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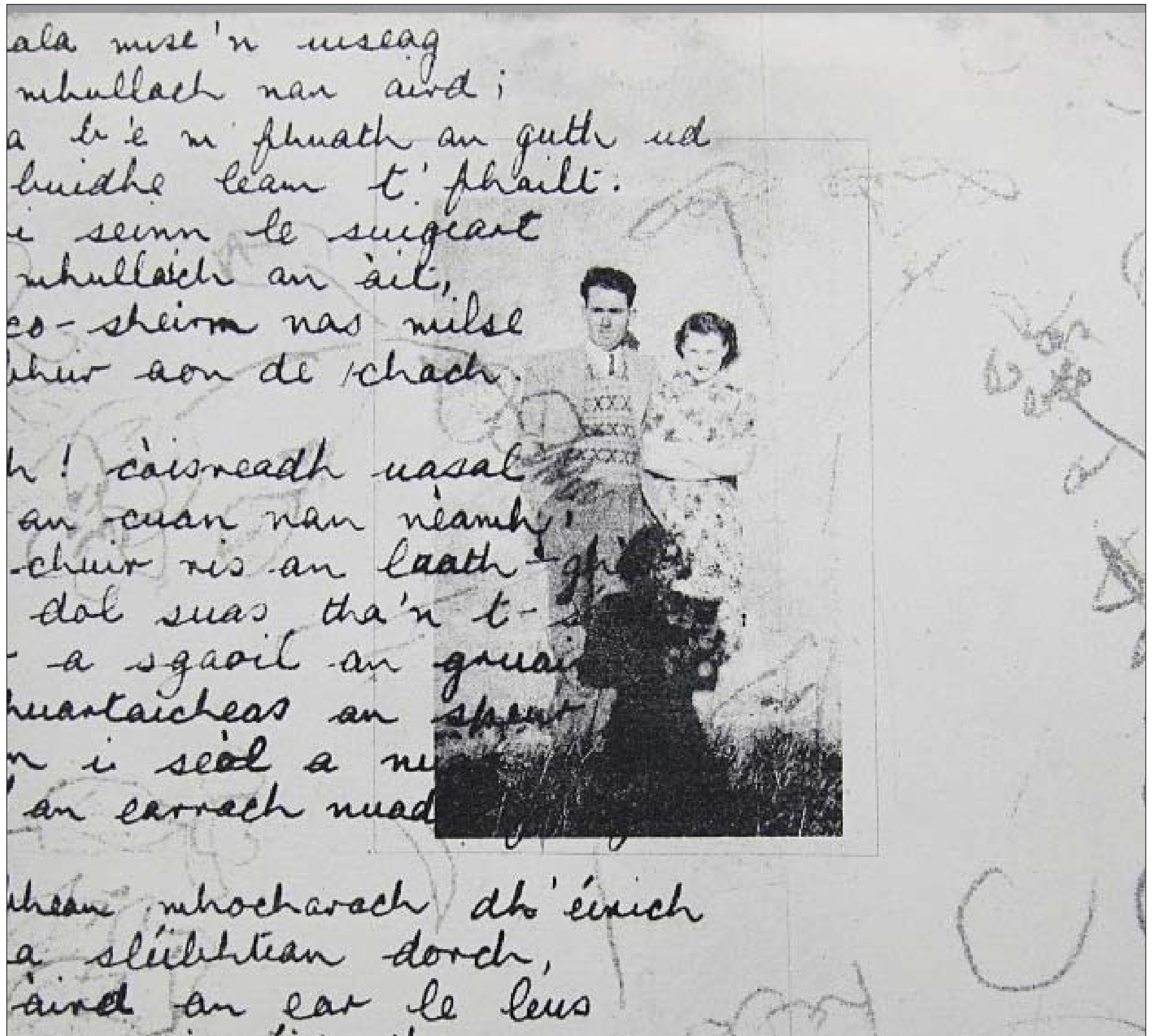
Northwords **Now**

Issue 23, Spring 2013

Island Lives: Prizewinning Poems and Stories from the 2013 Baker Prize

Donald S. Murray, Mandy Haggith and Kevin Crowe on Questions of Independence

New Poetry and Fiction, Reviews Section



EDITORIAL

Questions of Independence

YOU'D HAVE TO have turned the blindest of eyes not to have realised that the issue of independence is set to dominate Scottish politics for the next two years, and beyond. That why *Unstated: Writers on Scottish Independence* (Word Power Books) is such a timely book, and not just because the writers therein weigh up the pros and cons, the principles and pragmatics of independence. The question cuts deeper than that. From Shakespeare to Yeats, from Walt Whitman to Hugh MacDiarmid, writers (and other artists) have taken the lead in imagining their countries, in discovering – even inventing – what it means to be English, Irish, American and Scottish. And that is why I asked Donald S Murray not for a review of *Unstated* but for a response, a chance to put his own conception of Scotland on the page. As you'll see from his essay on page 3, he does not disappoint. You may not agree with his views, but it's an eloquent and potent contribution to the debate.

Questions of independence do not begin and end at Hadrian's Wall, nor for that matter in the debating chambers of Holyrood and Westminster. Independence is about more than national identity, as the articles by Mandy Haggith and Kevin Crowe demonstrate. They are not just practical accounts of publishing and bookselling; they're reminders that in an increasingly globalised and corporate world, the independence of writers and of the people who bring writers before the public, is a crucial aspect of any society for whom the word 'free' means something. Now that is a state of independence this editor is more than happy to abide by.

Finally, congratulations to everybody who entered the Baker Prize, organised by the Reading Room on Skye. As one of the judges I can testify to the high quality of entries and I'm pleased and proud to publish the best poems and stories in this issue. ■

CHRIS POWICI, EDITOR



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Photopolymer etching by Anne Campbell.
"Based on 'an Uiseag', 'The Skylark' by
Peter Campbell, Pàdraig Tharmoid Chalum,

Bradhagair. The verses are in my father's handwriting. The photograph is of my parents." www.annecampbellart.co.uk

Submissions to the magazine are welcome.

They can be in Gaelic, English, Scots 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.

Payment is made for all successful submissions.

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Highlands and Islands Enterprise
Iomairt na Gàidhealtachd 's nan Eilean

HI-ARTS

Independence Blues

Donald S. Murray Responds to Writers on Independence

FOR ALL THAT the images of politicians sometimes flickered across our TV screen, it was the nights when its signal spluttered and failed that really brought the politics of the wider world to my young life in the isle of Lewis. Older men might gather around the fire and speak about their days working on Hydro dams throughout the Highlands, mingling with exiled 'Poles' and Irish to bring light to our homes. They would talk about the Tunnel Tigers whose bones occasionally mingled with concrete when things went wrong, the disputes and dangers that marked their existence in these remote glens. My father might occasionally be drawn into speaking of these days, mentioning how – as a trade unionist – he had been involved in some of these clashes, losing his job one time through pressing for a works canteen on site.

These conversations provided me with a sense of theatre, one that was, however, more than matched by the arrival of the 7/84 company in the Nicolson Institute during my senior years at that school. Their play *The Cheviot, The Stag and The Black, Black Oil* was a history of both the Clearances and the struggle for secure land tenure in the Highlands and Islands. Told through songs, a pop-up book and pantomime-like villains, it transformed many of those who watched it, providing us with a sense not only of the politics of the Gaelic language which many of us spoke (and often, unfortunately, derided) but also of our native place.

For all our enthusiasm about the drama, however, there was a division in the way the audience of school-pupils responded to its words. For some, like me, it seemed to argue in favour of a form of 'international socialism', taking, for instance, the croftland on which we lived into community ownership, ending what control that landlords, whether they were Scottish or English, had on our lives. For others, the message of the play seemed to be all about the idea of nationhood, that Scotland could once again become independent and end the injustices its people had suffered in its past.

Nearly forty years later, it seems to me that I still remain more or less on the same side of the dividing line I occupied at that time. For all that it was more than a little bruised by the Blair and Brown years and their bloody misadventures in, say, Iraq, my faith in the 'Christian Socialism' espoused by men like my father remains relatively intact. Their principles brought us both the National Health Service and an educational system which allowed me – unlike my father compelled to leave at 14 – to attend that play in my senior years in school. It also – through the remarkable work of the Scottish Secretary of State, Tom Johnston and others – built the Hydro Dams that brought that flickering TV screen to my island home.

I write all this by way of preamble to this essay, establishing that – like all human beings – I am not an objective observer. My views were moulded by the experiences of my early



The writer standing upright in the winds of change
Photograph of Donald S. Murray by Mhairi Chaff

life; these talks around the fireside. Despite this, I am all too aware that the principles I believed in are no longer in the ascendancy in much of the Highlands and Islands or Scotland generally. Instead it is the views of the other half of that 7:84 audience which have grown popular. It is all a little like both the final days and aftermath of the Austro-Hungarian Empire when the novelist Joseph Roth declared 'People no longer believe in God. The new religion is nationalism. Nations no longer go to church. They go to national associations.'

If that were true in 1932, the year 'The Radetzky March' was published, his words seem to me to carry quite a bit of conviction in the Scotland of 2013. In this new faith, there is little doubt that the recent book, *Unstated: Writers on Scottish Independence* is both text and catechism, providing even in the poetry of such marvelous writers as Kevin MacNeil and Douglas Dunn a litany and missal for the movement. There are one or two writers who even appear to believe that as soon as the vote for independence is achieved, 'the kingdom of heaven' will be at hand. Social justice will be achieved. Our southern neighbours will follow our example. 'We could' even 'inspire the whole of the British Isles to become part of a larger European fightback' – though against what is unclear.

Haud yer horses. This is exactly what John Aberdein warns us against in his more measured contribution to the book – the triumph of hype. Over the last years in our shared trade of education, we have seen far too much of this from 'Parlamaid na h-Alba'. Meaningless catch-phrases like 'Quality Assurance', 'Curriculum For Excellence' and 'Higher Still' are parroted by both the Mandarins and MSPs mixing and mingling

there. It is also the case that, as John also points out, little has been done – apart from Jack McConnell's Land Reform Act in 2003 – to address what *The Cheviot, The Stag and The Black, Black Oil* was all about, the issue of land ownership, particularly in the Highlands and Islands but also Scotland as a whole. At the time, McConnell's piece of legislation was criticised by the SNP as being timid. In comparison with the silence that has existed thereafter and the recent embarrassing fiasco over Raasay's shooting rights, it now seems radical and bold.

This is also true of their commitment to that other element of the play – the Gaelic language. A number of years ago, we had the extraordinary spectacle of Seamus Alasdair Stiùbhart MacSteafain or Stuart Stevenson the SNP's erstwhile Minister for Transport delaying the introduction of bilingual road-signs for fear they might confuse and endanger drivers. One can only conclude that there must be mayhem among the motorists travelling across the mountains of the Dolomites. Sometimes there are even tri-lingual road-signs yodelling along the roadside there, all poised to ensure car-drivers and passengers alike plunge, distracted, to their deaths.

This notion that the SNP are essentially a 'conservative' party – distilled and bottled largely in Moray and Nairn and Highland Perthshire – with a left-wing fringe chimes with much of what I observed during my university years and early period of employment as a teacher in Stornoway. At that time, the Western Isles constituency was represented by Donald J. Stewart, a decent, kind man who smoked a pipe, was involved in the Harris Tweed industry and looked avuncular. Almost uniquely in the Scotland at that time, he operated without a Parliamentary office.

It was said that if you wanted to see him, he was always good enough to come and visit you at your house. It is not an offer that, I imagine, many of the more self-conscious of the islands' poor were anxious to take up.

There was also a single issue that perturbed me at that time. Weavers like my father were in a curious position in terms of their employment. Technically self-employed, they were still dependent on the mills for their supply of tweeds. This left them in a vulnerable position when no orders were available as they were not allowed to claim unemployment benefit for themselves or their families. It was not, I heard from SNP activists, a situation that could be altered in any way – until the Labour Party did this when the industry appeared to be in its death-throes in 2004.

All this has left me with a rather cynical attitude to independence. In short, I do not believe it will bring about any great transformation in society. The danger is, as Allan Armstrong predicts in his contribution to *Unstated*, the SNP will not dissolve itself once its goal is achieved but, instead, cling to power with all the tenacity of Tartan Superglue. In countries like South Africa, India and Ireland, this has not proved to be a positive experience. For all my good friend, Aonghas MacNeacail's words, I have not, for instance, always been cheered by the confidence of my fellow-Gaels in Ireland. It has sometimes generated its own failings, such as a feeling of complacency. In the Haughey years, in particular, there was a sense in which virtually every TD and journalist in Hibernia had retreated into 'hibernus' hibernation rather than bring out into sunlight the extraordinary scale of the corruption that was going on.

In short, whether by accident or design, I seem to have adopted the political attitudes of my present home in Shetland. It is not as idealistic as those of the Western Isles; no sense that either the flap of a red flag or blue saltire will alter the landscape very much. Instead, it is both pragmatic and practical. (When the independence debate opened up, the first question they asked was 'How will it benefit us?' – encouraged, no doubt, by the woeful performance of the MP whom the SNP trotted out to discuss the issue on one night's edition of *The Politics Show*.) They will also very quickly point out that if ever there was ever a Shetland version of *The Cheviot, The Stag and The Black, Black Oil*, the villains would be much like the ones that also (largely) existed in the Western Isles – the mainland and Lowland Scots.

And then despite all this, every single doubt and reservation, if independence ever came, they would, like me, take Alasdair Gray's celebrated advice and 'work as if you live in the early days of a better nation ...'

As if most people aren't putting enough hours in already. ■

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We Are All In This Together

POEMS BY GEORGE GUNN

Serenade

Jupiter is low in the Southern sky
Venus high in the East
the full Moon rises huge & orange
the sky is a harling of stars
in this the coldest night of Winter
the air is sifted

the frost spreads across the grass
with stiff feathered purpose
I touch its sticky anaesthetic skin
local & tickling & numb

I look up & in my minds map
the season swings on the gate of Morven
no longer a big green hill
but a small snow-shirted mountain
shape-changed & pivotal

as I walk up the Langwell strath
doglegged narrow & hill-cut
the night wind is a serenade of stags
like tides they move & meet
then move apart again
high up in the scree-slopes
a Birnam Wood of antlers
& among the secret harvests
of their fraternal nods
my instinct pulls me in

I pass upon the narrow road
the shades of my uprooted clan
Sutherland Bannerman & Gunn
their markers still manuscript the brae
across the burn at Altbea
for here the land is the stable element
not the weather of those who own it

they go these shades
to Badbea & the coast
did they hear the hooting night owl
as I heard it from the coppice
at the corner of the estate house garden
which then like them now
was not there

cut into rocks not far
from the occupied space
of the cradled township
which now consolidates a sheepfank
are cup marks for the old god
who swam between the trees
swims still in the founds
of the abandoned houses
the carved druid memory
of this silent devout column of ghosts
walking out tonight & every night
a forest of frost-lit antlers
the owl in the darkening pine

Badbea Revisited

We walked the old road back
from Berriedale to the monument
hugging the top lip of the Grey Coast
zig zagging around geos
& fractures in the granite
the road inspired & terrified
pock-marked every twenty yards
with the mean grabbing o-rings
of keeper set snares
the old dispensation cannot let go
human or rabbit
the scream hangs over the sea
here Finn walked from Dunster
a butterfly followed him as he went

omphalos at the edge
centre & periphery
time tradition & torture
over a hundred years
of being tethered to a thankless nation
the people came to Badbea
betrayed by the great liberal conceit
of “agricultural reform” & “market forces”
while Sinclair obsessed in London
about Cheviots & the Statistical Account
the dispossessed of the Eastern straths
came to a bleak hillside above a cliff
to construct something from nothing & its cousin
the generosity of the estate

control is the drug of choice
for the sadistic incompetents
who litter the lobby of history
with their ugly shoes
out in the Moray Firth
The Beatrice Field burns its wasting torch
in the distance we can hear
the neurotic hunting hounds
bark their kennet rage
over Langwell & Braemore
the estate has put a tourist panel
at the bottom of the path from the road
it asks in all cynical innocence
“Could you live here?”

at Badbea time stopped in nineteen eleven
all the books written
about the Highland Clearances
sit stacked like layers of sedimentary rock
on some off-shore sea-clett
we marvel at the ordinary
names on the four sides of memory
which at least was leavened with love
unlike the cordite cloud at Waterloo
where young Donald Sutherland fell
where the Highlanders should have bound their officers
& taken their Brown Bess muskets to join the French

History

The sky is low
the day is cold
the barley knee-high
in the whisky acres
on the train the young Wickers
are playing cheat-poker
while fiddling with their mobile phones
neither of the girls know the rules
& I don't know them either
listening to their ugly rap music
& staring out at potato fields
drilling rigs appear out of the mist
like Landseer's stag emerging
from the Cromarty Firth
squat on their footings
to dominate our uncertain decades
a rumour of boor trees
weep through their flowers
a hayfield blown into waves
pours out its tide of grass
like history after rain

We Are All In This Together

In Memorium Yannis Ritsos
(1909 – 1990)

A warm wind blows in from Libya
the surf crashes like white china
on the beach at Kommos
it power-surges sending tourists
searching for their cameras & beach-bags

earlier in the day we walked
through the broken wave
of the ruins at Gortes
where the Roman capital stretched
across the mesara & reached out
to North Africa with her galleys & legions

now olive trees embrace
the fallen imperial columns
much as the wave does
the girls legs at Kommos

Italian archaeologists dig out
a silted-up theatre
where hymns to victory
were choked on the dialogue of dust

I would take them here
those who burst for glory
I would ask them to speak to the olive trees
about empires and wars
& after two thousand years
the olive trees would say
“We feed the people”

THEY WERE LYING on the bed in his room, listening to Black Sabbath. Gordy watched as Sheila wound a strand of gold hair round her finger. She was propped on one elbow, the bedside lamp at her back.

