, housekeeper etc to give dramatic depth to this story, told in the kind of short poems for which A C Clarke has already made herself a reputation. As a sequence this is a quite a major achievement, and one feels the recession will have no effect on A C Clarke's progress at all.

The third book is *The Songs of Oana* (Ettrick Forest Press – www.efpress.com) by Graham Hardie, and gives rise to another observation on the whole group of pamphlets under review. Graham Hardie is the founder and publisher of Ettrick Forest Press. In that capacity he has initiated various websites including an online magazine, *Osprey*. It is not amateur self-publishing when a publisher knows the ropes, has learnt to edit, and knows something about layout and design. The poems are written in a refreshing, straightforward way. They are still enigmatic: they seem to involve a love affair, and there are neat touches of Glasgow and other landscape. Hardie also has some strong magazine credits, including *Gutter*, *The Interpreter's House*, *nth position* and *The Recusant*.

Among other virtues, Happenstance publisher Helena Nelson (www.happenstancepress.com) has the knack of promoting impressive beginners. Of her three new pamphlet authors, Richie McCaffery, author of *Spinning Plates*, is any good editor's bet for a high flyer. His wry and incisive poems are full of anecdote, wit and his own distinctive vocabulary and he has already found a confident voice. Here he is in full swing in a poem about a house with an upside-down escutcheon: 'Nothing is ever lost at this bat-eyed address//and I can't decide, from the outside/whether it's a blessing or a curse to never/be able to lose something, or someone.' Future books from McCaffery are almost inevitable.

Theresa Muñoz has perhaps been a little luckier to have such a propitious start, though it is good to see young women poets given their head, at long last. Titled *Close* (the title poem gives little away) it is largely south Edinburgh urban poetry, spare, quiet and unassuming as in *Hard to Know*: 'outside/ the grass shines/January thriving/slick wet blades/while I pour coffee.' A little further on

in the poems she writes: 'last week at the top/ of Calton Hill/I said it, I said/Do we like/the same things?'

The third of these Happenstance pamphlets is *After the Creel Fleet* by Niall Campbell, this time with highland and nautical interest. Like Muñoz, he is the new type of trained poet, having a creative writing M Litt from St Andrews. He has also taken part in the Island Writing initiative. This booklet contains interesting poems, with original ideas, such as 'An Introduction to the Gods of Scotland' – named as cities – or in the 'Songs of Kirilov'. This is a very good pamphlet by a poet at the start of his career.

Two more sets of two. The better produced are by Harpercroft of Crail (Old Bank House, 24 Castle Street, Crail, Fife, KY10 3SH). Publisher Gordon Jarvie's *Withering Into the Truth* is paired with Christopher Salvesen's *Crossing the Border*. Jarvie is an energetic poet, from his ambitious title poem (after W B Yeats), 'From wartime beginnings, a seaside sun/from all the weft and warp of my youth,/a lifetime's future is woven and done,/and I'm weathering, withering into the truth' to the generous confidences of 'On the Wisdom of Acquiring a Dog at Seventy' and the narrative gaiety of poems of daily life.

Christopher Salvesen is described as having done National Service and then moved from Oxford to Dublin to Reading University, which places him at a fairly venerable age. His work is not strongly of a Scottish timbre. It is substantial and readable however, and a neat piece of publishing by Jarvie.

The final two pamphlets are by better known poets: Walter Perrie (the publisher at Fras – www.fraspublishing.co.uk) who has a remarkable track record, and William Hershaw, one of the very best poets around in Scots. Willie Hershaw's is real Fife Scots. None of your dictionary Scots. You can hear it singing, the language comes from within. Here's a Wabster (you should be able to work it out): 'The wabster i the winnock neuk/ wha hings abuin the sill/kens a souch'll fetch a flea,/grist tae its mill.// Even the warselin flee itsel/kens its weird is dreed:/thirlt an taigled i a wab/no tae be freed.'

It is not often mentioned that readers of Scots prefer their own dialect, the factor that largely restricts Sheena Blackhall's important canon to Aberdeenshire sales. While those across the Central belt may be comfortable enough with Fife Scots, they are not truly linked to that language as readers. So potentially major poetry in a minor dialect of a sidelined language may be lost, and sadly, poetry books in real Scots are almost certain to be decimated by the recession.

