

The FREE literary magazine of the North

# Northwords Now

Issue 28, Autumn 2014

## AND STILL THE DANCE GOES ON

Referendum Poems by John Glenday, Aonghas Pàdraig Caimbeul, Sheenah Blackhall and others



New stories and poems including Wayne Price,

Ian Macpherson, Kenneth Steven and Irene Evans

In the Reviews Section: Cynthia Rogerson gets hooked on farming

## EDITORIAL

**A** WEEK OR so before the referendum I put out a call for September 19<sup>th</sup> poems via our Facebook page and by direct appeal to some of the many frequent contributors to the magazine. I was keen that poems had to be submitted on the day after the referendum. I wanted a spontaneous heart-and-head-and-soul reaction, whatever the result. You can read the poems for yourself on pages 3-5. It's fair to say that the dominant note struck by the writers is one of regret – even, in some cases hurt – whether that takes the form of dry humour or full-on lament.

It is also fair to say – putting referendum politics to one side for a moment – that these are poems that exhibit, in their different ways, a feeling for Scotland that springs from many different wells and takes a variety of forms. Scots today are, after all, a diverse people. A host of narratives play their part in forming the character of the country. That this should ring so loudly true in our literature is a cause for celebration. Writing is a way of describing and articulating a sense of place (whether that place is a nation or a nook in the landscape) and it's also a way of exploring why the question of belonging matters so much to people. To my mind these September 19<sup>th</sup> poems fulfil this brief. They look back to the referendum, and all the heady mix of emotion the result sparked, but they also show a range and depth of feeling that will serve Scotland well whatever direction it takes in the future. ■

– CHRIS POWICI  
Editor



Radio Lives: Stories from Barra, page 9



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### Front cover image

'Dance Me To The End of Love' by  
Alice Strange [www.alicestrange.com](http://www.alicestrange.com).

### 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. The next issue is planned for March 2015

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ALBA | CHRUTHACHAIL



# The Morning After

## Poems for September 19th

### The Ballot

JOHN GLENDAY

I wonder where those plywood  
ballot booths get stored afterwards?  
They look quite shoddy, I always think,  
but seem to last for years and years.

And don't they fold surprisingly flat?  
I hadn't realised they come with hinges.  
It's quite astonishing how little space  
democracy takes up when it's not in use.

I wonder if they're stored in my old school  
now that it's being used for something  
community – maybe in that cupboard off  
the Assembly Hall, where I was once

locked in by you-know-who for being from  
Monifieth? The half-opened boxes of chalk  
reminded me of ammunition, I remember,  
and there was this rolled-up oilpaper map

of the world with all the countries  
coloured dusty pink that we loved so much  
we showed them God and let them help  
with the chorus of the stirring songs we knew.

### Skipper's Log, 18-19 September 2014

MANDY HAGGITH

sun shines  
in a saltire blue sky  
a fogbank to the west

smooth or slight  
visibility very poor

even the pirate ship  
has disappeared  
we listen for the sweep of oars

longing for blue  
to break through

invisible birds  
on an unknowable shore  
twittering, carefree

we steam from Eddrachilles to Enard Bay  
on instruments

in fog, the fear is  
not the land unseen  
it's the big boats

all-night watch anchored in Loch Roe  
stars and moon do not shine through fog

the radio hisses  
the night gets darker  
and darker

gloom at dawn  
still at anchor

### Cumha 19

MAOILIOS CAIMBEUL

Carson a smaoinichinn  
Gum pòsadh tu saorsa,  
Gum beireadh tu air làimh oirr'  
'S gun èireadh tu san t-saoghal  
Am measg dhùthchannan dàimheil?

Fàilte gu tìr nam bancairean,  
A cheusas na bochdan air d' altairean,  
Fàilte gu tìr nan gealtairean.

Carson a chuir mi na ghealladh dhomh  
Gum faicinn e mus bàsaichinn,  
Alba ag èirigh suas  
Gus a bhith na tìr àbhaisteach? –  
Ach na àite daorsa mar dhuais.

Fàilte gu tìr nam bancairean,  
A cheusas na bochdan air d' altairean,  
Fàilte gu tìr nan gealtairean.

An sgillinn ruadh nad phòcaid,  
An aon luach a tha nad chridhe;  
'S math an airidh ma bhios gàire  
Air sràidean Lunnainn, is mire  
Ann a' Whitehall a-màireach.

Fàilte gu tìr nam bancairean,  
A cheusas na bochdan air d' altairean,  
Fàilte gu tìr nan gealtairean.

### Poem For The Undecided

ANDY JACKSON

Give me just a minute, or an hour,  
to go through all the papers one more time,  
plot the arguments against the normal  
distribution curve, find the shoogly line  
of least resistance, question every witness.

I seek a middle way, as undemanding  
as a mother's kiss, a non-intervention pact  
in the event of revolution, an unforked path  
that means I do not have to face the fact  
that all this noise is the sum of our choice.

So I've joined the Party With No Name,  
campaigning on the ticket *think now act later*,  
whose manifesto runs to a thousand volumes,  
each printed on responsibly sourced fly paper.  
The truth is double-sided. Yes? No? Undecided.

### Morning After

ROSEANNE WATT

I love this country for its mist;  
the hills' soft defeat  
to the smirr, that sweet dither  
into grey, the vow  
of old afternoon rain.

Yes, this is a haar  
for the hollow-boned,  
for clearing a patch  
on the blinded window  
to watch the glimmer

on the spiderless web  
slung between the rowan  
and the gutter. This  
is weather we could all lose  
something in. This  
is kind weather.

### Referendum: Eurydice Tint

SHEENAH BLACKHALL

A flashmob o mair nor 1,000 roarin 'Ay'  
Stappit the auncient Castlegate o Aiberdeen on a Setterday rally  
Chantin, flag wyvin fowk  
Bairns wi Saltire faces  
A dug weirin its fite an blue jaiket  
Gas wirkers, ile wirkers, halflin, littlins  
Auld bodachs, chauncers, skiffies, sparkies  
Cheerin ahin pipers, hippies, students  
The warld an its wife on the rin up tae makkin history

Wallace's wirds dirled ben the granite cassies  
Bruce on his shelt, raised his haun tae the lift  
In the killin hoose, the office, the mart  
In the picture hoose, the howff, the skweel  
The spikk on ilkie neuk wis aboot the Future  
Posties, porters, bikers, hikers, argy bargyin

An syne, the votes war coonted  
Hopes cam tummlin doon  
The aisse o yestreen steered up wi virr an smeddum  
Swypit awa like stoor

Fit a difference a day makks!  
The scales o indecesion had trimmled an cowped  
At waddins, kistins, christenins  
At ceilidhs, bevvies, rammies  
Aathin hung on the threid o brakkin news  
Fit ouiji boord cud hae faddomed thon ootcam?

This day oor kintra cud hae raxxed its auncient wings  
Taen flicht an soared  
Bit like Orpheus luikin backwird at Eurydice  
Dootin the pouer o oor richt tae a blythe new stert  
We lowsed the grup on oor ain Weird an Kintra  
An watched, puir gowks, it scalin like Scots mist

**In Dependence**

HAWORTH HODGKINSON

So Glasgow says yes  
to Edinburgh rule  
but Edinburgh  
says no thanks

and damp flames consume  
the paper rainbows  
that some of us dreamed  
could be true.

Once more we turn  
to traditional comforts  
like slinging caustic sludge  
at our neighbours’ flowerpots.