“So are ye excited – what do ye think yous’ll do?”

She was smiling and he knew she was excited for him. He liked the way her eyes shone when she spoke. They were the same colour as the blue of her checked shirt.

“I dunno. See the university, I guess. Visit the castle, maybe. Da says there’s a hail street o’ pubs.”

He didn’t really mind what they did in Edinburgh. He was just excited to be seeing his friend again. Al had left for university in September and now it was almost Christmas. Strathy hadn’t been the same without him. There was no one to go shooting with on Saturdays. And, on his way to Boys’ Brigade, Gordy had to cut over Crabby Coull’s field on his own. Worst still, there was no one to sit with down by the beach, smoking No. 6s in the pale grass of the dunes.

The record came to an end, the speakers hissing to the gentle click of the needle. Gordy got up from the bed to choose another from the pile that lay on the chest-of-drawers. His hands caught a draught and he bent his head to the tiny cottage window. A bright moon hung in the clear winter sky and beyond the headland the black water of the bay was pitted with silver.

“What ye putting on noo?” Sheila asked.

He had bought three new singles this week. Sabbath and Purple, and a song called All Right Now by a new group called Free. They’d played it last Saturday night at the Big Hall, and he’d hummed it on the walk home, seven miles of country lanes with flecks of snow sticking to the grey tarmac.

He found the record in the pile, and tipped it out of the paper sleeve.

“You’ll like this,” he said, cueing the needle.

“Are ye nervous about the train?”

“No, no really.” He settled himself back on the bed beside her and she leant over him, an elbow on his chest.

“You’re dead grown-up since ye started work!”

It was true. He did feel different since he’d started work. Something about having money in his pocket.

“Do ye think... do ye think he’ll have changed, ye know... now he’s at the university?”

Gordy stared at the ceiling. “Course no. I’ve known Al forever.”

But still the question made him uneasy. Al had sounded different when they spoke on the phone. He said things like ‘just now’ when really he had meant ‘the noo’. Gordy wanted to tell him but felt like Al was too far away: just a voice travelling on a wire.

Sheila was humming to the record. He looked up at her, her face in the lamplight, feeling the warmth of her body through his jumper. She looked so relaxed – so content – singing along to the song. He couldn’t help himself, he had to say it. It had been on his mind for days.

“I... I love you, Shee.”

She stopped singing and looked at him, her lips parted slightly. After a moment, she lowered her eyes, and placed her head on his

With Her Head on His Chest

SHORT STORY BY L M MORGAN



chest, squeezing his sides. Her thin fingers felt surprisingly strong through his woollen jumper.

At first he’d just enjoyed the sensation of gliding, and the faint noise of the tracks beneath him that confirmed he was indeed on a train. A train going somewhere far, far south. Snow-covered fields passed the window, dark grey forests on the white hills. He was thinking about Sheila. How long were you supposed to wait before you told a girl you loved her? He thumbed the pages of his NME, wondering what Al would say.

By Perth, there was no snow and the countryside just looked grey and damp. He looked at his suitcase in the luggage rack – the one his mum had borrowed from Uncle Alec. Gordy had been washing himself at the sink when his mother came to tell him it was on his bed. She stood behind him as he soaped his chest with the flannel, a soft smile on her face. He didn’t like it when she stared at him like that – like he was the finest young man in the whole of Sutherland. The truth was that he was too skinny and his neck was too long, and his pale skin was almost purple around the chin, where his face was marred by pleuks.

It was getting dark when the train arrived at Edinburgh Waverley. Gordy stood in the dusk of the platform as the whistle was blown for a second time and the train pulled off. It felt strange to be standing there, in a city where he didn’t know a soul. He put the leather suitcase on the ground between his feet, and waited, jangling the loose change in his pockets, until finally he saw Al coming through the crowd.

“You’re late!”

“Gordy, good to see you! How’d you get on?”

Al looked different. His hair was getting longer – it curled around the collar of his leather jacket – and he had a blue silk scarf tied loosely at his neck.

They left the dark of the station and walked up onto Princes Street. It was a wide road with tall buildings on the far side. Al pointed out the sunken gardens that dropped away to the west of the station. Double-decker buses rumbled up and down the dusky road, their burgundy paintwork glinting under the yellow lights. Al led the way through narrow backstreets and up a hill onto another wide road called York Place. Here, the grey sandstone buildings were five stories high – six if you counted the dormers pointing up into the evening sky. It was cold but not as cold as home, and Gordy loosened the scarf that was tucked into his sheepskin jacket.

In the pub, Al introduced Gordy to a table of friends and went to get some drinks. Gordy was sitting next to an English girl with short, black hair. Her name was Lou and he thought she sounded like Angela Rippon. He found himself entranced by her perfume. Not so much the smell of it, which was musky, like cinnamon at Christmas, but the thought of it.

He pictured her applying it to the white skin just above the collar of her navy blouse.

Al arrived back at the table with two pints of lager.

“So how long have you two known each other?” Lou asked.

“Forever! Since we were wee!” Gordy said.

She smiled at him, biting her lip. “I’m sorry but I have no idea what you just said.”

“He said we’ve always known each other. We grew up together as kids,” Al said, sounding posh.

Gordy smiled at Lou. With her black hair and dark eye make-up, she looked like Cleopatra. Only prettier, definitely prettier. Al was still speaking. He was saying something about the time he and Gordy stole a bottle of whisky from Pa Munro.

“Who’s Pa Munro?” Lou asked, laughing.

“Gordy’s grandfather. Everyone calls him Pa Munro though.”

“Why?”

“I dunno, they just do... Anyway, Pa Munro had these new neighbours. A young couple from Liverpool. The guy was working at Dounreay.”

Gordy noticed that two of the guys at the table had lent in and were listening to Al tell the story. One of them tore the foil from a packet of Rothman’s and offered the cigarettes around.

“Now Pa’s about ninety, and he’s blind as a bat – wears glasses like jam jars.” Al paused to light his fag. “So these new folk move in and the lassie has her black undies hung out on the line. Now, as far as Pa Munro is concerned all underwear is white. Women’s smalls are white – simple as that. So this lassie’s black undies are flapping about on the line...”

Gordy watched Al smoking. He liked to hold his cigarettes like Michael Caine did in Get Carter, with all his fingers extended, the palm lightly cupped. Somehow it looked right here, in this pub in Edinburgh, when in the Big Hall back home it had always seemed a bit showy.

“Now... what I’ve haven’t told you is that Pa’s favourite pastime is shooting crows from the back window of Gordy’s house.”

“How do you mean – shooting them from the window?”

“I mean, Lou, that he leans out his window – with a shotgun – and he shoots the bastards! So next thing, Gordy’s dad has this lassie from Glasgow at his door, near hysterical, telling him that Pa Munro has shot her knickers to smithereens!”

“Wasn’t this story supposed to be an anecdote about stealing whisky?”

“Yeah, well I’m getting to that. Gordy’s dad is going mental at old Pa – raging he is – and so my good friend Gordy here spots his moment... he sneaks into Pa’s bedroom and nicks his bottle o’ Glenmorangie! And there’s no way Pa’s going to grass him up – not when he’s in so much trouble over the knickers. A full bottle it was, seal intact and everything.”

The guys laughed. Lou was blushing. Gordy

laughed too but he couldn’t help remembering that the bottle was half full, two thirds at the most. And what Al hadn’t told them about was afterwards, when they were sitting in a hollow in the middle of dunes, passing the bottle between them. Al told Gordy that he was going to apply to go to university. That he wanted to study engineering.

“To work at Dounreay?”

“To hell with Dounreay, mate – to see the world! You can travel anywhere with an engineering degree. Folk always need bridges!”

And Gordy had laughed. But really he had wanted to know why. He had wanted to point up to the lights above the bay, at the third house along, and say – There! That’s where you live! Why would you want to live anywhere else?

On Monday morning Al said he would walk Gordy back to the station. Gordy put his jeans, his shirt and his toilet bag back into the leather suitcase and flicked shut the brass clasps. He wanted to say goodbye to Lou before he left. Al told him where to find her room, on the next floor up.

Lou answered the door wearing a towel-dressing gown with floral pyjamas showing at the neck. She looked tired. Her hair was flat on one side, and black eye make-up was smudged around her eyes.

“Gordy! Are you off then?”

“Yeah. Just wanted to say bye.”

Lou leaned her head on the doorpost and smiled. She was still lovely, even with the smudged make-up.

“Can’t you stay another night? Ten pence a pint at the union on a Monday!”

He shrugged. “I can’t. Got work tomorrow.”

“Sorry?” she smiled, her eyebrows pinched.

“I’ve got work tomorrow.”

Lou giggled. “Sorry, it’s those Rs.” She bit her lip. “Well... we’d love to see you another time.”

“Yeah,” he said, looking through the door at the chair and desk.

“Bye then, Gordy.”

“Yeah, bye.”

She closed the door and Gordy was left standing alone in the hallway. A window was open on the stairs and he could hear students passing by, their voices carried up on the breeze.

It was gone three when he got off the train in Thurso. He hitched a lift as far as the turning for Strathy bay, and then walked down to the beach in the half-light. The tide was out and he sat up on one of the dunes and looked out to the dark horizon, where two yellow lights glimmered on the sea. The wind blew trails of sand across the beach, like whispers. He couldn’t help thinking how quiet the little grey houses looked, sitting there in the dark, above the bay.

His hands were cold. He blew on them and shoved them in his pockets. He remembered Lou staring at his hands over lunch on Sunday, and how he’d been conscious of the steel dust under his nails. How long would he have to be gone from the yard before the last of the black washed away? No, his hands would never be like Al’s or his friends’. But – steel dust, the white burn on his thumb – it gave him a strength they didn’t have. He knew what it was to work overtime, to not ►►

Three Sonnets

J.W. Lennon, 1957

BY JIM C. WILSON

This boy imagines he might be The King
while digging for rock with his Quarrymen.
Then, *Bring a little water, Sylvie*, he sings
in the cottonfields of his aunt's back kitchen.
Three chords later, there's that boy Paul, and praise
for pretty Peggy Sue. There's nylon strings
and nylon stockings; time to strum and wake
up Susie. This boy can now do anything:
even walk the streets in blue suede shoes
and a black leather jacket like Be-bop Gene's.
The Light Programme is playing light music
but John has learned all the words of *Lucille*.
He's going to Kansas City, the USA;
across the universe, yeah, all the way.

Battan

BY NICKY GUTHRIE

The scent of vapour rising, hidden streams,
Of budding birch, of garlic, earth, of Spring;
The tail-end wisps of winter nip that teem
With tales of triumph: animals that bring
Themselves unaided through the frozen moons,
So close to man, invisible, unknown.
I envy them the map that God has drawn
Upon their brains. We weigh the odds alone.
He gives us words and choice and prayer but
The clues he gives confuse and contradict.
Outlandish baying. Dogs? A stag in rut?
In March? Aroused, I wait. The flowers picked
Forgotten. Overhead a flight of swans
Sweeps clean the winter's dregs for summer dawns.

An Epistolary Sonnet

A response to Elegy XIX – To His Mistress Going
To Bed by John Donne

BY FRAN BAILLIE

Dear John, I must decline what you suggest,
I'm not a fertile country to explore.
Though you persist on knocking at my door
and think that I will yield at your behest,
this lady's not for shafting like the rest.
Your catholic taste in every kind of whore
is legendary, and good sir, what's more,
you really need to give that tongue a rest.
I won't be safeliest with one man manned,
your roving hands aren't licensed, they can't go;
my hairy diadem, you understand
is mine and I dictate when it's on show.
To enter in these bonds is to be free,
methinks you jest, old man! You're kidding me.

► sit down to dinner till eight o'clock, washing yourself at the sink while your stomach quaked. Would Lou understand that, appreciate it? Or did she just think he wasn't clever enough for university? He remembered the conversation with Al that morning. The way they'd left things.

"You should forget Lou, you know."

They were standing on the platform, waiting for Gordy's train. The sky was cloudless, the air fresh but not wintry. Al was wearing his leather jacket, and Gordy's sheepskin coat hung loose.

"What do ye mean?"

Al sighed and crunched up his nose. "I just... It's just that I'm sensing you've a wee crush and I don't think it's worth bothering about."

Gordy looked at him.

"You're not her usual type, that's all. Even apart from the distance thing."

"What do ye mean 'not her usual type'?"

"Look forget it, it's not important – anyway you've got Sheila."

"Ye mean I'm not smart enough for her."

Al had been looking out over the station concourse and now he turned back to face Gordy. He looked surprised, and then angry. "No, 'course that's not what I mean. I mean she usually goes for older guys, flashy dressers."

They'd stood a few feet apart after that, both with their hands in their pockets. Gordy had told him to go but Al had shaken his head. He'd waved to him as the train pulled off and Gordy wished now that he'd waved back.

Sitting on the dunes, he looked at his watch. Five thirty. The boys would be clocking off. Going home for their tea. Dragging shut the roller-door on the darkened workshop, closing in the smell of burnt metal for another night. He wondered what Lou would be doing. Getting ready to go to the union. Cheap pints on a Monday she'd said. He wondered if she would sit at the same table by the window. If she'd wear the same dark blouse that made her pale neck look like one of the Lladró figurines on his mother's mantelpiece. He suddenly felt in limbo, suspended above two different worlds. Not standing in the yard with Sandy while Frank locked up. Not walking down the corridor to Lou's room feeling a breeze from the window on the stairs. Just sitting where he'd always sat. He could sit here forever. Looking out at the bay and the dark headland.

He walked home along the tarmac lane, just as a wet snow began to fall. The wind sent flurries of it to cling to the gorse bushes in the ditch, and he knotted his scarf around his neck.

In the evening, Sheila called round to the house and they lay on Gordy's bed listening to Sabbath. When the song ended, she sat up, placing an elbow on his chest.

"Hey, I've got something I wanted to tell ye!"

She looked excited, her cheeks were flushed and her eyes bright. Her smile was so jubilant he couldn't help feel better.

"Aye, what's that?"

She paused, pursing her lips, then said, "I love you, Gordy Munro."

He stopped smiling. He pulled her head down to his chest and held her there for a while, cupping her soft hair with his hand. ■

Poetry

Saturday Morning

HUGH McMILLAN

Across the water on the Greensands,
two early morning drunks are fighting,
rolling over cut grass like lovers.
Here, balanced sturdily on a railing,
is a seagull, eyes cold as a Viking’s.
It is desperate for a crust
that’s nestled snug
in the dirt below this bench.
What brings us to these depths,
misfits from two noble species,
our holy grails pale things
made from flesh or pizza dough?
We will not be deterred,
not by this fine rain, nor instincts
of when the world was fresh
and the sun a diamond cut in space.
We watch each other,
it is a waiting game, decline,
and the river makes its usual
slow
horrified
way to sea.

Arrangement in Grey and Black:

Dealbh dhe Màthair a’ Pheantair (1871)

le James McNeill Whistler

MAOILIOS CAIMBEUL

Dealbh a tha dorcha is glas
Dhe màthair a’ pheantair fhèin
Ann an dreasa fhada dhubh
Agus i le lèirsinn dhian

Agus foighidinn gun smal
A’ meòrachadh air na th’ ann
Mar gum biodh i ag ràdh:
‘An e seo toradh mo bhroinn

Tha a–nise beò mar seo –
“Ealain air sgàth ealain” – fear
’Son na rinn mi ùrnaigh tric
Aig cathair Dhè rè òige mhear?

Ach chaidh e a shlighe fhèin,
Bha e righinn, fad’ na bheachd:
a–nis chì e mi mar thè
dhùr nach roghnaich tlachd.

Mise na mo shaoghal earbsach,
Ag ithe aig bòrd fear–saoraidh;
Is esan mar am mac stròdhail
Na gheòcaire an fhaoineis.’

Ach canaidh am mac ris fhèin:
‘Is iad na h–ealain mo threòir,
Tha mi dùinte ann an dath;
Tha mi na mo pheantair mòr

Aig a bheil inbhe is cliù,
A chruthaicheas bòidhchead fhìor
Le co–sheirm dhathan rèidh
Bhios mar cheòl nam ban–sìth.

Tha ise na saoghal fhèin,
Dùinte ann an glas agus dubh:
Am beàrn eadrainn cho mòr
’s a tha eadar tìr is muir.’

Tè le smuaintean naomha
Dhan fhear–ealain mhòr:
Coinneamh an dà shaoghail
Is dà sheòrsa glòir.
when it rains.

Changeling

BRIAN JOHNSTONE

the ewes cry for their offspring
who’ve rejected them
in death

cry for the skin
flayed in mitigation
that’s bodied round the orphan

a swift nick cut and peel
thrusting one identity
all four legs

into the being of another
the mother
wiser than the moment

knowing hers
as more than this
still bloody from the knife

more than smell and touch
the thrust and nuzzle
of snout on teat

more than cries
that echo from the holding pen
heave out her response

The Day the Rain Falls
Katherine Lockton

The lake is speckled with rain.
Each dot an echo of the last.

Swans pedal.

My eyes are wet. Life is melting.
I always do this.

This is the way it always is.

Kids jump in puddles, parents calling them.
But still they leap, mouths wide open, eyes grinning.

Seil

MAVIS GULLIVER

Ardencaple

Abandoned long ago,
and poached for stone,
only low walls remain
each crevice home to spleenwort,
wall rue, moss,
each family’s space so small
a rowan’s branches stretch
from wall to wall.