The poems by Perrie have a reedy quality, which is present in some of his other work. They are quite simple, sometimes rhyming. He is most at home in a rather Scottish English. Lyricism can still be found – and the great ghost of Yeats still rides, as in his title sequence:

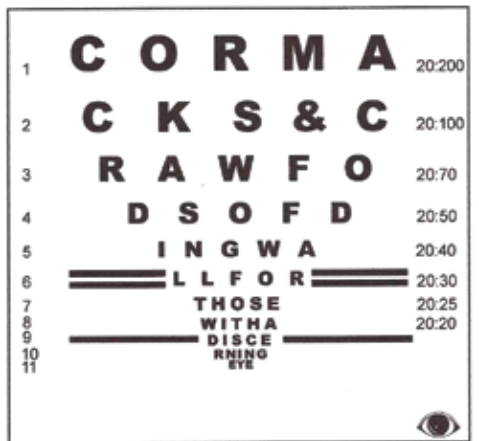
The cricket chirrups from the cold/hearth-ash into the dawn's chill gold,/our little grain of speechless trust/outweighs it all,/the suns and moons, the starry dust.

Fras' quality of production is not as high as that of Harpercroft or Happenstance. There may be a tacit assumption that if you want good quality poetry it hardly matters about

the vehicle, but I don't think the format quite comes off. Their publications have a distinctly desktop character, and consequently one suspects they are rather short runs. Still it is good to have their availability.

Finally, a very nicely and cheekily produced booklet by Controlled Explosion Press (**Email : hfulton32@btinternet.com**). This is Graham Fulton's work: *Upside Down Heart*. It is a big square format with lovely full page colour illustrations by Becky Bolton. Both author and artist are from Glasgow. They are poems about sex, about women and men: 'You clean the bathroom mats and my shirt,/the whitest High Street Men's Store chic./It spins out constellations with green./Washday spores. Locusts of stuff.'

Like it or not, this has something to say and it says it, and the production, the object that is the booklet or book, backs it up. A book that can have a life as an object. That's really what the small press has to come up with, these days. ■



The moon is too far to reach.

The summer breeze passes without a trace.

The running wave turns to water in your hand.

For lovely things you can hold and keep.

Babalu

Chock full of things you will want.

68 High St, Forres

CONTRIBUTORS' BIOGRAPHIES

James Aitchison has published six collections of poems, the most recent being *Foraging: New and Selected Poems*. His main critical work is *The Golden Harvester: The Vision of Edwin Muir*.

Amy Anderson lives in Glasgow and was apprenticed to Gerry Loose on the Clydebuilt Poetry Mentoring Scheme last year. Her debut pamphlet is forthcoming.

Jean Atkin has been working on her new pamphlet *The Dark Farms*, which is focused on the Galloway Forest region. She has two pamphlets in publication, *The Treeless Region*, and *Lost At Sea*, which was shortlisted for the Callum Macdonald Memorial Prize.

Grahaeme Barrasford Young returned to poetry ten years ago, and is widely published. He recently reached a century of published work.

Georgia Brooker was born in Shetland and lives, works, writes and practises t'ai chi in Aberdeen. She hopes one day to deserve the title of Ninja-Librarian-Biker-Poet.

Tanera Bryden joined the Nairn Book and Arts Festival team this year on a freelance basis after moving back to the Highlands from London where she worked for national fundraising charity, the Art Fund.

John Burns teaches English and Tai Chi. He is the author of a book on Neil Gunn and Zen, a book on the vision songs of Bob Dylan (*Series of Dreams*), and a book of poems, *Open Sky*. He is also editor of *Southlight* magazine.

Paul F Cockburn is a Glasgow-based freelance journalist who writes on disability issues, performing arts, and culture. Recent articles and reviews have appeared in The Herald and Scotland on Sunday.