It’s a healthy enough distraction –  
keeps from our diminutive minds  
the bean-bankers and supermarketees  
who hold the true balance of power.

**Referendum Notebook**

DONALD ADAMSON

(The campaign)  
Jings! This is an unco sicht,  
The high and heid yins in a fricht!  
The grun that aye seemed firm and sure  
Is blawin aboot thir een like stour,  
The born-tae-rule are hivvin flegs  
As s\*\*\*e rolls doon Westminster’s legs  
Wi pairty leaders in a tizz:  
– I say, do you know where Scotland is?  
– I think it’s somewhere in the north.  
– I’ve found it! Let us sally forth!  
And north they come tae hiv their say  
And see if they kin save the day.

(Closin o the polls)  
The votin’s ower, suin we shall see,  
In the smaa oors, oor destinie.

(The morn)  
Noo the results are comin in,  
It seems the Yes camp didnae win.  
Tho strang in rhetoric and rhyme,  
They didnae quite convince – this time –  
They’ll tak it sair tae hert, nae doot,  
But ach, they neednae be pit oot,  
Conseederin this: that they’ve laid doon  
A marker for the neist time roon.  
A year or twae, and ... whae kin ken?...  
The hail stramash cuid stert again.

**Cuspair**

KIMBERLEY ROXBURGH

Facal beag airson rud caran mòr.  
Ann an deasbad mar eisimpleir far am bi daoine ag ràdh tòrr.  
Ach aig deireadh an latha chan eil ach dà fhacal  
cudromach:

Bu chòir

**The Act of Union**

CHRISTIE WILLIAMSON

If anybody had bothered to ask us in the first place  
the people given up for land and tribute in far off fast evolving  
offshore crown protectorates would have choked on the word  
that sings today, that lifts us up, above the sore crush  
of broken promises and threats half full.

300 years of divide and rule of usury,  
and I’ll be fine has brought us to this first date  
superstorm of hope and expectations;  
this feel the fear and go for it decision of a nation.

Who’s too wee to be free? Today it’s you and me  
who hold the casting vote on who’s oot, who’s in.  
Today, we give breath to the beaten before,  
to the believers who carried their hope to the end  
and if you haven’t read the script there’s alway lip  
ta lug an lug ta lip, an if you think we’re going anywhere  
then it’s time to think again.

We are united. We are of a settled mind.  
There’s no point getting in a state but we’d prefer  
to rise unaided and unfettered, and express our opinion  
that this mess is okay, this plan A is best of both worlds  
or that Scotland should be an independent country

all i did was carry a cross from booth to box  
to say Yes to change. Comin fast.  
No the first. No the last.

**Alba 19/9/2014**

AONGHAS PÀDRAIG CAIMBEUL

Tha na h-uain  
a’ mèlich air an t-sliabh  
‘s na caoraich bhàna  
a’ cnàmh na cìr.

Tha an òigridh  
air an tàlamh bàn  
fhàgail làn  
len croisean.

Earrach is Foghair  
a’ gleac  
‘s Geamhradh, na h-èideadh dubh,  
a’ suirghe Samhradh.

**Scotland 19/9/2014**

The lambs  
bleat on the moors  
and the white sheep  
chew the cud.

Young people  
have adorned  
No Man’s Land  
with their crosses.

Spring and Autumn  
wrestling  
and Winter, in her black robes,  
seducing Summer.

**ungrasped**

CHARLIE GRACIE

the boil of a fish rising in Loch Barvas  
a face, a child at the steamed bus window  
silvering of mist, soft on the morning road  
your brown eyes, held for a moment too long  
a balloon let go from a child’s hand  
my heart in a flutter

horizon, obscured in cloud

**the man from Del Monte**

MAGGIE WALLIS

where the hell was he  
on the eighteenth?





'Anthem' by Gerard M. Burns [www.gerardmburns.com](http://www.gerardmburns.com)

IT IS A truth universally acknowledged that marriage is nothing more than legalised prostitution. Which is why I proposed to Blaise. She turned me down, which I took at the time to be feminism gone mad. The truth, however, was far, far worse. It involved her mother, a bath ejector seat, and the idyllic hamlet of Trossach. But let's begin with the mother.

The morning sun shone, having rehearsed this perfect moment since the beginning of time, on Blaise. And time, its work now done, was about to come to an end.

At which point the phone rang.

It was Blaise's mother. Blaise promised to be right over.

'So what is it now?' I asked, as the sky darkened and the clock ticked on.

Which brings us to the bath ejector seat. Blaise's mother was, apparently, a big fan of daytime television. I say *apparently* because I'd never actually met her. But she liked nothing better than to cruise the shopping channels and make a bid for the very latest in gadgetry.

'Her bath ejector seat is stuck,' said Blaise. 'And she's stuck with it. The water is cooling fast, she can't reach the hot tap, so there you have it. I've got to go over.'

'That's the third time this week,' I said. 'I'll go with you.' And before she could protest I raised my hand for silence. 'I won't go anywhere near the woman,' I said. 'But I could do with a breath of fresh air.'

I rooted out my climbing boots and dusted down my signed copy of that timeless classic of travel writing, *A Brisk Hike Up The Trossachs* by Hector Baden Powell, maternal grand-nephew of the world's oldest boy scout. And soon I was lost in its exquisite, not to say *limpid*, prose.

'Ready?' said Blaise, who wasn't altogether happy about me making the trip.

I closed my book, saluted in time-honoured Boy Scout fashion, and marched to the car, my imaginary shorts creased to perfection, my hair parted neatly and my 2 chubby cheeks, also imaginary, puffed up with youthful pride.

To say nothing of the kiss curl.

Blaise eased Mem Saab into whatever it is you do with cars and we were off. It was a race against time. The water, once lukewarm, was probably now tepid and would, also probably, shortly be cold. There was no time to lose. Blaise gripped the steering wheel, a sure sign of the onset of one of her dreaded migraines. I had looked this up recently in my well-thumbed copy of *Women's Bodies, Men's Wisdom*, and had been referred to 'Abstention From Sexual Intercourse, Excuses For', but decided to keep this nugget of wisdom to myself.

'Haven't you got your medication?' I asked, but I was only fooling myself. I knew what was coming next.

'I think it might be a sugar low,' she said in her small voice. 'Better stop at a garage and get something. Just to be on the safe side.'

'Of course,' I said. 'A nice banana, perhaps.' My tone was pretty heavy on the irony. 'On the other hand we just might find something' – I whipped open the glove compartment and a mountain of chocolate tumbled to the floor – 'in here.'

'Ah,' said Blaise. 'I've been meaning to mention that.'

'No need,' I replied, and my voice was hard

yet compassionate. 'So what can I get you? Hmm? I can do dark, white, milk. You can have squares, balls, bars. There's...'

'Just give me chocolate,' whimpered Blaise.

I passed her a miniature Toblerone and awaited a progress report with interest.

'That's better,' she sighed. 'Just in time.' She squeezed my hand. 'Thanks, Doctor.'

I chuckled quietly to myself. No excuses tonight.

I held that thought for the remainder of the journey and entered Trossach in excellent spirits.

Blaise left me in the town centre and apologised yet again.

'It really isn't the right time to meet Mother,' she said. 'She's got issues with the Irish.'

***Such beauty. Framed in the jamb she looked like an iconic painting by one of those pre-Raphaelites. We would make love later, of course, but first there was the small matter of her mother.***

'I thought your father was Irish,' I said, adjusting my gaiters with a gay flourish.