Small quarries where they worked
are overgrown.
From slate–strewn floors
and leaf–clogged pools
trees strain to reach the light,
cast shade on man–made cliffs,
slimed walls that drip and trickle

Grod

PÀDRAIG MACAOIDH

Tha tòrr an tairbh air a bhith a’ bòcadh
airson seachdainean a–nis, gun sgeul fòs
air sgioba na comhairle ga thiodhlacadh.
Tha na bà a’ cumail nan taigh–fhaire,
ged a tha tè no dhà dhiubh an impis
sgogadh nan cuimhne ’s nam bàidh,
an impis beachdachadh air an fheur ud thall.
Tha na coin, a rinn donnal ri boladh
an sgiorr san adhar, air preaslach
nan ròsan fhàgail, air tilleadh dha
iom–cheumnachadh nan gàrraidhean.
Tha corp na h–aon feannaig feòrachail
a–nis na iteag ’s na chnàmh. San dìg,
tha rodan a’ dèanamh diolaidh,
a’ freastal spreadhadh a’ ghais,
gus grodadh a chuirp a thionndadh gu dearc.

Pacman

PÀDRAIG MACAOIDH

’S dòcha gun robh, mu dheireadh thall,
nàdar de phact ann eadar thu fhèin
agus na taibhsean, rudeigin Faustian,
anns an robh an leth–bheatha acasan agads’
agus vice versa. Cha do thuig mi riamh ge–tà
a’ phuing a bh’ agad mun eagal agus caitheamh:
bha mi eòlach ort mar tàmh–baile,
flâneur beag buidhe a’ spaistrich tro sràidean
do phrìosain ’s a phàtran–griod on 19mh linn,
a’ feitheamh airson an diog a reòthadh tu,
a’ feitheamh airson error message.

Poetry

Showdown at the Red Barn

IAN MCFADYEN

They came down by Dungrianach, our place in the sun,
a gang of them, marauders from the moor;
between the rounded, wind-smoothed, red-flecked granite
boulders of the Ross.

They did not flit, like buntings, wagtails,
wheatears, linnets or the like:
this was a swaggering, a strutting flight.

Yet they could hover by Macdairmid-headed thistles
and pluck them bald, white strand by strand,
or land upon the spent rust-coloured clumps
of sheep-sorrel as light as bees
and strip them bare.

And it was there, down by the red-roofed barn,
that they faced up the cat (a Siamese,
with one squint tooth, called Pigeon-pie).

He was no danger:
they could just have taken flight,
but they were not for giving ground.
Sharp little balls of fury,
they fluttered their wings, flaunted their bellies,
shrilled their defiance and shot up and down
in a frenzy, like so many bungee-jumpers
at the ends of their tethers – some invisible matador
with this cloak of living rage,
taunting the hapless cat
(who veered off sharply, affecting indifference).

Dunnock, we thought, or sparrows.
But no: to our delight
these guys turned out to be a shower
of cheeky little twite.

Winter Trees

LIZ TREACHER

Afterwards we dress in the awkward silence of the hotel room.
Light glares through a gap in the curtains, making the dust jump.
She offers me an upturned hand and, picking up her watch,
I slip it over her tiny wrist, veined with winter trees.
I fiddle with the fastening, fingers feeling her fragile bones.
Years later I can still hear the click of the catch and the
dust dancing.

Drystane Dyker

ANGUS MACMILLAN

He settles to a rhythm beyond braille,
an unworded language
between eye and hand and stone, webbed
in a haptic grammar of heft and balance,
by the unerring eye that tongues the stones,
edge against jagged edge, knowing
what to pick up, what to leave aside.

He can see the line he intends across the hillside,
slanting beyond us, shaping a future tense.

in Blanchland again, November 2012

CHARLIE GRACIE

in the square there is nearly nothing
the post office, a deli, the closed doors of houses
Pennine stone frames everything in this hardly peopled place
visitors hide in the White Monk, eating broth

in soft late sunshine the hollyhocks breathe their last
the ranks of gardens squeeze final inches of growth
leeks, the skeletal ends of sunflowers, blooded haws
the walls of the houses are warm

over the field to the river
I pass a sagging line of washing, one side sun-drying, the other frosted
in the dark stretch of trees, the river skips over brown stones
oak, ash, beech lean over, nearly drinking from the wet rush

out into the horse path, a pine, high and soft barked
we hug, me and the soft barked tree
talk in hush about all things since we last met
the school closed
and the Consett works
the football field was flattened and drained
my father died
on Bale Hill new trees were sowed
and in squished-in houses
fire upon fire upon fire laid and spent in the warmed front rooms

the village sits in smoky sun
the same sun we saw years ago

Waiting for the Film

ANNIE PIA

I wish I was
A picturehouse girl,
All punk and patchwork
Rough knit socks, a scant covering
For that tattoo,
Your gift for a birthday I have now forgotten,
A kind of celtic branding, your style.
My hair is gothic geometry,
My lips are Hollywood, my face speaks tea rooms
I am geisha rather than Greek.
And we would talk intelligently, you and I,
If I was that girl,
About the rise of Latin America,
The red tents of Jacob.
And I would live in Portobello perhaps, with cats, a herb garden, terracotta pots
Fifties chic,
I would dress my ginger girl in charity shop dresses,
Listen to Women's Hour,
And seated in rattan sofas,
I would turn the pages of a glossy book,
Intent on Annie Leibowitz or retro Miyake,
Maybe re-read reliable Austen from a library close by,
I would holiday in Sweden
Play the mouth organ, ride on buses in oversized astrakan,
I would be that girl in a quiet corner drinking ale,
Simply waiting for the film to begin,
And once again, you are fascinated.

Publish & Be Glad!

Mandy Haggith Surveys the ebook Revolution in the North

MOST SMALL SCOTTISH publishers are now producing ebooks as well as their traditional paper products. Birlinn is putting their entire backlist out as ebooks. Sandstone Press has the same intention, except for a handful of graphic-rich non-fiction books, and Robert Davidson at Sandstone says that their ebook sales are about to outstrip paper sales.

Saraband are also producing all their books both on paper and digitally, and have noticed that ebooks generate worthwhile overseas sales, particularly to the Scottish diaspora. Sara Hunt said: 'Ebooks provide the opportunity to reach around the globe, without a distribution cost (financial or environmental, although of course the environmental costs of ereaders/devices are not a straightforward issue!) so finally people in New Zealand or Canada can find Scottish-interest titles without paying through the nose.'

Two Ravens Press produce ebooks when print sales have gone well and to catch an overseas market. They have taken a principled stand to epubliishing, producing them in a manner that allows them to be shared, unlike the standard Kindle format. In general, they found that ebooks were not working particularly well for them, until they started using the Kindle store on Amazon, which is where almost all the ebooks action is happening.

In the Highlands, it is individual authors who have gained most from ebooks so far. For example, Linda Gillard has found liberation as an independent ebook author, enjoying the freedom to write exactly what she pleases rather than following editorial requests to follow the norms of genre writing. In a blog post about her most recent ebook, a paranormal romance, *The Glass Guardian*, she said 'If I published the book myself, I could tell my story in the way I wanted to tell it.' Sticking to her own style has massively paid off. Her book *House of Silence* was described by her ex-publisher Piatkus as 'unmarketable', yet it has sold more than 30,000 copies so far and Linda is making a good living as an independent author. How many authors with publishing deals can say the same thing?

Linda has re-published several of her novels as ebooks, and also some new books, one of which is *Untying the Knot*. This is a romantic novel in her reliably readable and intelligent style, and as I have come to expect, at its centre is a deliciously complex and intriguing man. Magnus is a retired bomb-disposal expert who spent years in the army and is left with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). As in *Star Gazing*, in which the main character's blindness is integral to the tale, in this newer novel the character's problem is woven deftly into the plot. The story is narrated by Magnus' ex-wife Fay, and the text dances between her reflections and memories of the past, and the increasingly excruciating present. Much of the novel is set in a castle, known as Tully, a ruin that symbolises Magnus's shattered soul or perhaps the two character's relationship, damaged through war and painstakingly reconstructed. The narrator's creative work on a

patchwork of a family tree brings revelations about Magnus' past and Fay's own need to recover from the events leading to the couple's divorce. This is a marvellous story about healing and self-preservation.

The Survival of Thomas Ford, by John A.A Logan, is another success story. It is a gripping thriller about Thomas Ford, who survives a car crash in which his wife dies. Jimmy, the driver of the car that caused the crash, is a brilliant creation: variously described as a crow, a hawk and a parrot, he is sometimes ludicrous, always dangerous and his father is even worse. When Jimmy's girlfriend finds out his guilty secret she rashly underestimates her ability to benefit from the knowledge. Right from the start, it is clearly all going to end in trouble and as the plot twists the likely scale of the trouble escalates. Throughout, the story is inhabited by a cast of butterflies, birds and cats behaving in almost supernatural ways, adding a note of mystery and symbolic depth. It is compelling stuff, and it has been wildly successful.

John Logan took Linda Gillard's success as a model and put his book up on Kindle on Christmas Day 2011 and instantly started to gather readers. He had been waiting years for this to happen, because despite praise for his writing from agents, editors, film company staff and others in the publishing world who read his work, nobody actually signed on the dotted line to publish it. They have missed a trick. Asked if epubliishing is working for him, he said, 'I can certainly say yes to that. Within 3 months of epubliishing *The Survival of Thomas Ford*, I had my best week of downloads of the book, making £1000 from downloads in 7 days'. In 2012, *The Survival of Thomas Ford* won numerous awards, and it has now reached 30,000 downloads. John's literary agent will seek a conventional publishing home for his next novel, but he is relaxed about the result of their search, knowing that he can epubliish if mainstream publishers don't take it.

Allan Guthrie, another author with several books under his belt, chanced into ebook publishing when his publisher, Barrington Stoke, delayed production of the paper version of his novella, but agreed to let him have the digital rights and to experiment with epubliishing. *Bye Bye Baby* has been explosive on Kindle, reaching their top ten and netting him sales of almost 10,000 ebooks per month. He said, 'I like being in control of cover design, pricing, what length I write to, etc. And it's nice that I'm selling a lot more books than I ever did in print.'

Bye Bye Baby is a crime novella, in which a missing boy turns out to be long-dead and the police are more wicked than the apparent criminals. In these busy times, short novels, or long short stories like this have a welcome role for readers who want the plot twisting journey of a novel without the fully-worked character development of a longer text, or who want to stay a bit longer with the characters of a short story, without committing to them for several hundred pages. Perhaps these intermediate length narratives will find more

of an audience in the epubliishing world than they get in the sphere of conventional books.

Short story collections also seem to be doing well. *Best Man* by David Manderson is a collection of three substantial short stories about men. The stand out story is 'Inkerman', in which a car factory worker steals, piece by piece, all that he needs to build his own car. It's an atmospheric piece, the landscape in snow vividly drawn and the main story is interspersed with glimpses of a small girl meeting her father out of a brickworks in an earlier time. It invites the reader in to witness secret moments in the lives of working class people, showing us their quiet resistance and their dignity.

Steven Porter's collection *Blurred Girl and Other Suggestive Stories* is a varied gathering of stories, from brilliant flash fiction moments, such as 'Lisa's Birthday Party', which is a cover for something much darker, to longer pieces such as the moody 'Boxing Day in Muros', where a man tries, unsuccessfully, to make a new start in his life in Spain. The best of these are vivid, slightly off-kilter glimpses of the margins of people's lives.

Carol Mackay's short story collection, *Ordinary Domestic*, is full of sympathetically drawn characters. In 'Frozen Waste', a tramp who lives in a dump shows compassion to a runaway girl. In 'Decomposing' a woman skirts the extreme edge of despair after a miscarriage. In 'Ugly Duckling' there is an unsettling encounter with a man in a planetarium. Is he her father? There are some horrible men in here, in stories like 'Unrestricted' and 'Total Obliteration', and mostly I am drawn to the women, particularly a blind woman who finds a moment of joy in 'What mattered about the Dancing'. If you like short stories that give satisfyingly realistic snap-shots of a broad cast of characters, this collection is a must-read.

Carol Mackay started epubliishing when she was told the market for her work was too small. She said 'E-publishing is ideal .. because it means the texts are out there, available, at little cost to the publisher (i.e. no printing or distribution costs, no storage costs). There's no 'out of print' issue with e-publishing, either, and they can find a market globally. One of the advantages of e-publishing is that books can be any length. Novellas become more easily placed and sold. There's so much more flexibility, and this has to be a good thing.'

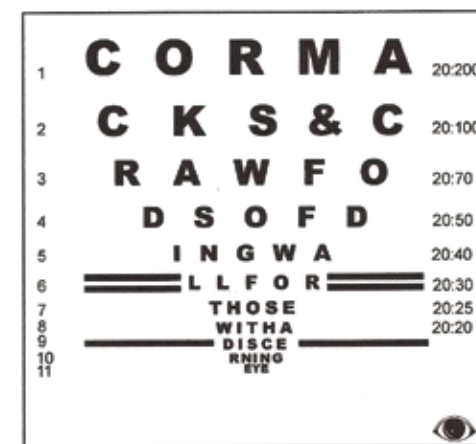
All of these authors use blogs and social networking to promote their books, and Steven Porter remarks that independent authors need to develop their business and marketing skills, as 'making waves in the world of self-publishing is a huge challenge to those with a more artistic or literary mindset'. Several of the authors have taken the advice to 'think like a publisher', effectively setting themselves up as small independent publishing companies rather than wearing the sneered-at badge of 'self-publisher'.

One such is Orla Broderick, whose first novel is the inaugural production of Council House Press. *The January Flower* tells of a woman coming to terms with her sexuality

as a lesbian. Mary abandons her council house in Skye, takes up with a no-good man and does everything the social services consider the wrong thing for a single mother. This immensely readable story has a lot to say about love and mothering, and its characters are as messy and complicated as people are in real life. Orla is already reading unsolicited manuscripts from potential authors. The book was produced simultaneously as an ebook, an audio book and in paperback, and the ebook is due to have covered its costs through sales within three months of release. There's still a sense that epubliishing is a pioneering activity. Orla Broderick said: 'I like being self published, I like having an ebook - it makes me feel a bit daring and adventurous!'

By side-stepping the mainstream publishing world's constraints, ebook authors are sustaining diversity and originality in the literary world. Independent epubliishing may be a way to resist what John Logan describes as 'the gradual succumbing to a general and longstanding process of dumbing down and homogenization'. It is certainly allowing the distinctive voices of Highland writers to reach an appreciative audience.

If this all inspires you to head into the epubliishing world, the Alliance of Independent Authors allianceindependentauthors.org may be able to help. ■



**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**

CRAIG WOKE. THE window was wrong; it was too far away. Then he remembered; they were in a hotel. He reached across the bed towards Jodi, but she wasn't there.

He listened in the darkness. He could hear Lily breathing evenly from the travel cot. Rain was splattering on the window. He pushed himself up on one elbow and squinted at his watch. The faintly luminous hands were at three o'clock. There was a strip of light along the bottom of the bathroom door. He flopped back down.

He was so tired. He closed his eyes but felt them twitching as if they were trying to read text on the inside of his eyelids. Too much driving, but they'd made it halfway. The B&B was a decent size; not just them and the owner. It would've been easier to go to a Travelodge by the motorway, but Jodi wanted something more homely. It was so homely it didn't have a lift, so he'd lugged all the baby kit up two flights of stairs to their room. She'd packed endless supplies for the visit, ticking it all off on her clipboard, but surely they didn't need all of it out of the car for one night?

There was still no noise from the bathroom so he pushed back the duvet and climbed out of the bed. The room was chilly and he was wearing only a T-shirt and boxers. He reached for his jeans where they lay across the chair, but then decided to leave them in case he woke the baby by flapping around putting them on. He eased past the travel cot that was wedged between the end of the bed and the wardrobe. The wardrobe door banged shut as he knocked into it with his hip. He froze. Jodi would be furious if he woke Lily. She didn't stir, and he carried on to the bathroom door.

He tapped lightly. 'Jodi?'

She answered, muffled through the door, 'You can come in.'

He turned the handle. The metal felt cold. He opened the door just enough to squeeze through, making sure light from the bathroom didn't fall across Lily's cot. He shut the door, blinking in the brightness.

'What are you doing down there?' he said.

She was sitting on the floor, her back resting against the plastic side-panel of the bath, her legs crossed like a child in school assembly, a novel open in her lap. She looked up at him.

'I couldn't sleep,' she said. 'And I didn't want to wake Lily by turning the light on.' She wore pink long-sleeved jersey pyjamas with a chunky grey cardigan over the top. Her blonde hair tied was tied back in a low, messy ponytail. There were dark circles under her eyes and dark roots in her hair.

'It's three o'clock in the morning!' he said.

'I just can't sleep.'

He was reflected in the mirror above the white basin: black stubble beard and a pale bald head, shaved so that he didn't have a circle of hair like an old man. He crouched down beside her. 'You must have slept earlier.' He tucked a wisp of hair behind her ear.

'I don't think so. I keep thinking about the journey, and seeing Mum and Dad, and Lily's feeds, and whether I've got all her things, and...it's just no good.'

There was a musty smell in here, probably from the plugholes. 'Come back to bed. Try and get to sleep,' he said.

'I've tried. I can't.' Her index finger was picking at the skin at the corner of her thumbnail.

He stilled her hand by covering it with

his. 'You can't stay here.' From where he was crouching he could see the pipes running down the back of the basin pedestal and he was on eye level with the toilet seat.

'I just want to read. It passes the time.'