Linda Cracknell writes short stories, radio drama, and creative non-fiction. She was the

recipient of a Creative Scotland Award in 2007 for a project linking walking and writing. www.lindacracknell.com

Sally Evans is editor of Poetry Scotland. www.poetryscotland.co.uk

Dàibhidh Eyre À Drochaid a' Chòta. Tha dàin aige ann am Beurla air nochdadh anns na h-irisean Poetry Scotland agus Irish Pages.

Mandy Haggith lives in Assynt and writes in a shed with a tree-top view. In 2009, her novel *The Last Bear* won the Robin Jenkins Literary Prize for environmental writing. She can be contacted at hag@worldforests.org

Charlotte Haigh MacNeil makes her living from journalism and has contributed to titles including *Red, Elle, Psychologies* and *Healthy*. She is married to the novelist, poet and playwright Kevin MacNeil. Charlotte is currently working on a collection of short stories – visit her blog at charlottehaighmacneil.wordpress.com

Marcas Mac an Tuairneir À York bho thùs. Saothair leis ann an irisean leithid Cabhsair, Irish Pages, Poetry Scotland etc. Ag obair air cruinneachadh Deò an-dràsta.

Dàibhidh Màrtainn Leòdhasach ri bàrdachd, òrain, sgeulachdan is dealbhan-cluiche (tha e air Beckett a chur gu Gàidhlig). Stuth leis air fhoillseachadh san Herald, An Guth, The Year of Open Doors is an leithid.

Lisa NicDhòmhnaill A' fuireach ann an Ulapul agus an sàs ann Leasachadh is Clann le Gàidhlig.

Marion McCready's latest poetry collection, *Vintage Sea*, is available from Calder Wood Press (www.calderwoodpress.co.uk).

Donald S. Murray comes from Lewis but works in Shetland. A full-time teacher who is also a poet, author and journalist, his books include *The Guga*

Hunters (Birlinn), *Small Expectations* (Two Ravens Press) and *And On This Rock; The Italian Chapel, Orkney* (Birlinn). His latest book is *Weaving Songs* (Acair).

Thom Nairn: poet, translator, editor, critic. His 4th collection of poems, *Sky Burial* was published late last year. With Greek poet D. Zervanou he has published many books of translation. He likes cats.

Maggie Rabatski is a Harris woman who writes in both English and Gaelic. She is a 'Clydebuilt' mentee and Makar of the Federation of Writers (Scotland).

Julian Ronay A' fuireach anns an Aghaidh Mhòr. Saothair leis anns an duanaire An Tuil agus ann an irisean leithid Gairm agus Poetry Scotland.

Stewart Sanderson was born in Glasgow in 1990. His poems have appeared in a number of literary magazines, including *Gutter, Magma* and *Poetry Review*.

Davine Shutharlanach À Taobh Sear Rois. A' teagasg Beurla mar an Dara Cànan.

James Sinclair began writing in his forties. Publishing a pamphlet *Gulf Stream Blues* through North Idea in 2007. He is on the editorial committee of *The New Shetlander*.

Kathrine Sowerby is a graduate of Glasgow School of Art's MFA programme and Glasgow University's MLitt in Creative Writing. She is working on a collection of poems called *father's low birdsong*.

Shane Strachan is a PhD candidate at the University of Aberdeen writing a collection of short stories related to the fishing industry in the North-east. He edits *Causeway/Cabhsair* magazine.

Peter Urpeth A' fuireach ann an Leòdhas. na sgriobhadair is na fhear-ciùil a tha 'g obair aig HI-Arts an-dràsta.

Maggie Wallis lives in the Highlands. She has recently hand produced a small pamphlet, *Shades of Blue*, containing some of her short poems and available from maggiehenhouse@btinternet.com

Moray Watson is a lecturer in Gaelic Studies within the School of Language and Literature at the University of Aberdeen.

Mary Wight grew up in Melrose and lives in Edinburgh. Her poems have appeared in magazines including *Edinburgh Review, Eildon Tree, Gutter, Poetry London* and *Poetry Scotland*.

Terry Williams lives in Beauly and writes in a garret, with rooks and an 800 year old elm tree peering in the window.

Christie Williamson is a poet from Shetland, a father of two, and author of *Arc o Mòns*, joint winner of the 2010 Calum MacDonald Memorial Award.