'He was. But he kept quiet about it. Right. Here's the mobile. I'll phone you when I'm through.'

And she was off.

Trossach. You can almost smell the exclamation mark. As I say I was here for the brisk hike, but what a joy simply to breathe the sharp, clear air of this much loved retirement spot. Celebrated worldwide for the annual porridge tossing championships, its main claim to immortality rests with the 1950s classic TV series *The Embalmers*.

Trossach was black and white in those days, and as I strolled along the main street of the modern version I was transported back to the carefree days of childhood and the flickering box in the corner of the room. Every Sunday night Messrs. Mummer and Grieve would traipse the grainy hills and glens touting for business while Janet McNee, dear, prim Janet McNee, tended to their inner man.

'You haven't lived, laddie, till you've sunk your teeth into Janet McNee's Clootie Dumpling or sniffed the gentle aroma of her Cullen Skink.'

The show didn't survive the advent of colour television – audiences found Mummer's purple nose unintentionally funny – but the series lives on through the loyalty of the fans, and I was watching a coach

load of Janet McNees disgorging onto the town square when the mobile rang. The ring tone was set to the high-pitched cackle of a malevolent child.

'Thank goodness I've got you, Doctor,' bellowed Blaise in a voice normally reserved for her mother.

'I'm terribly sorry,' I bellowed back. 'I think you've got the wrong number.'

Blaise adjusted her volume.

'Hold on.'

I heard her booming at her mother. Something about signals and taking this outside and I do wish you'd use your hearing aid. Moments later she was hissing down the line.

'We've got a problem,' she said. 'Mother's toe is stuck in the bath ejector seat, the water's freezing and I can't get her out on my own.'

'Excellent,' I said. 'At last I get to meet her. I'll bring scones.'

'She's in the bath,' said Blaise in a measured way. 'Anyway, I've told her my doctor is holidaying in the area. So get something for hypothermia and please don't dawdle.'

'Doctor?' I said. 'I don't follow.'

'I just don't think it's the right time to meet you yet. Trust me.'

'So where's your doctor from?'

'What?'

'Well he can't very well be Irish, now can he?'

'Don't complicate matters,' said Blaise. 'Doctors are supposed to be Irish. So no silly voices. Just hurry.'

End of conversation.

I bought a miniature Isle of Ulay single malt and made my way to the house. Past a gateway with Presbyterian iconography. Up the gravel path. Blaise opened the door.

Such beauty. Framed in the jamb she looked like an iconic painting by one of those pre-Raphaelites. We would make love later, of course, but first there was the small matter of her mother.

'Ah, Doctor,' bellowed Blaise. 'Good of you to come.'

'All part of the service,' I said. 'So where's the lucky patient? What's her name, by the way?'

'Isobel,' said Blaise, ushering me into the bathroom.

Isobel sat in the bath chattering away like a six-year-old. Not exactly the hewn-granite Calvinist I'd been led to expect. She reminded me of Bonnie as a child when I left her in the tub and got side-tracked.

'I see you've put in bubble bath,' I said. 'That's a relief. Right. We'll have you out of there in no time.'

Isobel stopped chattering for a suspicious moment and eyed me keenly.

'Are you Irish?' she said.

'Certainly not,' I replied. 'I'm from Birmingham, but I got elocution lessons off a Mrs. O'Reilly.' She seemed reassured. 'Right,' I said. 'Let's winch you out of there.'

'I don't think so, Doctor,' said Isobel,

scooping a protective layer of bubbles around her upper torso. With, I would have to say, a slightly hunted look.

'Relax,' I said. 'I'm Bush Baptist. I assure you I won't take pleasure in it.'

And with that I plunged my hands deep into the suds and rummaged.

The toe I could fix, but I felt this might be a good opportunity to spend some quality time with its owner.

I turned to Blaise.

'Is there a monkey wrench in the house?'

Blaise narrowed *her* eyes.

'I'll have a look in the tool shed,' she said, and left me, arms flailing about in the water.

Her mother gave me a jaundiced look. I felt the need to say something.

'Hypothermia,' I said, 'and, unless I'm very much mistaken, frozen toe.'

'You *are* Irish, aren't you?' said Isobel.

'Sadly, I replied, 'yes.'

'From the north, perhaps?'

I detected a faint note of hope.

'I'm afraid not. Tragic accident of birth. Nor,' I sighed, 'am I Bush Baptist.'

Isobel pursed her chattering lips.

'You'll be telling me next you're Romish.'

I decided the time had come for truth if not reconciliation.

'I can't lie to you. I was raised a lapsed Catholic.'

At which point Blaise came back in brandishing a toasting fork.

'Will this do?'

'I don't think we're going to need it after all, Nurse,' I said. 'It's a simple matter of leverage.'

'In that case, Doctor,' said Blaise, 'if you lift, I'll release the toe.'

I leaned towards her mother in what I took to be the accepted bathside manner.

'Trust me,' I winked. 'I'm fully certified.'

Within moments I'd plopped her down on the mat and she scurried, still chattering, into the living room. I followed her through.

'Nice and warm in here,' I observed. 'At the same time, it might be an idea to put something on.'

Which she did. And soon she was steaming gently in front of the fire with a blanket draped round her and a glass of quote 'medicine' unquote in her aged hand. As she sat there with her skin arranged in neat wrinkles I was reminded of little Bonnie when I finally remembered to take her out of the bath.

So... *vulnerable*.

She took another sip of her medicine and gave me the beady eye.

'I'd offer you something, Doctor, but this is a dry house.'

'And I'd put the kettle on,' said Blaise, 'but I'm sure the doctor has other calls on his time.'

'Not at all,' I said. 'Free as a bird. Tea would be lovely.'

Blaise gave me a withering look and went into the kitchen.

Which left me alone with Isobel.

As she glowered at me across the hearth I felt we were beginning to bond. Which made her bombshell all the more difficult to bear.

'If Mingus wasn't working so hard he'd be here,' she said meaningfully, taking another sip. 'Oh yes. Mingus would be straight over.'

'So – who's this Mingus?' I asked nonchalantly.

At least it was meant to be nonchalant,

but nonchalance doesn't contain within its broader meaning a mounting sense of doom.

Isobel took another dainty sip.

'Why, Blaise's husband,' she said, pointing to a wall of photos. Blaise in a wedding dress. Blaise cutting a wedding cake. Blaise being driven away in a wedding car. All with the same... husband?

I was speechless. I thought of all those times she'd been away overnight. Readings, she'd said. Seminars. Book signings. And all the time – surely it couldn't be possible – she'd been leading a double life.

Isobel broke the silence.

'He's a chief executive.'

I was still speechless, so I said nothing.

'Oh yes indeed,' she continued, sipping her medicine with Lutheran abandon. 'He's very high up is Mingus.'

I could finally contain myself no longer.

'Blaise? Married?'

'Oh yes, Doctor. Quite a catch.'

Blaise came back in, beautiful still but now, perhaps, unattainable. I was devastated. I accepted the cup of tea she proffered as an unacceptable substitute for true love and mentally packed my bags.

Isobel took another sip and giggled quietly.

'For goodness sake, Mother,' said Blaise. 'What have you been saying to upset the doctor? Just look at his little face.'

Ah. If only she knew.

Her mother took a generous slurp.

'Aye. Well he wouldn't have had to come in the first place,' she pouted, 'if my favourite son-in-law was here.'