'Jodi, please!'

'Just leave me alone.' She looked at him, her forehead creased, and mouth tight.

He stood, 'I'm going back to bed. I've got a lot of driving to do tomorrow.'

He edged back out of the room into the dark bedroom. He felt his way back to bed, pulling the duvet up, some warmth still there in its folds.

He lay in the darkness staring upwards. She'd been waking early in the morning for weeks now, whether or not Lily needed a feed, but not being able to fall asleep was new.

She had all-but cancelled the trip a few days ago; talking herself out of it while she was ironing last Sunday. 'I saw it on the news,' she had said, setting the iron down on its end with a clunk. 'It's an epidemic. A child died.'

'It probably had asthma or something.' He was sitting across from her in their kitchen-dining room, his newspaper spread across the pine tabletop. He was trying to ignore the Tesco carrier bag of exercise books on the chair next to him. He turned a page of the broadsheet.

'Why don't you listen to me?'

He looked up. She was watching him from behind the ironing board with her best teacherly glare.

'I'm listening.' The bright red teapot-shaped clock on the wall behind her showed that he should be getting on with his marking, but it was hard to read the exact time; its thin hands got lost in the large polka dots.

'They said it's much worse down in England.' She folded one of Lily's vests, then unfolded it again and laid it back down on the ironing board.

'It's only the 'flu.'

'What if she gets ill? We'd never forgive ourselves.'

'If she gets ill then the likelihood is that she would get better within a few days.'

'We'll be miles from our doctor. How would we get help?' She folded the vest again.

'We'll be in London. There are thousands of doctors.'

'What if we all get ill and neither of us is well enough to look after her? What if I get ill and I can't feed her?'

'That won't happen.'

'It might.'

'It won't.' He folded the newspaper.

'How do you know?'

'I don't.' He laid the newspaper down on the kitchen table gently, trying not to show his frustration by slapping it down like he wanted to. 'But, it's very unlikely.'

'I think we should stay here where it's safer.' She ran the iron up and down the leg of a pair of jeans, squirting short spurts of spray. 'We should get some extra food in too, in case the epidemic gets bad.'

'What?'

Halfway

By LYNDsay MARSHALL



'The supermarkets might not get their deliveries. There might be panic buying.' She moved the jeans so the other leg was on the board and she squirted the water again. 'We should make sure we've got plenty of tins. And some long-life milk.'

'Jodi, listen to yourself. This is crazy.'

Somehow he'd managed to get her to think straight, after a lot of talking, but maybe they should've cancelled the trip after all. He turned onto his side and stared at the strip of light at the bottom of the bathroom door. She used to be up for anything. She'd led a school trip to Aviemore last year, responsible for sixty P7s for a week, the sort of thing that made him shudder to think of it; a day-long field trip was his limit. He closed his eyes and exhaustion dragged him back into sleep.

'Can we go to a supermarket?' she asked next morning as he was packing the last of things back into the car.

'Why?' he glanced at her quickly, then turned back to the hatchback, squashing and pushing the baby's changing bag to make it fit into the last gap between the suitcases and the car roof.

'I need a better gift for Mum.' She was jiggling the handle of Lily's buggy gently. Lily watched him with round blue eyes. 'I wish I'd had time to paint something this year.'

'The biscuits are fine.'

'I don't think so.'

He could feel his patience starting to stretch. He dropped the changing bag down onto the gravel of the car park.

'Careful!' she said, and she bent and picked it up.

He lifted a suitcase out of the boot and set it down next to the buggy.

'I want to get a digital thermometer too,' she said.

'What for?' He turned round and stared at her. Not this again.

'In case Lily gets ill.'

'She's not ill.' He pointed at Lily. 'She's fine.'

'I want to get one. Then I can check that she's well.'

'But we know that she's well. Look at her!' His voice was rising.

'Shhshh. You'll upset her.' She bent to tuck the pink sheep-patterned fleece blanket round Lily. Then she pulled it completely off and turned it round. 'That's better, Lily,' she said, 'the baa-lambs were upside down.'

'We need to get on the road,' he said.

'It won't take long. There's a Tesco on the edge of town. I saw it yesterday.' She pulled the blanket off Lily so that she could take her out of the buggy and put her into the car.

He couldn't find them. He walked down the middle of the store, checking every row as he passed each aisle-end. He squeezed between an abandoned trolley and a display of mince pies that had been built in the middle of the walkway. This was such a waste of time. They'd never make it to London before dark at this rate. No sign of them. He reached

the wine section at the far end of the store; rows of bottles made a hard shiny wall that glinted reflections of the bright store lights back into the empty aisle. How had he missed them? He turned and began to search again. He should've got a basket; his arms were beginning to ache carrying a six-pack of water bottles with a packet of chocolate digestives balanced on top, ready to roll off and smash to the floor at any moment. How could she have managed to disappear in the time it took him to choose a few things?

He rounded the end of the nappy aisle. Jodi was kneeling in front of the Pampers, apparently trying to see under the bottom of the shelf.

'What are you doing down there?' he said. He dumped the shopping into the basket that was next to Lily's buggy.

Jodi looked up. Her face was red, puffy and wet with tears. 'I can't find it!'

'What?'

'Her shoe!' She stood up and pointed at Lily. 'She's lost her shoe!'

'Ssshhh,' he said, 'stop shouting.' He looked down at Lily. Her legs, chubby in stripy pink and red tights, were dangling and jiggling. She had a bright purple, soft leather bootee on her left foot. It had a butterfly on the front.

'The stupid woman just doesn't care!' Jodi pulled at her pony tail, pulling the end round to lie over her shoulder, and tearing her fingers through its length, over and over.

'What woman?' What was she talking about now?

'I went to see if it's been handed in, and the woman didn't care.'

'Well. It's ...'

'I was going to keep them for her memory box. They're special. I have to find it.' She moved as if she was going to bend down and start looking under the shelf again.

He reached towards her and held her arm, 'It's not the end of the world.'

'What would you know?' She shook off his hand. 'What would you know?' She hit out at Craig's chest with her fists, 'What would you know?'

'Stop it!' he said, grabbing at her wrists. 'You've got to stop it. You're making a scene.' He looked around. There was a woman pushing a toddler in a trolley looking at them. Lily started to cry.

Jodi unclenched her fists and sagged within his grasp. He let go of her wrists. She wiped at her face with the open flat of her palm. He crouched down next to Lily as she wailed with a wide square mouth, her eyes screwed up tight. 'It's alright little-Lily-lamb,' he said, 'Everything's alright.' He pressed at the buckle at the centre of the buggy harness, but it just wouldn't give. His thumb slipped off. Lily wailed, pushing her body upwards against the straps, making it harder to get hold of the buckle. He pressed again, the buckle unclicked and he could pull Lily free and lift her up.

'It's OK,' he soothed, as he held her on his shoulder, rubbing her back. 'Everything's OK.'

Jodi was staring into the empty buggy. Lily was quietening down.

'I think we should go home now,' said Craig, 'maybe make a doctor's appointment?'

Jodi's head snapped up, 'Does she feel ho?'

'Not for Lily.'

She stared at him with a deep crease between her eyebrows. Then she nodded slowly.



Poetry

If She Could Tell It How It Is

PAULINE PRIOR-PITT

would she say
she's in a foreign country
under siege

walking through rooms
she can't remember
searching for her babies

where strangers
ask questions she can't answer

tall men tell her
she's their mother

and try to hug her
when she shies away

in this house
she has lived in
for more than fifty years

but keeps begging to be taken home

Isle of Lewis 1919

KATHARINE SCAMBLER

Freezing tides spat back wreckage
in rhythms
incomprehensible to the human heart.

Dark water yielded the ship's secrets
over days, months
and decades mute with grief.

Women were widows north to south;
a brittle, black backbone of the island.
Daughters learned a landscape of shock.

This was worse than war.
Boys grew up watching the sea
that swallowed fathers, uncles, brothers.

They knew the ocean as a thief of men.
The waves crashed and roared.
No-one spoke.

camhanaich

GREG MAC THÒMAIS

camhanaich an latha ùir
dè thig na chois?
ciad ghathan na maidne
a' tuileachadh na h-albainn
le solas is dòchas

ar seann dùthaich
air stairsnich a slighe ùire
a brang a' teannachadh
mus bris e na mìle bloigh

bàs an sgioba

GREG MAC THÒMAIS

a bheil sinn brònach an dèidh do bhàis
thusa a sgar mo bhaile-sa is ceud baile eile
nan dà threubh, dealaichte, briste
ginealach an dèidh ginealaich
a thug air pàiste èigheach air a nàbaidh
“a phàpanaich shalaich ghrànda a tha thu ann”
a thug leisgeul dha mathan airson dòrn a thoirt do
mhàthair a chuid cloinne
a chionn 's gun do dh'fhaighnich i dè an sgòr a bh' ann
chan eil mise duilich ged a dh'àraich na seann laoich mi
cooper is mcCoist is laudrup
thig ainneamhaig ghorm beò às an dust agad
leònte is i a' casadaich is a' plubraich
ach i fhathast a' moladh a' bhanna-sìoda a chosg m' athair-sa

After Your Death

JAMES ANDREW

Wind yowls over the land, shaking
bushes, and razing plants. No trees
shudder. Their saplings were wrenched out.
The bracken and heather writhe before the blast.

Sheep graze stubbornly, but seem ludicrous
as they ponder the furore served up with their grass.
The waves rampage towards the headland.
The gale and sea shriek like something alive.

A screeching gull sounds like something dead.
You and I passed here, but now
you're gone. Our laughter no
longer rebels against storms.

Ballast Bank, Troon

GORDON JARVIE

They told us Troon's coal-boats
used to return from Ireland empty
apart from a dark ballast of Irish soil.

The ballast became the town's Ballast Bank,
a raised plateau stretching half a mile
along the shoreline beside the harbour.

They told us this was the only place
in Scotland where wild shamrocks grew,
so we hunted for them as far as the sawmill.

We never found any, a childhood disappointment,
and we decided the soil wasn't Irish at all
but dredged instead from the adjacent harbour.

The Ballast Bank still makes a vantage point,
a look-out for kids to spy flying washing lines
to landward, and ships plying the Firth of Clyde.

It gives forby some shelter from fierce westerlies
whipping across the ocean – another Troon feature
being its trees all leaning sideways, drunk.

In my late teens I followed the Troon coal-boats
to attend university in Ireland. The Derry quays
had coalyards along the Foyle, below the campus.

My room-mate's dad was a coal merchant
in The Diamond, Donegal. Troon's coal-boats
sailed there too . . . Imagine! Only connect.

Such links were all unlooked for
in my sheltered youthful Ayrshire world,
but I was well pleased by these connections.

Furtachd

JULIAN RONAY

ann an ceallan prìosain
fireannaich aonaranach agus cràdhte
ri fèin-bhrodadh air an oidhche
san fhuachd
saoghal neo-shuimeil
a' briseadh na mhìrean
mòmaidean theth fhallasach san dorchadas
furtachd sealach
na cneadan agus eacaoine
a' cur a mach
stealladh sil

sàsachadh miann
a bhith coltach ri dia
a bhith òirdheirc
a choinneachadh ris an neach
a tha eòlach ort
chan eil feum air faclan
an cràdh a tha a' ruigsinn cho fada air ais
a dhèanamh greim air an seud
an seud
a shlànaich an cridhe dhe gach tinneas

ISLAND LIVES

Baker Prize Poetry Competition

Photographs by Donnie Mackay
www.photohebrides.co.uk

Winning Poem

The Moving Island

BY DEBORAH MOFFATT

*It was a desolate island, stony and bare, without trees, without grass.
On a shore without sand we ran the boat aground
and there on the boat the man of God remained, no fool he,
while we, in vigil and prayer, passed the night on the barren island.*

She saw the island as she wanted it to be,
saw beauty in the silver-black water of the lochs,
in the violet-grey grasses of the bogs,
in the cold blue stone of the hill-tops,
in the amber warmth of a man's eyes,
in the bottles lining the shelf above a bar.

*In the morning, after Mass, we took all we had from the boat,
the raw meat, salt for the flesh, the few necessities left to us
on our quest to find the blessed island, the promised land,
our Holy Father's will our own, our bodies in his hands.*

More than a life on the island, she wanted the island to be her life,
wanted to be defined by the rocky cliffs, the pebbled shores,
the bare hills, the long winding roads, the remote bothies,
the silent men, the wind in her hair, the muddy bog at her feet,
the red-brown murk of peat staining her bare skin, drawing her in,
pulling her deep into the very heart of the island.

*With the few bits of driftwood that we found scattered about the island
we built a fire and set a pot to boil, and as the flames began to rise
we felt a strange unease, the ground heaving beneath our feet,
the island moving in a great wave from one end to the other.*

Perhaps she wanted too much, tried too hard. She made mistakes,
misjudged the depths, the distances, the solidity of the rocks,
the liquidity of time, the warmth of a man's eyes. Silences stretched
from one end of the island to the other; certainties slipped,
and through the bottom of a glass she saw what she had missed—
the instability of the island, the subsidence of trust.

*Stricken with terror, we ran from the island, leaving all we had behind,
crying for protection, our hearts full of doubt, our faith sorely tested—
for it wasn't lost on us that our Holy Father had never left the boat,
and that all along he must have known what sort of island it was.*

As she tethered her clothes to a rope in a howling wind,
she heard, in the distance, the music of the pipes, a slow march,
the lop-sided beat of the retreat, and felt stray notes falling like tears
on her face, or perhaps it was nothing but the wind she heard,
nothing but rain on her face, the piper and his music only a memory
she was preparing to have after she had left the island.



*As we set sail, we saw the island moving away from us,
as if the island had a life of its own, a life that could never be hers,
our poor fire still burning on the creature's scaly back,
as if it had turned its back on her, smoke rising from the hills
the fire we had started in ignorance and desperation,
in silent reproach, as if she alone were to blame for the damage done,
to satisfy our needs, never thinking of the harm we did,
the eroding trust, the uncertain silences, the deceptive welcome
never imagining that God's will would one day lead us astray.
of an unstable island, the transient passions at the bottom of a glass.*

Runner Up

Lewisian Nights

BY GARRY MACKENZIE

Abandoned air force buildings — mess hall,
dormitories, clifftop cells where visions
of war were drawn from a metal sea —

have become a village, concrete shells
that sheep wander like tinkers. In the cold war
of wind and land, two crofts remain,

and pillboxes black with peat
guard a beach whose sand
was sucked into the sea.

Cows stand in the rain. Inside we drink
and talk of ferry crossings, first impressions,
sitting in a croft house kitchen

built for radar operators' wives.
At each pause in conversation
we contemplate the inner exile.

Later, our hostess lifts a gun
and none of us is shocked or laughs
as feathers fall near the cattle trough:

a gull flies west with the sun, lead-poisoned.
Night sweeps its ash into the sky.
A bus rattles at the end of the road.



Highly Commended

Invasion

By ALISON BARR

Ropes have minds of their own.
They migrate to one another,
corkscrew across salty seas,
multi coloured DNA spirals.
Congregate in bundles.
Some stranded on beaches,
brilliant Bluefire jellyfish,
long tentacles trailing.
Some, washed up swirls,
mini-galaxies
draped over black rocks.
Some, net-intact,
vibrant orange, fisherman yellow,
concertina diamond jersey patterns.
Some brittle with age, sun baked,
degraded, weathered, weakened,
at a touch breaking into powdery filaments.

Assorted lengths float around
deep sea orifices and eddies,
hang around in crisscross rope shoals.
Swirling, shifting slowly, catching penetrating light rays.
Natural hemp, woven, spliced, pleated, knotted,
rough ends frayed like lions tails.
Nylon, chemical blue, orange, yellow,
white, polished, ends melted.
Lost overboard from moorings, nets, rigging lines.
Drifting for days and decades.
Thin, thick, twisted cords, curled, snake entwined,
hitches, stopper knots, plaited.

Where do they all go in the end? To rope heaven?
To a giant universal rope brain? With rope synapses
pulsing out messages like an international homing beacon.
Universal assembly harvested from ice scattered northern seas,
warm southern waters.
Modern art flotsam birthed from tankers, P and O's, Nile sloops,
Hebridean yachts and local fishers, Dover to Calais Norfolk line,
Mediterranean cruisers, shiny red funnelled Cal Macs, Japanese sampans.

Big tangles washed up on beaches all over the world
where eyes cast over them and ghost ships cast off.

Highly Commended

Fàgail

By ANDY JACKSON

He is the last of all to leave this place,
waiting for the Admiralty sloop, a refugee
pursued by no-one. Hands like claws,
his scabrous skin the pallor of the sea,
he wears the North Atlantic on his face.

His home is ceded to the slew of gulls,
immutable chaos of beak and feather,
the only real government here. The fall
of man approaches, low pressure
roaring in, a revolutionary squall.

Throughout inconstancies of weather
he has clung like topsoil to the fact
of this isle, but, as would a doomed lover,
it now pushes him away, a wordless act
of kindness, knowing it is over.

The final parliament dissolved, the vote
not carried, it is time to face the sea
again and set adrift the seaborne note
that says that you were here, that *we*
were here. Now, step onto the boat.



THE BEACH in the American movies on television is very different. People drive there in red cars that reflect the sunshine. They park in long, hot rows of tarmac, in between men selling balloons. They lie on broad ribbons of sand and watch each other play volleyball. Behind them hotels rise, flat and glassy. Everything shines. When I go down to the beach to help my da take the sheep in, I step on a rock slick with bird poo and algae and land in seaweed up to the top of my boot. Everything smells of dead seal. I am fairly certain all this is some sort of cosmic misunderstanding.