Fiona Wilson grew up near Aberdeen and now lives in New York City, where she teaches literature and often recalls the lovely scent of gorse flowers. Her work has appeared in *Poetry Review, New Writing Scotland*, and elsewhere.

Dawn Wood lives in Perthshire. She has published *Quarry* (Templar Poetry, 2008), *Connoisseur* (2009) and *Hermes with Gift* (UAD Press, 2011).

Howard Wright lives and works in Belfast. Recent poems have appeared in *Arete, The Fiddlehead* and *Other Poetry*. His first collection, *King of Country* was published in 2010 from Blackstaff Press.

Where to find a FREE Northwords Now

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Shetland Arts Trust, Lerwick
Blue Shed Cafe, Torrin, Isle of Skye

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Woodend Barn, Banchory
Yeadons of Banchory
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Dundee Contemporary Arts, Nethergate,

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Stirling Libraries
East Lothian Libraries
Ewart Libraries, Dumfries
Gracefield Arts Centre, Dumfries
Byre Theatre, St Andrews
The Forest Bookstore, Selkirk
Prestongrange Museum, Prestonpans, East Lothian

Edinburgh

Blackwells Bookshop, South Bridge
Scottish Poetry Library, Crichtons Close
Bongo Club, Holyrood Rd.
Oxfam Bookshop, Raeburn Place
Elephant House Café, George IV Bridge
The Village, S. Fort Street, Leith

Filmhouse, Lothian Road
The Fruitmarket Gallery, 45 Market Street

Glasgow

Centre for Contemporary Arts, Sauchiehall St, Glasgow
Mitchell Library, North St.
Òran Mòr, Great Western Road
The Piping Centre, McPhater St.
Caledonia Books, Gt. Western Rd
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.

GET WRITING!

The Baker Prize 2012

2011 saw the launch of the Baker Prize Writing Competition organised by the Skye Reading Room/ Seomar Leughaidh. The response was fantastic – we were surprised to receive entries from all over the world. In fact, the competition was so successful that we’re doing it all over again this year. And for the Baker Prize competition 2012, we’re positively delighted to announce that *Northwords Now* is offering prize money and an opportunity for the First Prize winning entries to be published in the magazine. This is in addition to the opportunity for winners to read their work at the Skye Reading Room and to be interviewed and broadcast on The Reading Room Radio Show on CuillinFM.

Once again, the Baker Prize has prose and poetry sections for both English and Gaelic. We invite entries of prose up to 2500 words and poetry of up to 50 lines respectively. The theme for the competition is “Island Life”.

The closing date is midday on 30th November 2012 and winners will be announced at the Skye Reading Room in January 2013.

The first and second prize winners are invited to read their work at the Skye Reading Room Baker Prize Awards in February, where they will also have the opportunity to be interviewed and read their winning entries for broadcast on CuillinFM. If prize-winners are unable to attend the February event, they are welcome to attend a subsequent Reading Room or, if preferred, have their winning entry read on their behalf by the Skye Reading Room.

NORTHWORDS NOW PRIZES:

Prose (English) up to 2,500 words: £100 1st, £50 2nd

Poem (English) up to 50 lines: £50 1st, £25 2nd

Poem (Gaelic) up to 50 lines: £50 1st, £25 2nd

Please note: We are currently seeking sponsorship for the Gaelic Prose Section Prize and expect to be offering the same as the English Prose section

THE PANEL OF JUDGES ARE:

Gaelic poetry: Rody Gorman

Gaelic Prose: Morag Stewart

English Prose: Roger Hutchinson & Angus Dunn

English poetry: Kevin McNeil & Chris Powici

ENTRY FEES:

£5 for a first entry and £3 for additional entries in each section.

Payment of entry fees can be made via Paypal at the Reading Room website, **skyereadingroom.wordpress.com**

Full information and competition guidelines can be found at skyereadingroom.wordpress.com

Please send submissions (with appropriate cover sheet) to **skyereadingroom@yahoo.co.uk**

We regret we cannot offer any expenses to attend the Reading Room event nor return any submissions.