Blaise bristled.

'Who?!'

'You know who,' I said frostily, pointing at the wall of photos. 'Mingus.'

'Mother,' snapped Blaise gently. 'I haven't seen Mingus in 12 years.'

Her mother shifted uneasily.

'Aye. Well. That'll be the overtime.'

'No,' said Blaise. 'That'll be the divorce.' She stood up. 'And besides, I should have told you before, Mother. I've got a new man in my life.'

Her mother swirled the medicine in her glass and mulled this over. She lowered her voice to a melancholy whisper.

'There's something I've been wanting to tell you too, Blaise. Maybe you'd best sit down.'

Blaise stayed rooted to the spot.

'What is it, Mother?'

'It's been weighing on me for years. Your father...' – Isobel, her eyes misty, suddenly looked her age – '...was Irish. There, I've said it.'

The weight lifted, she sat up straight in her seat. 'So where's this fancy man of yours just now?'

'At home,' said Blaise. 'Why?'

Her mother staggered to her feet.

'I'm an old woman,' she slurred, 'A bit set in my ways. But maybe it's time.'

She gave her medicine a final swirl, drained the glass, and picked up the phone.

'Mother?' said Blaise.

'Let me be, lass,' hiccupped her mother. 'Now where's that blessed number of yours?'

She dialled. The malevolent child cackled in my pocket. I steeled myself, stood, and looked at the woman I loved.

'Leave this to me, Blaise,' I said. 'I'll take it.' ■

# Poetry

## Eye-exam

RICHIE MCCAFFERY

There came a point,  
after shining the light  
right in my eyes,

that all I could see  
was cracked clay,  
like a dried-up lake.

The optician explained  
this was inside my eye  
and it was healthy.

In bed that night  
I looked in your eyes  
and you into mine.

I recalled the crazing,  
how gaze is a drought  
and that is normal.

## Derick John Milburn

RICHIE MCCAFFERY

Being a building conservator,  
masons gave my father samples  
of their work – bits of mullions,  
voussoirs from unbuilt arches  
and even a simple headstone,  
carved *Derick John Milburn*.

Derick had never existed –  
marriage of a dog's name  
and the mason's accountant.  
We put it under the apple tree  
in our garden to gather moss  
like the velvet of time.

People asked about this man,  
wondering our relation to him.  
It seemed cold to say *No-one*,  
So he became the one we mourn  
on days when we feel down  
and don't know the reason why.

## On being asked to write a poem about a tool or utensil

DIANA HENDRY

I want an item without associations,  
something clean of history, so  
it can't be the dust-pan, at least fifty  
years old and tattooed with the cigarette stubs  
of Mrs Ellis who used to 'do' for us  
when the children were small and the house  
too big. And it can't be the Spong Bean Slicer 633,  
still clamped on the work top, cast iron,  
British made, dark green and beautiful  
with its two nicely shaped holes for thin/fat beans.  
It comes apart so neatly, unscrews  
to reveal its Sheffield steel blade. It's probably  
one of those items bought by my ex  
who had an obscure affection for mangles  
and glass bottles. It remains brilliant for slicing  
string beans, churning them out in even  
slivers, though nowadays we hardly ever  
eat them. Still, the grandchildren  
like poking paper down the holes  
and turning the handle for the thrill  
of metamorphosis. And it can't be  
the dishwasher, because it's impossible  
to use without my brother-in-law's voice  
instructing me on how to load it and to put  
the knives handles up and not to keep  
opening and shutting the door this being  
a waste of time and motion. So I suppose  
it has to be the new lawn mower named  
by some dullard, *The Veri-Green* which  
replaces the old *Panther* (now there's a name  
to mow with) which has travelled from  
Bristol to Edinburgh, has known two lawns  
and a number of *Damons*. *The Veri-Green*  
has a flimsy net called a grass catcher  
instead of a bucket. As yet it has no  
associations, no history. One day when the shed's  
rusted it a little, I might actually like it.

# Poems by Judith Taylor

## Hogmanay

The traditional things to turn the year.  
As night thins down to morning

Granny's favourite song  
and all the old battles and pointless causes  
rise for another airing.

At midnight we were wishing each other  
*all the best for the future:*

by 3 a.m. we'll be picking over the bones of  
what went wrong

- in the national history  
to begin with, but pretty soon  
between ourselves.

Somebody needs to watch the sky  
sing out when it starts to lighten  
and remind us of the time

Jock went out at dawn  
came back with an armful of eggs. Swore

he just looked into the henhouse  
and the bonny birds  
were throwing them at him.

Then  
for any sake, will somebody  
get those bairns away to bed?  
Not that they'll want to go, of course, but

now's the time: now  
while we're all still laughing.

## Flowers

I wanted to write an elegy  
without flowers. I know they're a requirement

but I wanted not to think of the way we hid  
the new, dark scar your grave was  
under pretty coloured flowers

and little messages.  
Only, what else could I speak of  
in that bitter day?

Nothing weather.  
Trees on the edge of the river

empty, not prepared  
to consider spring

and everything we had lost in you  
- your bright stare, your serious smile  
your dancing -

lost already  
beyond the last of our hopes' reach.

I wanted not to think of the way we turned aside  
and left you, as we had to  
in a place where you had neither leaves nor birdsong

for shelter, only  
grey grass, still keeping its winter;  
and our terrible swathe of flowers.

## The Lapland Woman and the Finland Woman

They're peripheral to the story  
grotesque beside the beautiful Prince and Princess  
or the Snow Queen in her white sleigh

and even the talking ravens have more glamour  
but the older I get, the more I think about  
those two sisters

who live in the cold North  
in houses that are always hot, since they're always  
cooking up  
whatever they need

in the way of soup, or spells.  
Hardy and self-reliant  
hospitable, too, to passing strays

generous with their stores and their directions  
and terribly wise:  
they are the ones I want to be

not Gerda. Though I never will.  
And they'd laugh to think I admire them.  
They laugh more than is dignified, and don't care

who overhears.  
They send each other letters  
now and then, written on stockfish

and each one chuckles knowledgeably  
over the other's latest  
as she adds it to the pot.

## Raven, Stac Pollaidh

Your black plumes  
take in all the light, and yet  
you shine.

The clap of your wings is  
slow and so  
considered

it's a wonder how the cold  
wind resists you or

sustains you  
as you glide  
above your high lands

deliberating where  
you will go to dine  
today.

We see you  
with the dead

and we shine our own  
thought and memory  
on your darkness.

Our stories give you  
speech and  
evil omen

yet you are gracious  
and delicate  
in your season

the bones of your body  
so fine

it's as if you have inherited them  
already stripped  
and windblown.

You live so long  
you learn  
to mourn.

You step out  
into nothingness

below the frightened walker  
on the hard crag:  
your voice knocks

like a warning  
like the clapper  
in the stone bell of your country.

# Radio Lives: Stories from Barra

Article by Janice Ross

William Blake says,  
“To see the World in a Grain of Sand  
And Heaven in a Wild Flower  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand  
And Eternity in an hour...”

BLAKE NEVER VISITED Barra yet the imagery of his prophetic words succinctly describes the wanton natural beauty of the miles of deserted sandy beaches and carpets of wild flowers growing freely on the machairs of Borge and Vatersay. But Barra is about people as well as nature and for the last five years I have been sharing and recording individual life-stories for ‘Barra Island Discs’ on the local radio station. Here are some of those voices.