“Come along then, Grace Kelly,” says my da without sympathy.

The hills behind us are sodden and brown, and the sheep don’t want to come. I lift my hood and pull my elbows in, a sheep monk. Massive and orange, my da tumbles down the cobbly sand ahead of me, heyupping with brisk claps. He is clearly complicit in the cosmic misunderstanding. I reach down and peel a strand of seaweed off my boot, along with a clump of wet sand, and cast it away from me with an excellent haughty gesture. This is completely wasted on sheep, of course.

In his other life, when we all lived in Kirkwall together, my da was a perfectly normal shipping agent. I would guess that the sheep are a midlife crisis. In those beach movies, people who have midlife crises learn to play the electric guitar or have affairs or become Buddhists. As far as I know, my da has never had an affair, and he is tone-deaf. As for Buddhism, I’m not sure if it’s possible to be one if you’re a liberal democrat, and my father is (was?) the recording secretary for the Orkney Liberal Democrats. I should probably look up how the two relate. Anyway, a midlife crisis is one thing, but I am fairly certain that he’s forgotten that I also have a life. In my early-life version, Sunday means sleeping late, birthday parties, going to the shops, watching films at the Picky Center, and takeaway with Mum. Sheep aren’t involved.

They’re all huddled together at the other end of the beach, where the seaweedy cobbles straggle out to a blip of shale cliff. They face my da in that way sheep have, panicked and defiant at once, like they could go either way between committing collective suicide or trampling the flimsy human. If I had to like one thing about sheep, it would probably be that: you never quite know what they are going to do. My da closes in on them, and they draw together, evil-eyeing him. My job is to stand here, blocking off the rest of the beach, so that when the sheep come to this point they’ll have to turn and run up the hill. They’ll stay up there, eat grass, have a bunch of ugly scruffy lambs, then come back down here for the rest of the year—they only get to be normal sheep for a few months. Sort of like me, they are victims of a cosmic misunderstanding. Maybe one day they’ll just evolve into selkies and have done with it.

The sheep are starting to shuffle this way. My da is still whooping like a lunatic, his claps sucked into his gloves and spit out as dull thuds, and I can only imagine they are getting sick of it. Moving back a few steps, I startle a mallie off the bank and he flips his wings and glides off, scolding me with smudgy eyes. Under my feet, the cobbles rub up against each other with a hollow, echoing scrape like grinding teeth, vibrating up through my

A Few Things I Know About Sheep

Baker Prize Short Story Competition Winner

BY JULIET LAMB



body. It feels as uncomfortable as chewing foil. I had better stop moving.

The day is dark with near-rain. Already the beam from the lighthouse at the dock cuts through the scraggly base of the clouds overhead. The only lighthouses in American movies are in the distance, and the only boats are elegant sailboats and those fast ones with huge arms sticking out the sides. They don’t have big blocky drab-colored ferries, with signs inside saying No Dirty Overalls On Seats. Come to think of it, they don’t wear dirty overalls, which is clearly what my da has on under his orange jacket. I do an excellently pitiable sigh and step again just to feel the stones grind. Possibly I have done something to deserve this torture. I might as well make the most of it. Suffering is meant to be good for artists. If I am ever called upon to play the wife of a drowned sailor, maybe, or a mysterious enchantress of the waters, I can channel this experience to bring depth and pathos and realism to my work. In my acceptance speech I can thank my father who, by usurping my childhood, made me the artist I am today. I am fairly certain it will be very moving.

The sheep are coming toward me now, not running, but definitely walking. Every now and then one of them checks on my da, like they still might be thinking about making a break for it. Somehow the noise of them all walking at once isn’t as bad as me on my own. All the individual grating-stone noises, differently pitched, come together to make an echoing crunch like boots in snow. I crouch a little so that they won’t see me and panic. From this angle we’re the same height, and they look like bigger versions of the cobblestones, grey and round. A line from a school poem comes into my head: Two mingled flocks: the sheep, the rocks. I scoot back into the seaweed and stay low. My da bobs orange behind the sheep, close enough now for me to see his expression. It’s funny the way he looks, concentrated, like all he can see is sheep. He bites his lip, the same as mum says I do when I’m working hard on something. I have this sudden weird feeling that the sheep are connecting us together, like they’re some kind of buzzing electric wire leading from him to me.

When he gets close enough he looks at me and nods—NOW—and a shock pumps

through me and pushes me up, tall and wide. “You shall not pass,” I thunder, and from behind the flock I hear my da laugh. I laugh too, and it feels like I’m pulling the laughter out of the air. Wildly, the sheep roll their eyes and swivel their heads, moving in confused circles with a cacophony of grating stone. It is a moment of supreme chaos that I am fairly certain has never before been seen: humans and sheep churning, yelling, slipping on seaweed. I go down and spring up again, waving my arms. The sheep try to get past me but they can’t. I am invincible, a force field. There’s a whoop that sounds like my da’s, but after the second one I realize it’s actually me.

It must take only a few seconds of confusion before the sheep right themselves, accept the inevitable, and file up the slope and through the gap in the fence. My da springs up behind them and slams the gate. He turns to look at me, his eyes bright and wild, with his hood fallen back and the bald part of his head beaded with fog. I remember the way I used to run up and put my arms around him when he’d come home at night from his office, wooshing in with his cold overcoat and carpet smell. The thought pushes the air out of me, makes me feel tired all of a sudden. But he’s waiting for something, so I raise my fist in the air and stretch out a grin.

The croft used to belong to my da’s da’s da’s brother, who was a genuine hermit and all twisted up like that one in *The Tempest*. I never met him personally—he died when I was wee—but my da used to tell me stories about visiting the old man in his hut when my da was my age. He wasn’t scary, according to my da, but gentle and soft, with a massive beard and a quiet voice like old shoe leather. He ate mostly sheep meat and fish he fished himself and vegetables from his garden, and he made tea out of nettle and thistles—“like salty water with dirt,” says da. They would bring chocolate biscuits when they came to visit, which were supposed to be a present for Uncle Angus, although he never ate them: they were just so da and his brothers would have something to eat besides nettle tea and fishy-tasting tinned rhubarb. Sometimes, grandda and da and his brothers would help with the sheep, which is how da knew what to do with them when he moved out to the croft, I think.

It’s hard to imagine my huge grandda visiting the croft house, which is peedie. Da and I fill it up. The only other things inside are one extra chair, a table, a tiny burner for cooking, and a fat iron stove stuffed with peat. Da’s food looks funny in there, wrapped in colorful plastic, like if you put a rock poster in a Medieval castle or something. Da checks the clock and puts water on the burner for tea, while I hang my waterproofs and start packing up my overnight things. The ferry back to Kirkwall is an hour from now. My da clears his throat.

“How’s mum?”

He says it casually, like he’s not been waiting since yesterday to ask. My arms go stiff. Why do you always have to be the mature one when it comes to parents? I am fairly certain that’s supposed to be their job. I mean to be angry, but my voice comes out small.

“How do you think?”

Da doesn’t say anything else. I keep packing, slowly, so I don’t have to turn around. In the American movies people’s parents always fight and misunderstand each other over silly



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things, and then they confide in their children, who have to step in and sort them out. The American movies aren't much help, though, because in real life parents just get horribly quiet, or get angry with you for no reason, or get some seaweed-sheep and move off to dark little houses on poo-infested islands, and quite honestly I don't have any patience for any of them anymore. The whole idea of being a parent is that you have it sorted out, or at least you pretend to. I don't want to tell him that mum stands at the kitchen and just stares straight ahead, because what would be the point?

The kettle squeals suddenly, making me jump, and my head dislodges some sort of drying-herb-style-thing and several old pieces of paper from the rafter. Da chuckles, although it's not even the slightest bit funny. My excellent evil glare goes unappreciated due to the tea. At least there are also ginger biscuits. His food comes from the little store on the island, and it always looks sort of depressed, like it's been sitting around for a

while, with saggy packaging and a thin coating of dust. Our house in Kirkwall has big windows, carpets, fuchsia bushes, a television and a trampoline. Mum bakes bread sometimes. We must have been pretty terrible to make him want to come here instead. What did we do, Da? isn't the sort of thing you can ask without whinging, though, which sort of interferes with being righteous and mature. Zipping my rucksack, I go over to the spare chair and sit. It (of course) wobbles, and I wobble it several times just to make sure he remembers. He rolls his eyes and slides the packet of biscuits across the table.

"Ferry's coming soon," I remind him, taking one. It is (of course) already broken.

"Thora..." Da starts, stops, angles his head toward his tea so that the steam fogs his spectacles. He tries again. "Thora, what does it feel like when you're acting? Don't you ever feel like you get to be somebody else, just for a moment? Like you can feel what it's like not to be you?"

I can see where this is going.

"Every day," Da continues, looking at me earnestly through the fog. "I would wake up in the morning and know that all I could do that day was go out and be the same me as every other day. Eventually I didn't want to get up any more. The idea of it was so endless, so... flat. I miss you every day, you know that. I miss your mother so much it hurts. But I have to take a break from being me. Just for a little while. Just until I can remember how to be me again. I wish you could understand."

Actually, what I said about how parents should confide in their children, like in the movies? Let's forget about that. But we don't get to take a break, I think, but don't say. Instead I eat my broken biscuit chunk, swallow, and nod very slowly. "Okay, Da. I think you should probably bring me down to the pier now."

The ferry arrives bang on time and disgorges a few disoriented arrivals. From the water, it's too foggy to see where the pier

begins. I think I've forgotten a time when the whole world didn't smell like soggy seaweed and dead things. The conductor, who knows me, offers a lopsided grin.

"Bye, Da." I give him a stiff, waterproofed hug. He's looking at me so sadly, like our dog when we go out and leave her home alone, so I have to say something else. "Thanks for the sheep. It was fun." As I say that I remember jumping up from the rocks, feeling the panicked steps of the sheep on the cobbles, watching my da slip and fall and jump up again with his eyes shining, and I almost think I mean it. Impulsively I reach over and hug him again. He smiles just a crack.

"What was that for?"

"For nothing. See you next week?"

He nods, but I'm already stepping onto the deck of the ferry, back to where I belong. I'm fairly certain a person can only herd so many sheep before she requires television, fish and chips, and a hot shower. Sunday isn't over yet. ■

LATE AUTUMN, JUST beyond the peak of hurricane season, she tells him she wants to go to Sesay. He watches as she loads her tools into the skiff, which she insists they take, shunning not only the small ferry to the new, gated club at the north end of the island, but also the public one, which she took as a child. She insists on being the one who rows pulling away from the mainland, facing what she's leaving. The waters are calm, a clear sky and bright fall sun overhead. She keeps her eyes bare while he shelters behind his Ray Bans.

On Sesay, named for the tribe of one of the first freed slaves to live there, she pulls the boat clear of the high tide mark before he has the chance to get the gear out. She lifts her bucket, strides on, leaving him to grab the tent and backpack and follow her down a skinny, sandy path. Here there are neither boardwalks nor tourists to clatter across them. The sun is filtered first by Palmetto trees, then pine, then cypress. Ahead, her kinky blonde hair, corralled into a ponytail, bounces to her internal rhythm. When they reach what he imagines must be the heart of the island, out of reach of brackish water, she stops on the trail, points to a clearing at the edge of still, dark waters. There's room for the tent and not much else.

"Are you sure it isn't tidal?" he asks.

She isn't.

His back against the bark, he drives in a stake between the knees of a cypress anyway. The dark limbs of the trees disappear into the swamp on the other side of him.

On her haunches at the edge, she runs her hand under the tannin-stained waters, lifting fingers again and again. In the sunlight, the drops become clear against her skin, cling to the ends of the delicate blond hairs on her arms. She slips off her loose trousers, baggy t-shirt, silky underthings; she slides in, white neck and face above. Her body becomes part of the dark below.

Suspended in the water, she digs fingers into pale kaolinite. This is what they have come for, to dig out and take home some of this most important class of rockforming materials. She has explained to him about this clay, a layered silicate, almost the precise shade of her own skin; she whispered to him about the secret shape of it, the tetrahedral sheet

using oxygen atoms to bind to the sheet of alumina octahedra.

"It's like working in air and earth at the same time," she had said.

She rubs a little onto her face, breathes deeply. He watches, there on the bank, tent stake in hand, as she binds herself in earth and air and water, elemental.

He recalls her telling of her grandmother, raised on the island. Octoroon, one-eighth black, the granddaughter of freed slaves, she was pale enough to pass for white. At eighteen, she rowed herself off Sesay, walked inland and north; she left her family, changed her clothes and her name along the way. Wanga, meaning charm, wouldn't serve her in her new life as a white woman. She passed easily; she met a white man that first week in New York, married him some months later. She became pregnant, then afraid.

"She got scared of giving him a baby with kinky-coily hair, the cocoa skin of her own grandmother. She told him. He paid ticket back to Savannah."

She walked twenty miles to the dock, found a boat that looked like hers, took back her name, rowed herself home. A honey-colored baby came some months later, with a thick head of blonde hair, kinky as she'd feared, the same kinky hair he watches in the next generation. He recalls her telling of weekends on Sesay, Wanga taking her digging for oysters. They ate a few, raw. They roasted a few more over the pit, never getting full because they had to sell enough to pay the tax man, to keep hold of their land. The whole island had been deemed worthless, good enough only for freed slaves after the Civil War; it stayed that way until air conditioning brought white folks down. Island paradise, dotted just a few minutes powerboat ride from the Carolina

Kaolin

Baker Prize Short Story Competition Runner Up

BY HEATHER MARSHALL



coast. The land became valuable, then; the taxes increased.

He watches her now, dig into the soft clay; he recalls her telling of Wanga's hands, raw and red, risking the gash of the shell to save her little bit of ground.

His own family came from an island 3,000 miles east and north of hers. His father, born there but not much more, took him once. They boarded the plane and then the train and then took a ferry across the Firth of Clyde to what, in his teenaged estimation, wasn't much more than a whale-hump of land. He hired a bicycle, rode it around like the rest of the tourists. Fifty-two minutes, it took him. His legs ached for a greater distance. In the evenings, in the one pub with his father and grandfather and the few men still resident — a handful of farmers and fishers, a priest and a publican — he felt he couldn't get a whole chestful of air. Perhaps it was just the smoke, as his father said.

By the end of the week, he had to hold in the impulse to sprint to the ferry. He paced on the train, sat awake on the plane. At home, he packed his bicycle, rode 120 miles in one direction in a day. He hadn't even reached the top of the state. In his tent that night, he lay on his back, hands clasped on his chest, thought of the whole broad continent. He slept immediately, finding a peace he might have thought reserved only for the dead.

He still has that tent, reserved for solo trips; the tent he stakes down on Sesay is two generations beyond. He spreads the cover in front of it, spreads himself on top of it, watching her.

When she has gathered all she wants, he lifts her, dripping, clay spattered — earth and water, blood and bone. They slide onto the tent cover, still spread on the ground; they

don't care that they are leaving the dug clay exposed, that the cover will be hell to clean.

Afterwards, they wrap the clay, rinse in swamp water, forget about covering the tent.

In the morning, they shake off the dried shards, turn for home.

"What will it be this time?" He asks this as they break camp.

She raises eyebrows, early light drawing the tinge of fire in them. "Patience."

Like a girl making a boy wait until the next date, and the next, and the next. But she has always shown him.



He has seen nothing of it by early winter, when he finds himself deep in the city. He thinks of it, standing at her side in a white room at the end of a linoleum corridor.

They listen as the doctor tells them he has dug out the mass, found it black and sprawling underneath the surface.

"Like cypress," she burbles, still half under the anesthesia. "Take me."

He dismisses the request as the talk of the anesthesia. He wheels her back down the hall, into the stainless steel elevator. In the lobby, he rolls her past the player piano that tinkles across from the fountain, the eternally plump renaissance boy in the center.

Outside, under a weak sun, she presses out of the wheelchair before he can steady her. She wobbles, extends her left hand, palm out, saying, Stop! or, Stay back! wordless.

She eases to a squat, presses palms to ground, turns her face to the sky.

"Take me," she says.

When the stitches are removed, he drives her, then rows, he thinks for the day, back to the place beyond the brackish water so she can feel her hands in yielding earth. Hadn't she said told him it helps form 90% of the earth's crust? He watches her, in chilled air, strip, goosebumps rising before she slides slowly in, fingers clutching the clay bank. To stop himself from rushing forward, helping her when she doesn't want it, he recites, in his head, what he can remember. He thinks of her as the kaolinite itself, formed from chemical weathering, undergoing transformations made through heat in air at atmospheric pressure. He thinks of her as porcelain, fired at over 1,200 C. He recalls her voice: The Chinese wrote that the kaolin formed

the bones of the paste; the refined rocks were the flesh. Her triceps quiver as she tries to push herself up and out. He steps forward.

"Tony." She grimaces. He steps back.

"I need to be here," she says.


He recalls her telling him she felt uneasy moving in when Wanga passed, and left the house to her. She kept her home on the mainland, checked on Wanga's house occasionally. She thought herself too pale to live on Sesay. Weren't there enough white people molesting the island? Now, on this, the free side of the gate, she wants to stake her claim.

She sends him for gear. She sends him for supplies. When he returns, he finds her, paler than clay, hammer in hand, shoring up Wanga's walls. He takes the ferry in the mornings, to work on the mainland, and at sunset, back; she insists on rowing herself, once a week, for treatment. She paints the walls, repairs the porch; hurricane season is long past.