Until very recently Dr. David Bickle had been Barra’s GP, a post he held for 30 years. He was also the very first person interviewed for Barra Island Discs.

*I always had a desire to have an island practice so when deciding to be a GP this was the main reason why I gave up hospital practice. I had been on the west coast for about 4 or 5 holidays when I was young and really enjoyed them. I liked the solitude and the wildness of it. Barra definitely has these qualities. I think I was extremely fortunate to get the contract to be a doctor here on Barra. I have loved my life here. I have thoroughly enjoyed the people of Barra and my life on the island and it has given me many opportunities I wouldn’t have had on the mainland and I look back with a great deal of pleasure.”*

Claire Brett is a holiday tripper who likes collie dogs. Claire is a psycho-analyst.

*I feel very, very blessed to have been coming to Barra ever since I can remember, every summer making the trip up to Barra from where I live in England with my family. Every summer I have been bringing my own children but the connection goes away back well...my parents met on the island in 1946. My mother was living on the island at Eoligaray for a few years after the war as a widow with my half brother Crinan but the story goes further back than that. The family of my mother’s first husband, the Alexander family had been coming to the island since 1910 so it really is a long connection. The Alexander family, from near the Bridge of Allan, they came in 1910 and they built the house on the point at the northern tip of traigh mhor (big beach) down on the shore in 1935. Their connection is Eva Alexander and her friend Marion Castles, were young women before the first world war and they were learning Gaelic in Fort William and their Gaelic teacher said if you really want to learn Gaelic you better come and stay in Barra and Mrs Joseph MacLean in Skallary, I think it is the house that is now a craft shop, and they stayed there that was the beginning of the connection. They loved Barra and it is now into the fourth generation...*

*During the war, there were very few visitors and we have got this wonderful visitor’s book and you can see year by year everyone who visited the house. After the war and the de Glens came after the war, Marion Castles married Louis De Glen so she was*



Castlebay, Barra. Photo: Tony Bell

*a De Glen and it was often known as De Glen’s house. Then my mother came, she had met and married her husband Sandy Alexander who had spent his boyhood holidays at the house and she had met him and married him in India during the war. He was an engineer and had joined the Indian army during the war and she was there because my maternal grandparents lived and worked in India so they married. Very tragically Sandy contracted polio and died so my mother was left as a young widow, pregnant and expecting her first child who is my half brother Crinan. So when she was able to come back in a convoy during the war in very difficult conditions, her one idea was to come to Scotland and meet the Alexander relatives and particularly to come to Barra which she has heard so much about from Sandy. He had even taught her a few words of Gaelic and taught her about the hills and the neighbours. When she came here she decided this was where she wanted to live with the baby. Here in Eoligaray with her child in a house with no electricity and no running water. I think those years made such a strong connection because she felt so welcomed by the Eoligaray community and she kept her vegetables and then my father came as a young doctor to visit through the De Glen connection... the Cuddy suggested he become the Barra doctor but he was living in London and he persuaded my mum to come away and become a doctor’s wife. It was a very hard decision but she eventually agreed on the grounds that we came back every summer to the house and it is my mother’s birthday, she is 92 today and she is determined to get up here as often as she can...*

Seonaidh Beaton left his home in Borge at the age of 15 possessing two key qualities: knowledge of ancient mariner skills (much sought after by shipping companies both at home and abroad) and a keen sense of adventure.

*“I spent 49 years at sea...well in my young days all the young lads headed for the sea especially the people from Barra, Eriskay and Stornoway. The Uist ones preferred to go to the army although*

*quite a lot of them went to sea but the Barraich (indigenous) headed for the sea and the girls went to mainland nursing...because there was nothing else for it there was no other work on the island, it wasn’t a choice. I got a fishing discharge from an old bodach (man) in Borge that had a wee fishing boat and he wrote me a discharge to say I had served with him for a year or something on his fishing boat... and you needed that to go away and go to the pool in Glasgow where you registered as a seaman so you produced this bit of paper...there was plenty of my type there from Barra, we were all in the same boat. I joined a ship in Liverpool and we went to Galveston, Texas to bring a load of sulphur to the UK. I was a bit sea-sick for a couple of days but when I got over that I joined another ship. There were 10 of us from Barra on that ship and there are only 2 of us alive today, me and Iain Sinclair up in Glen and we were away for over a year on that voyage. We went to the West Indies through the Panama Canal up to Singapore, China, Hong Kong before going on a tramp ship – you just went from port to port wherever there was a cargo and you were shifted all over the place, all over the world really so I went from China down to Australia did all the ports there: Fremantle, Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Port Elizabeth and then down to New Zealand and brought back a cargo of coal to the UK. Coal!*

Nannag Gillies is as much Vatersay as the white sands. Smoking and laughing a lot, she is a formidable woman. It poured shamelessly the day of the interview but her sunny disposition brought a warmth that enveloped both of us.

*Well I was born in Glasgow in August 1937. But I was only a fortnight when my mother died. And I was brought up then in Caolas on the island of Vatersay by my mother’s sister and her brother – they none of them were married. They brought me up as their own so to speak. That was the only mother I knew was her but I knew she wasn’t my mother you know...*

*I went to school in Vatersay. There was no road*

*then. It was just a track road. Nothing but puddles! You would have to jump on stepping stones going across the puddles but we got used to it. Most of the days we went across the hill straight up as the crow flies down to the school on the other side and the same coming back home. We were taught in Gaelic. We had no English when we went to school and the teacher we had at school was English speaking. She was Irish. And I don’t know whether she had her own Irish Gaelic. But I don’t know how we were communicating with her. But anyway we got there and we learned English. We weren’t taught in Gaelic but when we were older we went to her husband. Her husband was the teacher in the other room. When we went to him we started learning Gaelic but by then we were too old whereas nowadays the children start learning Gaelic when they’re wee. All of my own children can read and write it apart from me.*

Sometimes people find it very difficult to open their hearts and describe their personal journey through the twists and turns of life, and sometimes a memory long sleeping in the back bedrooms of our minds may waken, suddenly bringing pleasant smiles and laughter with it. The secret of successful interviewing is sharing in the warm humanity of the moment, understanding and empathising but never judging the choices they have made in life. It’s about intimacy and trust really, trusting that for one hour they are free to share their life stories in the intimate setting of a local radio studio being interviewed with someone they feel ultimately safe with. Plus it is a lot of fun, it’s a laugh – the end product is a radio recording of your life story, your voice forever shared with a global audience and a small photograph in the local island paper with the opportunity to shine like a star for one whole week. After all it’s not just ‘celebrities’ who have a right to be heard; the multifarious voices of ordinary, everyday people are just as fascinating, probably more so in a small island community like Barra. ■

# The Complex

SHORT STORY BY MARTIN MACINNES



IT BEGAN EITHER with the lights or the walls.

After work, having first taken the city-bus he would turn and walk onto the road that led into the complex. The buildings were tall – the highest eighteen storeys – modern and expensive. On the top of each of the buildings were the penthouses, with deep balconies and dramatic views of the estuary and north.