★

January brings a rare frost. The same week, she asks him to row her. She refuses to return to live on the mainland. He is still rowing her, twice a week now, in March. Mid-month, he wakes, facing the window. Birds, he thinks first. Soon she can sit on the porch, wrapped in one less blanket. She can watch the earth unravel again. He recalls her smile, broad, taking her whole face. The English thought they meant real bone. There's a recipe. Two parts bone ash, one part kaolin clay, one part china stone. He rolls over, finds her breath thready. He presses his fingertips to the edge of her throat, the way the nurse showed him. He does not need to check her blood pressure. Before they

arrive, he lifts her. Spring light filters through curtains in the hallway as he carries her again, outside. Her eyelids flutter but do not open as he presses her hand against the earth. He waits there, wonders only briefly if she'd want him to shun the water ambulance from the gated section; he slips her onto the gurney, just beyond dawn. It will be summer, the start of hurricane season, before he forces himself to the skiff again, to the sandy path. He will find, in the out-building, beside the oyster buckets, her kaolinite likeness, a self-portrait in three dimensions, shiny silicate clinging to oxygen, unfinished, hairless. He will lift her, this one last, unexpected time. He will recall her telling him her name meant wearer of the mask in Africa. Before that, he'd known only the Greek derivation – life. He will wonder, as he carries her likeness, wrapped carefully, to the spot, would she want him to stay. He will carry the jar containing her ashes, too. He will sit, as she did, on haunches, hold the smooth lump of her in one hand, close his eyes, trace her one last time – her eyes, lazy-lidded as they were, after, in the tent, the perfect curve of nose, lips slightly parted. He will recall that teenage visit to his father's island, his restless circuits around the island's circumference. What might he have uncovered had he been able to rest in the heart of the land and dig down? He will hesitate, his finger on her lips. He will plunge into the kaolin. There at the edge, he will mix the ashes of her, bone and flesh, with this most important silicate. He will press and pull until they are one. He will pull her to him, breathe her in one last time, whisper her name – Zoe – before he slips them under. ■



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Dàin le Fearghas MacFhionnlaigh

Cuairt Rothair

1)
As t-fhoghar
air brat-ùrlair
de dhuilleagan

dearga ‘s òra.
Màidsig!
Tha mi air iteig!

2)
Grunnan sheann daoine
a’ cabadaich air a’ chabhhsair,
cù no dhà air èill ac’.

*“Nuair a bhàsaich
an cat againne...”*,
cailleach ag ràdh.

Mise labhairt thusa labhairt
mise labhairt thusa labhairt
le teanga le fiacIan le bilean.

3)
Suas bruthach.
Balla le graifiti steansailte
ann am peanta dubh:

“Young minds polluted!”
Beachd agam cò rinn e.
Bha e uair sa chlas-ealain agam.

4)
Cnocan taobh eile an rathaid.
Craobh-giuthais no dhà far an robh
tùr le ridire Nòrmannach ann uair.

Am fearann air a thoirt dha
le Dàibhidh 1 san dara linn deug.
Chuir ar Comhairle sanas an-àird.

Cha do mhair seo fada ge-tà.
Is dòcha nach do chòrd e
ris na h-inntinnean òga bha siud

Iar-mhòdranas

Taigh-beag poblach -
ceann a’ phàipeir-tòin
air chall am broinn an drumà..

Blàr na Mara Meadhanaich

Nam leabaidh a-muigh
air balconaidh thaigh-òsta
air costa deas Chorsaca.

Dealanach fhiadhaich
a’ sìor bhoillsgeadh
air bàt’-aiseig air faire

air a slighe gu dàna
tro chath mòr na mara
bhon Fhraing dhan t-Sardinia.

An ath là frasan troma.
Mosgaidean an ath-oidhch’.
Mo ruagadh le feachd an adhair.

Nam leabaidh a-staigh.
Cùirtearan teann-dhùint’.
Ceann leònte fo phlaide.

Poems by Vicki Husband

What Do the Horses Think

What do the horses think
on a Saturday night in Glasgow, walking
the trough-like alleys, shadows saddled
with luminous riders? Drawing the city
in draughts through their nostrils, they sift
for the heat of crime, the creature-scent
of humans, the reek of waste. Ears swivel
to catch the lone song of a drunk, wild call
of the pack, first tremor of a stampede.

Passers-by may think
they’ve imagined these shapes, or conjured
them from the past; horse-shoes ringing on
cobble, echo off steel-trees, vertical lakes
of glass. I wonder if they fantasise: of clover
fields, nose-bags, blue skies, sweated miles.
Or later, safely stabled, will they re-live
the night: steering a baying crowd into
sticky pens, ghost-drawn carriages?

Community Liaison at Torness

For two days now the reactor has been shut off and staff sit waiting
for local trawlers to net the blooms of jellyfish. There is as yet, no
explanation for such a furore on the Berwickshire coastline. Jellyfish
crowd around a seawater filter, garlanded with wrack and jostling
with placards of wood, carrying faded names of fishing ports
and brands of whisky.

It’s as if hundreds of hippies have been reincarnated and flash-mob
the waters. Linking tentacles, the pale moons of their bodies bond
together. The plant sends Community Liaison to smooth things over –
she shouts into a loud-hailer a testament of safety stats and naturally
occurring forms of radiation, sings the praises of reprocessing
in millisieverts, terabecquerels.

After a while the jellyfish seem to get the gist of half-life, communing
with the voice on a far-out wavelength. Some drift off on the trail
of zooplankton. Others shout from their frilly mouths: Wait, come back
there’s strength in numbers. But they’re rudderless in an ocean current
like peregrinators at the mercy of a god. Or a diligent rent-a-mob
moving on, other causes to champion.

Books and Bricks & Mortar

The challenge of running a bookshop in north west highlands

By KEVIN CROWE

ACCORDING TO RESEARCH carried out by Experian for the Daily Telegraph, there are now less than 2,000 bookshops in the UK and in 2012 almost 400 closed. Despite Tim Godfray of the Booksellers' Association claiming the rate of closures has declined, it is clear that the traditional bookshop – whether selling new or used books, or both – is facing problems.

It is not hard to see reasons. The rise of the internet, the development of e-books and the uncertainty caused by the economic crisis have all had an effect. We are spending more time and money buying on the internet, a phenomenon that has not just affected bookshops, but – as the recent problems of Jessops and HMV show – all retail sectors. According to research from Mintel, half of all book buyers get most of their books online, whilst only a third buy mainly from bricks and mortar shops (B&Ms).

The effect of e-books has also been significant. Mintel found that in 2012 the purchase of e-books almost doubled, whereas sales of printed books fell. There are still far more printed books sold each year than e-books (in 2012 in the UK £3.1 billion was spent on printed book, compared to £261 million on e-books). However, the trend is clear.

Is there a future for independent B&Ms? If so, how might that future look? Does it depend on whether we are discussing urban or rural areas?

Clearly, there are differences between urban and rural locations. Bookshops in towns and cities are likely to have a potentially larger number of people passing their doors, but may also have to compete with Waterstones and with supermarkets selling books. Second hand bookshops in towns and cities may find themselves losing out to charity shops whose books are donated, are staffed by volunteers and get business rate relief. Bookshops in villages and rural areas will generally be less concerned about the chain stores and charity shops (particularly those of us in more remote areas), but are likely to be more reliant on tourists and need to attract visitors in the summer months.

The north west Highlands of Scotland is probably the most remote area on the UK mainland. Anyone who lives and works in Wester Ross and north and west Sutherland will be familiar with the large distances we often need to travel. Population density is the lowest in the UK. As well as some of the issues faced by all independent bookshops, there are additional problems and concerns.

There are four bookshops in the area, all of which have been in business for a long time and each of which has found different ways of meeting the challenges of running a business in a rural area in the internet age.

Ullapool is fortunate in having two excellent bookshops: the Ullapool Bookshop and the Ceilidh Place. North of Ullapool, at the small township of Inverkirkaig near Lochinver is Achins Bookshop & Café. On the north western tip of Sutherland at Durness is Loch



Donny O'Rourke reads his poetry at the Loch Croispol Bookshop

Croispol Bookshop, Restaurant & Gallery – the business run by me and my partner.

The first thing we note about all four is that they do not confine themselves to books. The Ullapool Bookshop is part of a complex that also includes Lochbroom Hardware and The Captain's Cabin, all owned by the same partnership, but with different management. The Ceilidh Place combines bookshop, bar, restaurant, gallery, hotel and meeting rooms. Achins and Loch Croispol also provide food and drink. In addition, both sell the work of local artists, and Achins also sell a variety of clothing, handbags and toys. All four shops stock CDs, calendars, and a range of postcards and gift cards.

Three of the bookshops sell only new books, whereas Loch Croispol sells both new and used titles. Loch Croispol and Achins also sell online. Achins has long been a library supplier.

This diversification is perhaps the key to the survival of all four bookshops. Different functions within the same building or complex can complement each other. Many of our visitors at Loch Croispol come for food and drink, and whilst here buy books, postcards or paintings. Likewise, those who come in to browse the books normally stop for at least a tea or coffee, often for a meal.

All four bookshops play an important role in their respective communities, and have sponsored the Ullapool Book Festival. We all act as meeting places and we work with local schools and community groups. Our staff are local people, so we also provide employment. We regularly provide prizes for local fund

raising events. All our bookshops are at the heart of the community.

Although the internet (and particularly the ubiquitous Amazon) is a serious threat to B&Ms, I believe that threat can be overstated, particularly in areas like ours where most of our business is from tourists. Buyers can't browse shelves on the internet, and one of the wonderful joys of bookshops for visitors is coming across books and authors they are not familiar with. Such impulse sales are common and on many occasions a customer has come to the counter with a stack of books and a credit card, telling us they only came in for a cup of tea.

The threat from the internet can also be reduced by choosing stock carefully. There is little point in small independents filling their shelves with celebrity chefs, celebrity autobiographies and the latest popular best sellers, as most of these are heavily discounted on Amazon and often in Waterstones. Shops like ours simply cannot compete on price. However, we can compete on product knowledge and customer service. I regularly get asked to recommend books on specific topics, and it is a joy to help customers choose those that suit their interests and pockets. Often, a pleasant and welcoming atmosphere from staff who genuinely care about the customer can be as important as price. All four bookshops regularly hold events such as book signings, poetry readings, book launches and the like.

Some wholesalers, distributors and publishers recognise the importance of a strong and vibrant independent section, and are

encouraging small shops by longer payment terms and/or better discounts, and the Booksellers' Association now has a strong independent section that can provide assistance with aspects of running a business.

Rather than simply complain about the internet, a more productive approach is to use it to sell books. Internet selling was one of the reasons we expanded into the used book market, a move we have never regretted. Although we have our website, with a secure payment page, the vast majority of our online sales are on listing sites, of which the two most important are Amazon and Abebooks. Our internet business is now a major source of income, especially in the winter. We have sent books to every inhabited continent and most days we take parcels to the post office.

A much bigger threat than the internet is the development of e-books and e-readers such as Kindle and Nook. Electronic books are not new: the idea probably originated in 1930, when an American academic Bob Brown proposed a literary equivalent of the then new talking movies (or talkies), which he called the "readies". In 1949 Robert Busa began work on an electronic index of the works of theologian Thomas Aquinas. There were further developments in the 1960s and 70s, including Project Gutenberg, whose aim was to create electronic versions of "worthy" books. However, it was only with the creation of home computers that electronic books became practical. The first e-reader was invented in 1992 by Sony. Fifteen years later, Amazon created Kindle.

E-readers are seductive, and there is no doubt they have some advantages (one would certainly have prevented me from having to pay excess baggage costs on overseas holidays). However, there are also disadvantages, one of which is the likely effect on bookshops. I suspect most people do not realise that when they download a book to their e-reader, they do not actually own the book. They have merely paid for a license to read it on that particular e-reader. You can't lend the book to others, you can't dispose of it as a gift or sell it on, and the book can be removed from your device without your permission or knowledge. Furthermore, if I leave my e-reader on a train, I lose all the books on it. If I leave my copy of "David Copperfield" on the same train, all I lose is one book.

Whether we like it or not, e-readers are here to stay. Some independents are looking at selling downloads of e-books. I am not aware of any bookshops in the north west Highlands who have gone down this path, but it is something to consider, and both the Booksellers' Association and some wholesalers can help.

Despite the challenges, I am confident that independent bookshops can continue to thrive, by adapting to new technology and by offering the sort of customer service provided by all four bookshops in the north west Highland. ■

Poetry

callainn

AONGHAS MACNEACAIL

aig an t-am seo dhen bhliadhna, bidh
sinn a’ giùlan caochladh dhòchais
ge b’ e dè an leus a tha san aimsir

gabhaidh sinn ri cur geal no buige
gabhaidh sinn ri caog grèine fann,
i fhèin ’s a ghealach nan deòin rèite

agus ni sinne ullachadh airson sgoil
mar gum b’ e gur i bun gach freagairt
is sinne nar cuinneag da gliocas

gach nì a bha dhìth ort

AONGHAS MACNEACAIL

tha gach nì a bha dhìth ort
airson an turais
paisgte air falbh
’s mas cuimhne leat, faodaidh
tu a bhi cinnteach gu bheil
cobhair na do mhàileid
airson gach càs

’s ann mar sin a tha dia
ach nach eil fuasgladh air màileid
far am faighear gin no cruth do dhia

Cha b’ e freumhan ach frasan...’

NIALL O’GALLAGHER

Cha b’ e freumhan ach frasan
a dh’fhàg mi agad an seo
gan toirt thar tìre ’s mara
is ar gaol-sa a’ falbh leoth’;

bidh neart na gaoith’ gan giùlan
chun ar dùthcha far an gabh
iad àit’ sa ghàrradh ùrail
leis gach fùr nach do chuir tabh

no astar bacadh orra
is iad a’ lorg dachaigh ùir
àit’ far am faigh iad cothrom
a bhith torrach ’s iad a’ lùs

le deargan de gach seòrsa
’s iad gorm, buidhe, òr is glas
a’ fàs gun rian no òrdugh
nan fiùrain òga is blas

na froise aig na measan
air na meangain mòra ’s àrd’
ach diofraichte ’s iad measgaicht’,
na dealtan gan toirt gu bàrr

mus tuit iad chun na talmhainn
’s freumhan aig am frasan fhèin
mura bi ’n gaol gan glacadh
is gan toirt gu talamh cèin.
Furtachd
Julian Ronay
ann an ceallan prìosain
fireannaich aonaranach agus cràdhte
ri fèin-bhrodadh air an oidhche
san fhuachd
saoghal neo-shuimeil
a’ briseadh na mhìrean
mòmaidean theth fhallasach san dorchadas
furtachd sealach
na cneadan agus eacaoine
a’ cur a mach
stealladh sil

sàsachadh miann
a bhith coltach ri dia
a bhith òirdheirc
a choinneachadh ris an neach
a tha eòlach ort
chan eil feum air faclan
an cràdh a tha a’ ruigsinn cho fada air ais
a dhèanamh greim air an seud
an seud
a shlànaich an cridhe dhe gach tinneas

She Had A Thing About Hearts

GAVIN BROOM

When we get back home
we cover the floor
with slips of paper folded in half,
cut into tiny drops – not rain,
you say, nor tears –
hearts from sample colour charts,
outdated phone books,
takeaway menus torn down off the fridge,
church fliers resurrected from the bin.

When we allow heavy sighs
to escape tight throats
the hearts flutter alive
rise from the floorboards
like hope in my chest
until they surround us
and all we can see
are butterfly words beating
a path to the lights.
We hold our breath.
We wait for them to die.

Seen in the Classifieds

JULIENNE THURROTT

I like men who’re sure as doorframes,
comfortable at kitchen tables
carved from wave blanched roof beams,
men who wear sandals in the winter
and gymmies in the rain,
men who plant their feet with the conviction
of a Scottish Olympic curler.

Most of all, I like men who taste
of home-made marmalade,
last year’s batch,
when a severe snowstorm in Seville
caused a scarcity of ripe January oranges.

Breezers

COLIN WILL

Girls lurch, bottle-clutching,
along Kirkwall’s slabbed streets,
singing songs that were hits
before my adult sons were born.
They’re cheerful drunk, unaggressive;
they return my smiles, as if
Grandad Greybeard has blessed
their dressy adverts for long legs
and plenty of pale skin.
They may totter on heels higher
than arches should stretch,
but they have a good-time dignity;
sure of themselves, their right to fun
a part of youth’s inheritance.
I wish them well, but don’t join in,
although I used to know the words.
Some worlds should not be joined,
just accepted, partitioned in memory.
It was the wind off the sea
that made my eyes water, that’s all.

September

STEPHEN KEELER

There were no dog days this far north this year;
No fishing canes askew beside the door
Or jam-jars tied with lengths of tattered string
For sticklebacks or lucky-if-we-caught
A newt; no swimsuits bleaching as they hung
To dry each day in searing evening sun;
Or flip-flops curling, colourless, and left
As though we were at prayer, secret among
The rocks, beside the blackened ring where fire
Had warmed easy romance the night before.
Cold days made summer short and kept it from
The beach: it was an inland season of
The tallest foxgloves bullied by the wind,
And desiccated orchids turned to ash.

★ ‘September’ was awarded first prize in the poetry
category (adults) of the 2012 Highland Literary Salon
Writing Competition.

A Traveller in Two Worlds: Volume 1 – The Early Life of Scotland's Wandering Bard

Volume 2 – the tinker and the student

By David Campbell

Published by Luath Press

REVIEW BY IAN STEPHEN

David Campbell has written an unusual book – one in which a man attempts an honest and close analysis of a long-term relationship with another man he has worked and played with for many years. There is a twist though and that is that the book purports to be simply a biography of Duncan Williamson, the singer and storyteller from a traveling background who became internationally known after the American musician and student, Linda Headlee transcribed his tales.