It was winter. From when he first turned onto the access road the walk was seven minutes to his door. He liked to take as much of the walk as possible by the water's edge. In the dark the lights on the land facing looked like fires. A refinery seventeen miles from the far bank would burn its waste off every quarter, a light that amplified at night and resulted in dozens of mistaken calls to the emergency services. The first time you saw it it was barely credible. Depending on your distance it seemed either the housing complex was alight or else one of the unpopulated estuary islands. The inhabitants of the complex had grown to enjoy the scene, especially those on the upper levels with the superior views. The tourists on short-term rents would panic, calling out on the path and on the access road, stunned by the indifference of the passing cars entering and exiting the low-level car park. The boats could only add to the confusion, small loaders ferrying cargo from the docks to the other side, mistaken now for emergency vehicles, as were the aircraft plying the busy route above.

Part of his routine, on the seven minutes of this walk, was to scan the windows for lights. It was automatic. There was no relevance to the lights; he didn't know any of the neighbours. He would look, naturally, for signs of current occupancy in the flats immediately adjacent to his own. It was a success when there was nothing.

He must have made a mistake. He counted again, from the bottom: zero, one, two, three, four. Then he counted across from the side. He was positive: his flat was lit up. He could see the living room lights and the bedroom, the open blinds, the interior revealed through the floor-to-ceiling windows.

He ran to the door. Before entering the building he considered the possibilities: burglary, police, or some factor employed to oversee maintenance within the building.

He placed his key between thumb and forefinger and concealed it in a fist. This was all he had. He would strike for the face, if it came to it.

Nothing unusual in the elevator nor the fourth-floor hall, but as he paused before his door and went to press his head in he heard voices, laughter, and felt, he thought, the door give way a little.

He twisted and gently pushed the handle, pausing, trying to give himself some advantage. But having earlier appeared to give way, the door was locked. Had they heard his movements? The complex received only weak coverage, he could not call for help. And anyway, what would he say? 'There is a light in my flat.' His failure to express the moment almost offered him escape. He could walk away, ignore it. But the space inside was being destroyed. His space. It was rage that he felt. He unlocked the door, readied his wrist, and entered.

He was convinced equally that there was

no further evidence and that he had not been mistaken. He had never once left those lights on. Those were not the lights that he used, loud central lights set to noon – he preferred the dimmer desk lamps, blending day and night easily. He studied the drawers, the cupboards, the fridge-freezer, the locks on the windows. He looked from a distance and up close at the carpets in the hall, the bedroom, and the guest room, checking for dirt-prints and other faint impressions on the floor. He decided to hold his hands up and forget it, it was one of those small inexplicable things. He had tasks to do, he was hungry, already his time away from work was being eaten up and he would have to sleep again.

He cooked, looked at the television, dozed on the sofa directly over the estuary and the other side. He had never thought to conceal those windows.

Every few minutes he was jolted, as if by a watcher, and he knew eventually he would have to face up to the strangeness of the visit and the lights.

He meant to record his last impression of each room as he left so he could be sure on returning that nothing had changed. He found that this worked, but that it was difficult not to follow the practice in all rooms, no matter where he was. He had been aware of the presence of neighbours above him, the screen of glass channelling the noise, but he was hearing, now, a notably closer voice – sometimes he would wake, and it was as if he were being spoken to from inches away. Though the voice was clear and sharp, the language was strange to him, and from the pitch and emphasis it was difficult to assign it to a man or to a woman, or to guess how they

were feeling. It didn't appear to be talking to anyone but himself.

The extent to which the glass sealed his room was becoming a concern. As well as a fault in its ability to block sound it seemed prone to other leaks. Wind would blow right through it, chilling him at night and rustling the objects of his room. One morning he woke to a pool of rainwater. He found an unusual amount of flies and spiders.

He checked close up for any corruption, even tiny holes pricked through the glass. Of course all the problems had started with the lights; but why would someone enter his house and alter the construction of its walls? Who would go to such trouble to torment him by these slow means?

His seasonal holidays arrived and he was determined this would be a new start. First he laundered all his clothes and linen and hoovered and mopped the floors. He lined the glass wall's edge with rugs to soak up any leak, though the weather seemed to have settled and no storms were immediately due. He diverted himself with good food and books and began to develop a humorous perspective on the events of the past few months. He had been overworked. It had been a difficult year, with all the changes, and he had almost lost himself, it seems.

He treated himself on New Year's Day. A feast. He started with soup and wine at mid-day, duck later in the afternoon. Flitting between a pleasant doze and some pages of a novel, he rose, remembering to take the coffee from the filter. There was one low-light in the room. Standing, he went quickly into a forward step, and then another, when suddenly he felt, from the head first, that

he'd lost his balance – only he hadn't, he remained upright, he had not fallen. A great pressure was felt on his forehead, he closed his eyes, and a rippling, fluttering sensation moved across his whole body. He was aware, as he stood, of shaking, of producing a tight vibration on his limbs, and he felt, he was sure, as sure as he ever was of anything, that he was trying to discharge something, and that that thing was himself. In the electric flux he felt warm and appalled, ashamed of what he was, and he wanted to turn his back on all of it, leave the shaking, fitting body behind, and exit the room. But he could not do this. The quick, total twitching of his body had its own intelligence. He was embarrassed and full of dread for his need, now, in the future, to have to deal with this, even as it was happening: either of confronting the episode, with all the upheaval that would surely entail, or of doing nothing about it, which would slowly and quietly come to dominate his mind. Still it was happening.

He was lifted like the altered dead. Self-sourced electricity made him move, was still seizing and shaking him, even as he thought he could stop it any time if he willed it. He knew it would be more painful to open his eyes so he guarded this tenderness with his lids, tried to cover the rest of himself, most importantly the head, which should be protected from hard surface if he fell. The seizure was made of a repeated motion, a failure of light to leave, looping back from the skin surface towards where it came from, inside, again and again.

It could only have lasted under a minute. He was exhausted. He sat down on the sofa – food, television. He had frightened himself. There was the shame of this coming from nowhere but him, though he understand none of it. The light, the electricity, had shocked him with its strength – but then, he thought, all that was different about it, all that was different from himself, all that it did not have, perhaps, was a voice.

He tidied the front room carefully and thoroughly, taking satisfaction in the cleanness of the surfaces, the glimmer of low light on the false black-marble counter, the pristine vacancy of the cooker, the uniform tone and direction on the bristles on the large rug.

As always the holiday was over before he knew it, and immediately and mawkishly he regretted the waste. Drying himself he noticed his phone moving silently on his bed, and as he picked it up he saw a signal indicating a message left. He sat at the counter in the front room, the coffee prepared, and picked it up to listen.

He would have to listen to the message again. He had not given it his attention, this was his first day back at work and there was a lot on his mind.

It didn't seem very clear, in an annoying, tantalising way weaving in and out of focus, as if the speaker felt self-conscious and was varying the tone and volume of his voice, holding the phone at distances from his mouth. The reception levels in the complex were notoriously bad and had also affected the quality. It sounded as if the voice was outside, with traces of wind rippling through the speech.

It all added up to a message he couldn't quite make out. The voice seemed familiar, something about the accent close, hospitable,

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known – an aged man from a rural place with warmth and calm. But the words weren’t hospitable. The words were tired; the speaker had come to the end of something. And having come to the end, he was communicating what it meant, what effect it would have. His first assumption, that the call was a mistake, reaching him in error and sent by someone he had never known, was at odds with the warmth and familiarity of the voice.

The voice on the phone never mentioned a name, or if it did then only at the start, spoken very lowly and tightly, the mouth not fully open.

The voice said several times he had to leave. Things would need cleared by the end of the week. There was something else happening, someone new coming in. It would be appreciated if he could go as quickly as possible.