Transcription is a key element of this work. David Campbell grew up in Fraserburgh, a town hit hard by World War 2, as it contained munitions factories as well as being a key fishing port. Like the poet and broadcaster George Bruce, Campbell can thus move effortlessly between vernacular voices of Scotland and the educated voice which was once thought necessary for presenting programmes on any part of the BBC. I'm writing this in Swansea, after visiting the Dylan Thomas Centre to listen to Thomas as well as Burton intoning language written to be broadcast on radio. Sonorous rhythms but with the regional accent seeming subdued behind the actor's voice, by today's standards.

In contrast, I'm also reading the autobiography of Miles Davies, for the first time – a book made “with Quincy Troupe”, a jazz journalist. Perhaps Troupe recorded Davies and arranged and tidied the transcripts to make the book. But there are no interventions. And there is little sign of editing to modify either the vocabulary or rhythms of the breezy narrative. Within a page or two, I was sensing this astonishing parallel between the rhythms of speech of a Scottish traveller and the natural voice of the East St Louis trumpeter credited as instigator of the birth of cool.

David Campbell is generous in the space he gives his friend to speak for himself, from the recordings he has made. But then he does come in with comment. Often this is indeed in the necessary role of the biographer – to question one account of events and compare it with another. This can become fascinating in its own right. There are after all many dramatic works based on counterpointing different accounts of the same events. The technique comes into its own in the second part of the two volume work. I read that first and then realized I could not concentrate on another book until I'd read the full story.

So I began with the story of the tinker-man or traveller and the student – how a young woman from a privileged background and herself a talented musician fell in love with the charismatic widower and his way of life. The good-humoured, inclusive character of Hamish Henderson is strong in this period, enabling an environment where a rigorous study of folklore, in the form of song, tunes and story, could be combined with informality. This helped bring the heritage that

survived in the day-to-day culture of some traveller families, to a mainstream audience.

Linda the student became Linda Williamson and fully entered traveller-life, to the extent that there were suggestions that he had adopted a lifestyle which discredited her academic background. The correspondence of this period is brimful of ironies, not lost on the author/arranger of this work. David Campbell was close friends of both, when they were together and after they parted and he remained friends and hosts to the children they produced. He recorded both partners but also the others who had become characters in this drama.

I then moved to the first volume to read of the origins of Duncan Williamson and gain a sense of the movement from job to job and from tent to bothy, from horse and cart to truck. There's a lot of Scotland's geography and a fair chunk of its history, influenced by world-wars. Campbell's recordings of Duncan's reminiscences could also have become an autobiography akin to Miles Davies, assisted by Quincy Troupe. There is no telling

how much intervention is in the transcriptions but I suspect there is very little because the rhythms of the spoken voice shine through. Betsy Whyte – a very great storyteller – went on to write her volumes of autobiography, as did Sheila Stewart and Jess White of the next generations. All are witty and eloquent works, showing a great sensitivity to the ways of people and to the fast-changing natural environment. Williamson might seem a bit full of himself here and there but this is balanced by intimate portraits of a host of characters and a generous acknowledgment of their role in passing on a huge culture to him.

Over the two volumes, I would say that David Campbell has done a similar service to Williamson's art of reminiscence as Linda Williamson did to her then-husband's natural storytelling voice. The difference is that Linda did not comment on the stories, only introduce them. So the two-volume work is also very much David Campbell's own reminiscence, the story of his own journey from university to teacher, to radio-producer to jobbing storyteller. In the latter, he was

for many years acting in counterpoint to Williamson. You get a sense of the relationship between the two men, together up-front in a high mileage VW camper. Williamson could quickly alternate between the inspiring and the exasperating, according to this account.

His own version of his life-story, without comment, seems to be at least as unreliable as most autobiographies, according to the evidence cited by Campbell. But the legends of the shinty-player or the boxer or the poacher are still part of the pen-portrait of the man whose very identity became that of a storyteller. He was known first as a singer – like Stanley Robertson who inherited some of the great ballads passed on by his aunt, the very great singer, Jeannie, first recorded by Hamish Henderson. And then he was helped to realise that the stories behind the songs were works of art in their own right. And that the tales told by aunt or grandfather to entertain the bairns in the absence of anything else, were in fact precious heritage.

There are all too few of the tales in either volume. Where one is slipped-in, an aside in the recorded life story or rather illustration and illumination of it, Duncan Williamson's narrative of remembered things it is carried through with the unconscious artistry of the very great teller. Like Miles Davies, on trumpet, in fact. David Campbell could well argue that this is not the place for them and that so many have already been so well gathered and reproduced by Linda and available in editions by Canongate and Penguin.

So let's not appraise a book on what it does not set out to do. I was held and fascinated by both volumes, from the rhythms of Williamson's own voice to the counterpoints of others. I did feel that the biographer and commentator did indeed sometimes sound a little too much like the radio presenter of a certain period in time –

sometimes a shade overwrought in phrasing and language. But this is not a real fault because it emphasizes the extent to which such an odd couple became friends, whose relationship seems to have lasted through their many tiffs and debates. ■

The Spring Teller

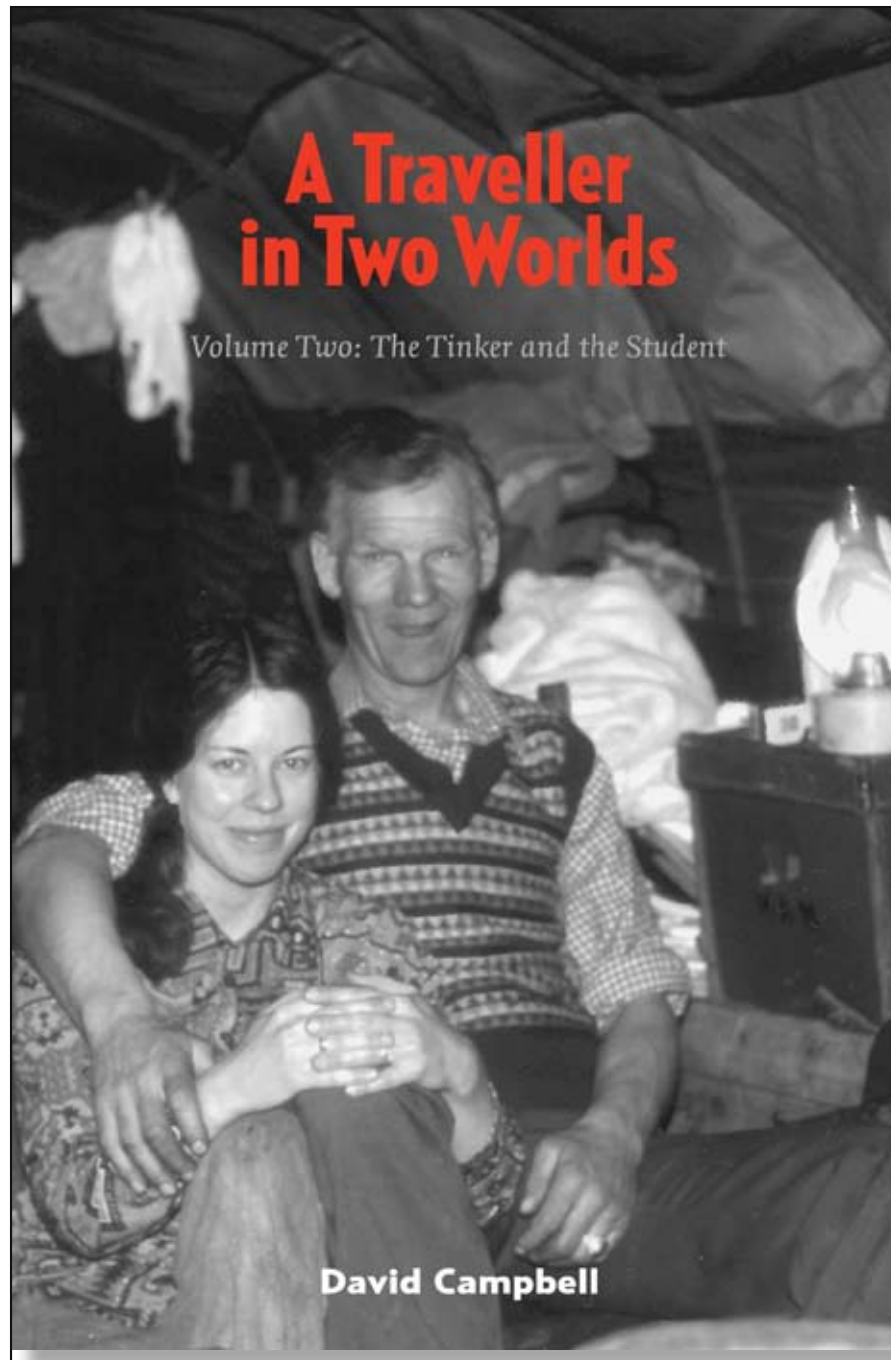
by Valerie Gillies

Published by Luath Press

REVIEW BY TED BOWMAN

I need help, wrote poet Edward Hirsch, 'I need help...to fly out of myself'. Norman MacCaig confessed: 'I took my mind a walk/ or my mind took me a walk – /whichever was the truth of it.' I thought of these two and more poets as I read and re-read *The Spring Teller* by Valerie Gillies. Like Hirsch, I need help to pause, be present, and truly see things in my environment that I pass by too quickly, overlook, take for granted, or about which I am ignorant. My world is with people, classrooms, hospitals, and buildings. I need guides that aid me in flying out of myself to locations that can inform and stretch my world. Valerie Gillies is such a guide.

I first met Gillies in 2002. Later, during a workshop in Dundee, she introduced participants to healing wells in Scotland. In fact, we each made our own “cloodie” or rag flags during the workshop after hearing Valerie



describe pilgrims who have travelled to healing wells to seek relief for ailments from toothache to cancer. On our flags we wrote something for which we also yearned to relieve, let go off, or transform. She had invited workshop participants to take their minds and yearnings for healing for a walk.

I later learned that Gillies was walking all over Scotland and parts of Ireland to healing springs and wells. The Spring Teller is her poignant and powerful account of finding these places, some well known, many out of sight or awareness, even to locals. While the history of some wells is included, more important is her 'experiential' poetry of describing Dolly "healthy at nearly a hundred" who remembered that as children: 'We all drank it if we were ill/because it was so good'. Sounds also find voice in her poetry: 'The well has a gurgling voice midway between man and bird/as the dawn wave of willow warbles ripples through the trees'. At an Irish well, Gillies asserted: 'you are looking into/ the well of yourself.'

Nancy Mairs' essays about living with multiple sclerosis (MS) helped me to fully appreciate Gillies' poetry. Mairs declared that she would not want to wish MS on anyone. But, as part of her adjustment, she was forced to become more aware of details, little things that could throw her off balance, cause her to fall. In so doing, she also became aware of other details she would not have seen had she not had MS, things like geraniums, small animals, nuances of colour. Once I became aware of healing springs and wells, I too saw things I never would have seen: altars in offices, cathedrals in woods, candles lit all around me, protestants rubbing rosaries, grown men kneeling along the street, roadside memorials, bread broken with adversaries.

Healing wells come in many forms. They may go unseen or undervalued unless we pause more often to see, look, and listen. These poems invite the reader to let the mind walk to places out there, nearby and inside each of us. Valerie Gillies teaches us how to do so. ■

The Waiting

By Regi Claire

Published by Word Power

REVIEW BY CYNTHIA ROGERSON

This is a good book. It doesn't mess around – it's good from the first page to the last, with poetic yet conversational prose, a simple structure, and a main character who narrates her tale with painful honesty. The back cover seduces the reader with promises of suspense, mystery and murderous intentions (and these are delivered!), but what kept me captivated was something much more subtle. Lizzie Fairburn's complicated friendship with the wild and dangerous Marlene, from early childhood to middle age, is heartbreakingly real and utterly compelling. Revealed through stories from the past, and interwoven with her present as a vulnerable elderly woman confronted with the unnerving presence of Marlene's granddaughter Rachel, this friendship is really a love story between women. The betrayals and times of forgiveness, the deep admiration and the envy, the bitterness

and rejection, the way the two women impacted on each other's lives despite the very different choices they made – this emotional complexity and depth is what interested me. I can vouch for Regi Claire as an expert guide to the strangeness of our attachments to people, and the power we give those we love.

Claire is Swiss. I think perhaps it is worth noting this, as her perspective of Scottish character and situation has something of the outsider's detachment – in the best way. The tone, despite the first person narrative, manages to retain something neutral and dry, leaving the reader to understand more than the narrator herself does. It is intensely intimate, but a million miles from melodramatic or sentimental.

I have never read her work before, but I am about to correct this and search out previous Claire stories. I absolutely loved this book. ■

On Glasgow & Edinburgh

By Robert Crawford

Published by Harvard University Press

REVIEW BY KEN COCKBURN

Given what Crawford calls the 'treasured rivalry' between these two cities, I should declare myself at the outset as an (adopted) Edinburgher.

'Written for natives and guests alike', this is partly a guidebook, though its layout – longish chapters with no section headings, and city centre maps lacking details – doesn't encourage use 'in the field', and some natives may feel the basics are elaborated, and Americanised, over-much (medieval toilets, or 'necessary-houses', are glossed as 'restrooms').

There are thousands of books about Glasgow and Edinburgh, but Crawford claims this is the first 'serious volume exclusively devoted to both'. What it isn't, though, is a comparative study; each city is considered separately, with little cross-referencing. The assumed rivalry between the two is rather overdone – the book opens with an eye-catching statement: 'like good and evil Glasgow and Edinburgh are often mentioned in the same breath but regarded as utterly distinct'. Later, he maintains that 'Glaswegians point out relentlessly that Adam Smith was a professor at Glasgow, not at Edinburgh.' Relentlessly? I can't say it's come up in any conversation I've had with a Glaswegian. (And anyway, as a native of Kirkcaldy, I'd claim him for the Lang Toun.) A brief mention of football further undermines the premise, given that the main rivalries are within rather than between the cities.

Crawford states that 'my discussion of the jostling between Glasgow and Edinburgh will be unashamedly bookish', and the sheer range of his reading throws up a great array of facts, characters and stories. But he continues, 'I have given little space to such performance venues as halls and sports-grounds, privileging instead art galleries and historic homes', and sometimes the contemporary cities struggle to emerge from the museum vitrines. He extols Glasgow's 1920s dance halls, but the only mention of the city's dance scene today comes in passing, relating to architect Zaha Hadid, designer of the Riverside Museum.

At times it feels like Crawford is dutifully ticking off items on a list – even the Scottish

Poetry Library, a gem of a building which Crawford, as a poet, might be expected to find an interesting angle on, receives only half a paragraph. And sometimes practicalities go missing – writing of Darwin's time at Ed Uni, Crawford notes that he 'was granted free admission to the university's museum', and that 'the splendid museum space can still be seen', but omits to mention that it is now part of the university's Talbot Rice Gallery.

It's his focus on people, well known and obscure, which is, to this reader, the book's strength; as he tells their stories you sense Crawford giving rein to enthusiasms. Edinburgh has Maria Theresa Short, who ran a popular observatory on Calton Hill; Patrick Murray, who set up the Museum of Childhood; and sculptor Eduardo Paolozzi, whose father's Leith shop was destroyed by anti-Italian riots in 1940. In Glasgow there is William Burrell who, having donated his vast art collection to the city, was stingy with his electricity; Madeleine Smith, generally assumed to have poisoned her older lover, despite being found not guilty at a sensational trial; and Victorian architect Alexander Thomson, whose Presbyterianism was expressed in 'horizontal principles', and with whose work Crawford seems to feel a post-modern affinity, writing of its 'adventurously polymorphous variety'.

At the end a consideration of the rivalry between the cities as is reduced to simply enjoying the 'fun' produced by 'caricatures'. While full of interesting material, the book doesn't quite convince either as a guidebook or as a serious study of intercity competitiveness. ■

An T-Eilean: Taking a Line for a Walk Through the Island of Skye

By Angus Peter Campbell

Photographs by Cailean Maclean

Published by The Islands Book Trust

REVIEW BY AONGHAS MACNEACAIL

Angus Peter and Cailean's Stride about Skye

I hadn't gone far into this book when I began to feel that I was not the one who should be reviewing it. The layers of knowledge, of tradition, of the culture, that Angus Peter Campbell seemed to be able to access, left me with an ineffable, almost unbearable, sense of loss. But, in reading on, I realised that, while he could recreate glimpses of what previous generations had taken for granted, in terms of myth and lore, he was also driven by that same sense of what we have lost. His particular gift is to be able to find something to treasure, and vividly reanimate, even in these fragments.

The conceit shaping the book is found in its sub-title (deriving its first six words from the artist Paul Klee): "Taking a line for a walk through the Isle of Skye". The formal title, An t-Eilean (The Island), by which Skye is known, is a form of abbreviation, as the full Gaelic name is An t-Eilean Sgitheanach which I, a Skyeman, pronounce 'Sgiathanach'. It is, certainly, in the Hebrides, the only island whose name is an adjective – which may allude to its winged shape, if "sgìath" is the root.

That shape certainly ensures that any walk through the island is bound to be a meander.

And a fascinating meander, through time and geography, is exactly what Angus Peter, a native of South Uist, delivers. Physically, the journey is through Skye, accompanied by the photographer Cailean MacLean, Sorley's nephew, who also spent his early childhood in Uist, but who now lives in Skye. Cailean's images bring their own compelling illumination to the book, encompassing the tranquil and dramatic, across both islands.