Strange, getting a call like that, clearly an important one, in error. The intended recipient was known to the caller, and as the call was made from outside then the number was likely stored. *His* number.

He didn’t immediately delete the message. He had left himself short on time – he dashed the coffee down, left the mug in the sink, and exited the apartment. But immediately he had left he was back in – he removed his shoes, checked the status of the glass walls and left again, testing the lock three times by pulling on the handle, watching it as he went away finally and entered the elevator.

The building’s front door had been rigged open with a hook on its hinge. The wind blew leaves down the hall. Walking down the ramp, looking out onto the estuary, he noticed a large van blocking the road – removals, a common sight in the complex. People seemed, here, to always be in flux.

It took him several seconds to realise the potential implications, to link the phone message with the removals van backed up on the building’s entrance.

He rented the property. Everything, as far as he knew, was in order. There had been no irregularities as far as he was aware. He had not been resident long and the agency hadn’t inspected the place. But the lights, two months ago. Perhaps they had let themselves in, observed something they considered a problem, and had begun the process of clearing him out. It was possible they communicated largely by email, that several concerned messages lay dormant in some sub-folder. Now, they felt the situation was serious enough to action his departure.

He stopped at the bottom of the ramp. He felt exactly as he had done waiting in the hall two months ago, equally full of dread and dismissive. He wanted to forget what was going on, even as he sensed its significance. His alarm and insecurity these past two months may be symptoms of his dread, low-level awareness of his coming eviction.

He knew none of it could be happening – it did not connect – and yet it was playing out before him, the removal men readying their trolleys and crates impassively. He would have nowhere to go. And all his things, taken out, here, in the storm – suddenly he saw that the removal van would already be loaded, full of the things of the incomers. They would be arriving at the front door, entering the premises, amazed at the presumptive ignorance of its ex-inhabiter, himself.

The men moved in. He had wanted to ask where they were going – that would clear it up – but he had missed his opportunity, and it came as relief. He could watch from outside via the glass walls, see where they went, or he could re-enter the building himself, take the elevator back up to the fourth floor.

He would be late for work. He rushed away, the wind and now the rain tearing at his face, animating his hair, and he cursed at the oncoming traffic.

Instinctively, unconsciously, he took the phone from his pocket and checked the screen. He hadn’t deleted the message. The number was still there. He brought the details up and pressed ‘call’. He knew it would be difficult to hear and to be heard with the wind, the rain, and in an area of weak cover, but it rang.

A woman’s voice: hello? Again a voice he knows, a familiar voice, not a threat. And it is clear that she is the wife of the man on the message.

Hello. I received a message from you – from this number – earlier this morning, and it’s not for me.

[Silence.]  
Who am I speaking to?  
He spoke louder, against the wind.  
It was a mis-dialled number. There was a message left for me, and it’s not meant for me.

He told her his name. A young boy’s voice, with the same closely familiar tone, explained something to her in the background: ‘uncle’ something.

Oh. I’m sorry.  
No – I mean, I am just calling, he said, to let you know. In case it was important. The message. Because he will have thought the message was received.  
Ah. Ok. Thank you for that.  
Ok. Goodbye.  
Goodbye.

She had heard him well enough, despite the weather, to understand what he meant. It was not like him to make the call like that, disturbing the strangers at breakfast. But he had cleared the issue. A series of coincidences, arbitrary things unfortunately timed. He was satisfied with his intervention, pleased at how it had gone. But he dreaded seeing the lights in his flat from outside in the night. And he could not be completely assured of the innocence of the movers until he saw his own furniture again, intact and in place, all his things, and had checked that the glass walls were sealed and nothing could get in or out.

The voices were familiar. He had not been mistaken. And how had the call been made? He had only recently moved to the area. The family – the older man and woman, the grandson, perhaps nephew – sounded like voices in his memory, accents from his youth. That might have been the source of her confusion, her asking him to clarify his name. Perhaps she, too, thought she knew him from somewhere, some other time, and just couldn’t remember where.

He saw himself standing in the middle of his front room, jerking his body uncontrollably by the tall glass wall, a strange light animating him, the same movements running through his body again and again, as if something was stuck, something he did not understand wanting to rush out through the glass and across the water. ■

## Cogadh Z agus na h-Os-laoich

(Cf Herman Dooyeweerd mun sgaradh “cruth is stuth” Heilleanach)

FEARGHAS MACFHIONNLAIGH

Teichibh! Tha na zombaidhean a’ tighinn!  
Tha Sràid Bhothchanan a’ cur thairis leotha!  
Chan ann slaodach bacach a tha iad nas motha  
ach air chuthach ann an ionnsaigh-catha!

Nas cuthachaile buileach na Blàr Chùil Lodair.  
No Bragàd Aotrom Gleann a’ Bhàis.  
No clàbar ifrinneach Somme is Ypres.  
Siod zombaidhean a’ lionadh Ceàrn Sheòrais an-dràst!

Tha fradharc aca ged a bhios iad dall!  
Tha fadachd orra gus an ith iad ar feòil!  
Às a’ Ghreug a thàinig iad o chionn linn nan con,  
slighe Ameireaga chugainn, tha am fathann a’ dol.

Ach fuirichibh mionaid! Dè tha sin os ar cionn!  
Siod Spiderman a’ leum bho stiòpall an Tron!  
Agus Batman agus Ironman agus Superman fhèin!  
Diathan-Olympais Ameireaga gus ar sàbhaladh bho chron!

*An e corra-shùgain air balla a th’ anns ar cuid smuaine,  
nar suidhe, a rèir Phleuto, cuibhrichte nar n-uaimh?  
Ar cùlaibh ris an doras, fo gheasaibh ar mùbhaidh,  
am bidh solais àrda gar dùsgadh aig deireadh na chùise?*

## Mo chasan

FEARGHAS MACFHIONNLAIGH

Mo chasan  
a’ ceumnachadh le tàirneanach  
fo bhuaidh iomtharraing na planaide.

M’ anail  
mar ghaoth làidir a’ sgàineadh  
craobhan-giuthais nam beann

Mo làmhan  
a’ cur mu chuairt nan cuantan mar choire  
‘s nan sgòthan mar bhrataichean buadhmhor

Mo shùilean  
a’ cunntadh nan reul  
le gàirdeachas is geur-chùis

Mo chridhe  
a’ deàrrsadh  
mar a’ ghrian

## An Eilbheis

FEARGHAS MACFHIONNLAIGH

Bàta-smùid air loch gorm san Eilbheis  
is gobhlain-ghaoithe a’ sigheadh seachad.  
Chì mì fodham na piostonan mòra  
mar ghàirdeanan gleansach airgid is òir.

Ach nan tuiteadh cuideigin nam measg  
bhiodh gach draoidheachd sgaoilte.  
Cha bhiodh san innealra an uairsin  
ach miotailt chruaidh a’ briseadh chnàmh.

Agus cha chreid mi gum biodh  
an nighean bhrèagha Iapanach ud  
airson dealbh eile a thogail an-diugh.  
Ach shigheadh na gobhlain-ghaoithe seachad.

# Poems by Wayne Price



## From the Lookout's Diary

The weather comes from the empty west  
like carnival, on stilts of rain.

I am happy in my simple, tall needle of  
attention,  
pointing one way, facing everywhere

but down. I keep neat as a white laboratory rat;  
its pink clean fingers, warm palms.

Tired of the wider place where every word  
is another's guest, I like this middle kingdom,

this country of one. Whatever my instructions,  
commands, I have already forgotten them.