Among characters celebrated by the writer, Domhnall Angaidh MacLean, a native of Scarp, a small island off Harris, justifiably occupies a prominent place: He was a 'missionary' in South Skye – the title representing a paid assistant to the parish minister, rather than an evangelist bringing his beliefs to a dark continent. He was also a man of deep intellectual curiosity, whose map of Sleat placenames is reproduced, and a list of 110 places recorded, with brief commentaries, factual or shrewdly speculative where there was uncertainty. In a meditation on the atrophy of dialects, he uncovers, and quotes substantially from, an unpublished study by CK Stead of distinctive dialect words and phrases from the author's own native South Uist some of which remain in use, and some having all but vanished.

There are also recollections of striking characters from South Uist, including his remarkable neighbour, a near-centenarian, Iain Sheonaigh 'Smus' (John Smith), virtually monolingual Gael, who, alone in the world, could still recite the Fingalian Chant, Duan na Féinne. Others, who are warmly and vividly sketched, include the Skye traditional bard Calum Ruadh Nicolson who is treated with the same respect as his relative neighbour, the internationally known Sorley MacLean, with significant quotations from both.

Touching, but without dwelling on crucial moments in Highland history, Angus Peter weaves elements of social comment into the narrative. Every now and again, a fascinating historical detail leaps out: that, for example, the chiefs of Macleod and Clan Donald having sold tenants into American slavery in 1739, were blackmailed into withholding their support for the Jacobite Rising in 1745, which may have had a significant effect on the outcome of the campaign. The social remoteness of present day chiefs with their cut-glass accents is recognised as product of the Statutes of Iona, but the sense of alienation between them and their kin is deftly sketched.

There's a narrative (apparently) for each day in both Gaelic and English, but the latter should be seen as complementation rather than translation. And, eventually, the days seem to go out of sync between Gaelic (which takes its time to ruminate, on past and present, place and personality) and the more economical English – which could be read as a metaphor for the way Gaels view the world bilingually. What is stored in the Gaelic portion of the brain has an almost organic quality to it, while the English material is more formally acquired. But whether as Campbell or Caimbeulach, this writer has a gift for poetry in both languages.

This is not at all a parochial journey. His references range from folk beliefs in holy ►►

► wells and little people to the now confirmed boson, and can accommodate Brodsky, Lowell, Kant, Kafka and Kundera, among other writers and thinkers. Buddy Rich and Schumann harmonise with Gaeldom’s greatest love poet, William Ross, and that great campaigner for land law reform, Mary MacPherson, Mairi Mhor nan Oran (Great Mary of the Songs – who wasn’t born in Skeabost but in her mother’s family home in Uig – Idrigil, to be specific, a couple of crofts away from where I grew up: the Skeabost house she’s identified with wasn’t ready for occupation for a few weeks. But that’s a minor, and personal, quibble).

The line being taken for a walk is as much travelling through the author’s life, experiences and memories as an actually geography, but the freedom that gives, to invoke and recall anecdote or story, snatch of verse or complete poem, makes for a wonderfully kaleidoscopic read. But it’s more than that: we encounter a man acutely alert to his environment, physically, psychologically and in terms of its history. And we can clearly see how the latter informs his politics. A religious faith encompassing both Catholicism and Presbyterianism, without in any way censoring his engagement with the wider world, provides a delicate bass-line to this narrative, which, with all its dualities, vulnerabilities and changes, delivers an affirmative portrait of a land and its people. ■

Poetry Reviews

By RICHIE McCAFFREY

First up is Graham Fulton’s pamphlet *Speed of Dark* (Controlled Explosion Press, 2012). These poems range from snap-shots of city life, to funny tirades against popular poets, Olympic mania and a printer on the blink. Fulton is the arch chronicler of Paisley life in all its forms, and while many of his poems have a surface wit, they usually also have depth. ‘James Taylor in Paisley Post Office’ captures both a sense of estrangement and loneliness:

I can hear him in
the sorting hall

singing
I’ve seen fire
and I’ve seen rain

as he searches for
my undelivered mail.

I’ve seen lonely times
when I could not find a friend.

In ‘Diamond’, the speaker hears a ‘drunk or mental’ woman ‘going up Greenlaw’ singing ‘I’d much / rather be / forever in / blue jeans’. Fulton is the makar of Paisley’s bam-pots, and his tone is mockingly affectionate, as if he wouldn’t have it any other way.

Jean Atkin’s *The Dark Farms* (Roncadora Press 2012) is almost an art object with pages studded with drawn stars and poems framed by the night skies. There is a drawback to this level of embellishment and one or two of the poems seem squashed in order to fit into their beautiful frames. The poems are spare in writing but cosmic in scope, the products of midnight wanderings and stargazing:

And now they’re emptied
the dark farms
now crouched in their earths

for years
they swallowed glints
and flakes of stars
as mica shines in granite.

Colin Will’s *The Propriety of Weeding* (Red Squirrel Press) takes for its leitmotifs, gardening, husbandry and plant-life. This is not poetry of pottering potting sheds and allotments, but botany and scientific study relieved from sounding boffin-like by a recurring sense of humour. Poems of loss and introspection rub shoulders with a dramatic monologue from Yoda and a CSI crime scene involving a carrot after snow melt. Some poems go for rather rhetorical and sentimental endings such as ‘The Blues’, a fascinating poem about the ‘true’ blue colour of ice, which ends with ‘And once, in a graveyard on the Somme, / two jet contrails crossed to make / a perfect Saltire. Alba, blue Alba.’ However, Will often gets the balance just right and produces masterly poems like ‘In the map gaps’:

Some nights the wind comes
from a direction that doesn’t exist,
and there are voices in it
that I know are crying.

Stewart Conn’s second pamphlet from Mariscat, *Estuary*, is an elegant and spare production. Conn’s poems segue into each other, rather like the liminal space between sea and sand or river and sea at the estuary, captured in ‘Tide’: ‘hard to know / where the river ends and the sea begins’. This metaphor can of course be extended to the cycles of life and the later stages that Conn finds himself in. This existential uncertainty is poignantly captured in the title poem:

Waking in the small hours of the night
before going to hospital, you press
the palm of my hand to your cheek
so that my wrist, following the line
of your neck, detects its pulse-beat,
making me aware as though we were
on the sandy foreshore of some vast
estuary of the tide’s tug, and precious
grains slipping through my fingers.

This is not just an abstracted grappling with ebbing time on a non-specific beach, but a collection firmly rooted in real places and real people. Moments of familial humour in ‘Walk’ contrast well with more serious poems and the collection hits a particularly high lyrical note in ‘Juggler’:

As pointless to ask him why, as for him
to enquire why I’m writing this poem,
each in endless search of perfection,
the marriage of inspiration and design.
But which is rehearsal, which the real thing?
and what chance one day of Chinese
lanterns floating, diaphanous, over the trees?

Conn’s previous Mariscat pamphlet is represented by a poem in Mariscat Press’ *Cat’s Whiskers: 30 Years of Mariscat Press*. The same high production qualities are evident here, a far cry from what editor Hamish Whyte

calls the ‘shoe-string’ beginnings of the press. The poems are laid out chronologically, giving both a sense of building momentum and Mariscat’s continued commitment to publishing the best poems ‘we want to publish’. This is not the valedictory publication of a much-loved press winding down, but a litmus paper of the quality work they are publishing still.

Living in Pittenweem, one comes across Gordon Jarvie often as a poet of the East Neuk. Jarvie’s brand of poetry in *Out and About Poetry* (Harpercroft) seems to be aimed at local rhymers, historians and tourists as a souvenir of their visit to the ‘Glorious Kingdom’. This is an often witty, innocuous and artless poetry that sometimes comes close to a form of East Neuk ‘crambo-clink’:

Here’s room for a rhyme
from time to time –
and that’s no crime
in poetry.

Jaunty rhymes prevail on subjects such as gardening and bird-spotting until the last handful of poems when Jarvie’s tone deepens and becomes decidedly more profound. In ‘The road, the miles’ Jarvie thinks upon a recent “mild stroke” he has suffered:

But I lie here vaguely thinking
of the view from the ambulance, looking
back along the road, the miles
I’ve come to reach this point, the life
I’ve lived to bring me to this place,
this weary sadness in a doctor’s face.

The blurb for Jim Carruth’s latest collection *Rider at the Crossing* (happenstance Press) suggests that the poet has reached an existential and poetic crossing in his work. Indeed, Carruth has, and one cannot think of a stronger and yet more varied previous collection by him. Here we see Carruth hanging onto his sense of the anti-pastoral poem and applying it to far more wide-ranging subjects. Many of these poems carry learned epigraphs but the poetry is never stuffy or inkhorn, but incisive, playful and alive. One epigraph triggers (if you’ll pardon the pun) a startling poem, imagining that Mikhail Kalashnikov invented a lawn-mover instead of a machine-gun. The idea of mowing down Whitmanesque or biblical ‘leaves of grass’ is not lost on Carruth:

You remark on its accuracy,
the reek of petrol and cut grass
mown down in swathes

but not the flutter you felt
as you flicked off the catch.

Many of these poems imagine history taking a different course, making a different crossing, and from the dying to the young, most of the characters here are caught in one form of transition or another, be it the loss of innocence of the grown man who has seen the ice-cream man for the greedy slob he is, or the veteran who learns late that it was never a battle between truth or lies:

It’s sitting at the home hearth of an evening
and having no one left to tell your stories to.

Lesley Harrison’s sequence *Beyond the Map* (Mariscat) takes the form of ‘an imaginary journey, following early whalers’ from Scotland and beyond until uncharted waters are found. It’s an eclectic collection ranging from concrete poetry worthy of Edwin Morgan to ballad-based poems, such as ‘Lament’:

He’s far away behind the wind
He’s at the thin ice of the moon
He’s out beyond the rolling haar
Wait. Wait for me there.

The poetry is both crisp and visual and descriptions of elemental things like clouds, sea and ice abound, as well as lichen recurring in three poems. There is both a plaintive thread to this sequence, considering all those who died on such voyages, and a linguistic brio. It is as if Harrison is writing both a Baedeker of the sea and a dictionary for it and those who venture ‘beyond the map’. Harrison doesn’t need many words to convey an unforgettable image, as in ‘He surfaced, vanishing’:

He surfaced, vanishing
in the wind-blackened water

then hid by drowning
his hands full of air.

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:

Icing the body electric? I can do the icing, but for
the electrics, you need Greensparks.

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Inverfarigaig, Loch Ness,
07712589626

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

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

CONTRIBUTORS' BIOGRAPHIES

James Andrew has had two collections of poems published: *Birdsong and Flame* and *Sailing the Sands*. He is a retired teacher and lives in Nairn.

Fran Baillie promised herself when she retired she would spend time and money on her writing and joined M.Litt at Dundee University. Fran says “It’s life-enhancing. Go for it!”

Alison Barr lives on the isolated Scoraig peninsula, where she took up the post of Head Teacher over three years ago. The wildlife of Little Loch Broom, the surrounding mountains, sea and islands inspire her writing.

Ted Bowman is a poet, editor, and educator specializing in change, transitions, and resulting loss and grief. He lives in St. Paul, Minnesota, but has been coming to Scotland for work on a mostly annual basis since 2002, often working with Lapidus Scotland.

Gavin Broom is originally from Falkirk and now lives and writes in Michigan. He edits fiction for *The Waterhouse Review*.

Maoilios Caimbeul – Às Taobh Sear an Eilein Sgitheanaich, a’ cruthachadh ann an iomadh dòigh-sgrìobhaidh.

Ken Cockburn is a poet, translator, editor and writing tutor based in Edinburgh. His most recent book is *Snapshot-dragon*, which collects his translations of poems by Arne Rautenberg. www.kencockburn.co.uk

Kevin Crowe has run Loch Croispol Bookshop & Restaurant with his partner Simon Long since 1999. He hopes to retire soon to concentrate on his own writing.

Mavis Gulliver is currently writing about the slate islands of Argyll. SEIL Ardencaple is one of around fifty poems which will form a collection to be published by Cinnamon Press.

George Gunn is currently writer in residence with Duthaich ‘Ic Aoidh, The Mackay Country Community Trust. His last two published plays were *Egil*, *Son of the Night Wolf* and *Atomic City*, both Fairplay Press.

Nicky Guthrie is a prize-winning poet who lives high in the hills between Loch Ness and the Beaully Firth. Her work has appeared in numerous anthologies and magazines.

Mandy Haggith lives in Assynt and writes in a shed with a tree-top view. Her latest novel is *Bear Witness*, published by Saraband . Mandy can be contacted at hag@worldforests.org

Vicki Husband has published poetry in: *Gutter, Iota, Mslexia, The North, The Rialto* and *Smiths Knoll*; she runs a bi-monthly Poetry Book Group in Glasgow.

Andy Jackson has been published in *Magma, Gutter* and *New Writing Scotland*. His collection *The Assassination Museum* was published by Red Squirrel Press (2010) and he is editor of *Split Screen anthology* (2012, also Red Squirrel Press).

Gordon Jarvie grew up in Troon, attending university in Ireland. His first collection was *Ayrshire Recessional* (1998), and he is currently putting together a wee buke of his Irish poems.

Brian Johnstone’s work has appeared throughout Scotland, in England, America and in various European countries. His latest collection is *The Book of Belongings* (Arc, 2009).

Stephen Keeler is a former BBC World Service website columnist. He writes non-fiction diary and travel pieces, haikus and poems and is currently working on a first collection of poetry while teaching occasional literature and creative writing courses in Ullapool.

Juliet Lamb works as an ornithologist, researching the movements and biology of seabirds. She is British-American by birth, French by association, and Orcadian by adoption.

Katherine Lockton edits South Bank Poetry. Her work has appeared in Magma, Rising, Ink Sweat & Tears, The Delinquent, Morning Star and South.

Pàdraig MacAoidh – À Leòdhas. Cruinneachadh From Another Island, Clutag 2010.

Fearghas MacFhionnlaigh – Bàrd a tha air an dreuchd aige mar fhear-teagaisg ealainn ann an Inbhis Nis a leigeil dheth o chionn ghoirid.

Garry MacKenzie lives in Crail, Fife, and is studying for a PhD in Landscape in Modern Poetry at the University of St Andrews.

Angus Macmillan is a psychologist, living in Dumfries. He writes poetry in English and Gaelic, and is co-editor of the literary magazine *Southlight*.

Aonghas MacNeacail – Bàrd mòr na Gàidhlig à Ùige an Eilein Sgitheanaich bho dhùthchas a thug a-mach Aois a’ Gheallaidh ann an 2013.

Greg MacThòmais – À Bruach Chluaidh bho thùs. Ag obair aig Sabhal Mòr Ostaig anns an Eilean Sgitheanach. Bàrdachd leis ann an *New Writing Scotland* 2012.

Heather Marshall, originally from Kilmarnock, now lives in South Carolina with two of her three children, a pair of Labrador-mix dogs, a set of bagpipes and a Royal Enfield motorcycle. She has an MFA in Creative Writing from Queens University of Charlotte.

Lyndsay Marshall lives in Aberdeen with her husband and two children. She studied creative writing through the Open University in 2012 and enjoys writing short stories.

Richie McCaffery is a Carnegie scholar at the University of Glasgow, researching the Scottish poets of WW2. His first poetry pamphlet is *Spinning Plates* from HappenStance Press (2012).

Ian McFadyen is a retired teacher whose life is now split between the Borders and Sutherland. He last graced *Northwords Now* in spring 2010 – hoping to see more stuff into print in this phase.

Hugh McMillan’s last poetry collection was *Thin Slice of Moon: selected and new poems*. He has received several awards and been anthologised widely.

Deborah Moffatt, originally from Vermont, lives in Fife. Her first poetry collection, *Far From Home*, (Lapwing, Belfast) was published in 2004. More information available at www.deborahmoffatt.com

L.M Morgan is studying for an MA in Creative Writing at Lancaster University. She was recently published in the Scottish Book Trust’s *My Favourite Place* anthology.

Donald S. Murray spent his childhood in Ness at the northern tip of the Isle of Lewis and now lives near the ‘Ness’ at the southern tip of the mainland of Shetland. His latest book is *Weaving Songs* (Birlinn).

Alison Napier lives in Perthshire. She has an MA in Creative Writing, her fiction has appeared in various journals and anthologies and her first novel, *Take-Away People*, is currently seeking a publisher.

Niall O’Gallagher Fear-naidheachd is fear-breithneachaidh. Saothair leis ann an irisean leithid An Guth, Gath agus Irish Pages.

Annie Pia returned last year to writing poetry after a thirty year gap; she is now a member of poetry and music groups in Edinburgh.

Pauline Prior-Pitt lives on the island of NorthUist. She has published six poetry collections and three pamphlets. *North Uist Sea Poems* won the 2006 Callum Macdonald Memorial Award.

Cynthia Rogerson has published four novels and a collection of stories. Her novel *I Love You, Goodbye* was shortlisted for the 2011 Scottish Novel of the Year, and developed into a Woman’s Hour serial. Her latest novel is *If I Touched the Earth* (Black and White).

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

Katharine Scambler works in mental health and travels to the Highlands and Islands whenever she can, to paint and write about the beautiful landscapes there.

Ian Stephen’s ‘St Kilda lyrics’, first published in *Northwords Now* will be published, in an expanded version, along with the music of David P Graham by Inventio-Musikverlag in Berlin, in 2013.

Liz Treacher works in Adult Learning in Sutherland. She also writes and is an exhibiting photographer.

Colin Will is a poet/publisher. He lives in Dunbar. His sixth collection, *The Propriety of Weeding*, was published by Red Squirrel Press in 2012

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