★

Hail, all day at the great  
walls of my windows, like thrown  
fistfuls of stones. I have finished the diary  
of the lookout before me. The pick  
in his throat like a fishbone  
that was cancer all along, and swallowed him.  
Two bearers, gossiping, carried the body down  
the morning I arrived. It passed me on the spiral  
stair  
pitching like an empty canoe in their arms.

★

Spring. At last the thin air  
is warming. The bright brass handrail out of  
doors,  
plain and smooth as a wedding ring  
is singing in the wind again.  
From its shine the glassy latitudes curl  
their perfect zeros. Mornings, bent double  
over its slippery band, I try to read the pages  
of the seabirds' white shoulders  
wheeling below. I am too remote, too slow.

★

Blue June.  
I am like a fly in a long-necked  
bottle in the sun.

I remember how  
high summer moves  
stately and slow  
across cornfields, pasture, the wind-  
scrubbed hilltops at noon.

Is it the delicate  
telescope, or what its sliding  
magician's cabinet reveals  
that eyes me when I lift it –  
insect-like, tiny?

★

This much further from  
the core, this much  
nearer the stars, the kettle  
is quick as a dog to its own whistle.

All night, faint detonations  
of dry lightning over the skerries  
like the highlights of distant  
others at war, the world's  
volume turned low.

It occurs to me suddenly  
that light from the furthest star  
has travelled equally far  
the other way. Perhaps to another tower.

★

This morning, a field mouse  
brained in the trap. Its fine  
long tail for balancing  
through how many thousands  
of generations on  
swaying ears of corn?

Winter soon. The herring fleets  
are gone, that shifted on the rim  
like ghost towns. The ocean painting itself again  
with wide brushes of storm.

At night the blatant harvest moon  
and the constellations I never learned,  
though I think I recognise the twins, and the  
hunter's  
arrowless bow. Awake in my bunk  
I try to remember the words I knew  
for stones and water, or for the dreaming  
heavy-headed waves of grass  
beating at the tower door.

## Between

The sprung horizons of desert and grassland  
eased them upright, complaining,  
the lolling tongues in their heavy skulls  
tasting the first granular nouns.

They followed the shorelines north, it seems –  
white sands beneath the verbal tides,  
the darker shoals that loomed like depths  
but were rich, slick, harvest fields  
of cuttle and mussel – knowing better  
than to stray too far  
from the moving speech of shallow seas.

And in high, offshore winds, the bright  
scallops of reflected sun – a cold simmering  
at the dumb affront of land. Middens  
of shell and fish-bone. Vast,  
mackerel skies of silver and grey;  
miles of stammering pebble beach  
and the coming syllables  
of storms between, where gulls  
might brace against the sun, and wheel.

## High Bridge

I out-stared a fox at ten  
paces today, on the ghost line  
above the Spean where the one-track  
railway used to run between  
Fort Augustus and Fort William,

at what's left of High Bridge  
where a piper and twelve shouting men  
stopped eighty soldiers crossing, shot dead  
three of them and sent the others running  
along the green way I was walking.

A quarter of an ever more murderous  
millennium since then, and Wade's  
military bridge, both arches  
long gone, is a half-done puzzle  
of masonry and tangled iron.

I smoked a cigarette, stared down  
at the swallowing black river  
unravelling after rain. Across it,  
on the steep far bank in May sun, a few  
quiet sheep, a few quiet lambs

grazing between the birch-wood's  
white, short-lived trunks  
that were wet still – though the weather  
on the corries and the Great Glen  
was clearing – unreachable, gleaming.

Photograph of Neist Point by Billy Currie  
[www.billycurriephotography.co.uk](http://www.billycurriephotography.co.uk)

# The Punch

SHORT STORY BY KENNETH STEVEN



IT WAS THE Friday afternoon when Ranald punched his brother. Angus had made a comment about Kirsty, who had been Ranald's sweetheart for almost a year now, and it was not the kind of comment any man would have wanted to hear about the girl he loved. Ranald's punch had split his brother's nose there in the barn that evening; he didn't stay to see what damage had been done, he simply turned on his heel and walked down into the field, his hand still sore from the blow.

It so happened that one of the old men was going out with the lobster pots and would drop into Mallaig on the way back. Ranald asked if he could join him for the ride and Donald Gorrie didn't even nod his reply. He looked up towards the Sgurr of Eigg and they were off. Without asking or being told Ranald dropped lobster pots as they went; there was nothing to talk about so they said nothing, and Donald Gorrie kept his eye on the water, thinking about his sister in hospital and the eggs he had to pick up from the croft before he went to bed that night.

Ranald jumped off in Mallaig and his hand still hurt. The only thing alive in Mallaig was an articulated lorry with its engine chugging, the men loading up lobsters and crabs for tables in the south of Spain. Ranald asked the driver if he could have a lift and the man, who had a face like a living walnut, thought about it a long time. In the end he said Yes as though he had taken a decision of immense magnitude, and half an hour later they roared away into the June night.

It was beautiful and Ranald wished he could have told the driver the names for islands and the stories of infamous fishing trips. He told them again to himself as the sky went a deep blue and the stars filled it like brine. The last thing he remembered before he drifted off to sleep was that his hand still hurt. It was like guilt except he felt none, and his sleep was easy and untroubled.

He left the articulated lorry when they reached Finisterre. The driver had given him some long story in Spanish which Ranald had guessed was all about how his boss would fire him for having a passenger and that it would be best for him to get off now. Ranald had bought him a beer in Nantes with some cents he had kept in the back pocket of his jeans for almost two years. He clapped the driver on the shoulder and thanked him, and went off into Finisterre.

The ship that he found in port bound for South America was involved in some kind of wicked business. He knew that as soon as he went on board. There was a smell about the vessel, literally and proverbially speaking. They didn't care where he came from nor where he wanted to go; a very camp man called Alberto showed him the containers that had to be stacked and weighed. He would be paid in dollars and he'd have to share a cabin with three others. Ranald said yes to everything.

He had been on the sea before, fishing out of Peterhead when he was seventeen. He had earned so much money he could hardly walk to the bus when he came ashore, his wallet was that heavy. He hadn't been sick once, though he'd felt queer early one morning after a full breakfast on the way back to port.

The sea got to him now on the fifth day out, but it was as much the ship as the sea. There was the smell below deck you never got away from, and the cabin stank of that and

sweat and something else. He was sick and it was bile that came up in the end. He had a raging thirst and there was no-one to ask to bring him water. He couldn't stop thinking about Kirsty, missing her and wishing he had never left. He tried to sleep and he couldn't, and the relentless sea went down and up and down.

When he woke in the night two of the men were playing a game of chess. His mouth was cracked and sore; it hurt even to open it. In his mind they were playing their game with the devil. If they won, everything would be all right, but if they didn't Ranald would be thrown into the sea. And then he sank into a shallow sleep where he seemed to be arguing with the devil, but it was all about

*He had no idea where he was when he landed except that he was somewhere in Brazil. The girl he spoke to in the shop told him the name in such a beautiful voice that for a moment he forgot Kirsty and wanted to ask her to take him home, to let him lie down and eat fruit and laugh again.*

weights and measures, and what could be bought and sold. Later he woke and knew that he had to drink; his body told him that if he didn't he would die. Somehow he got up, as though in a dream, with moonlight swaying through the cabin, and he found his way to the toilet where he was sick until there was nothing left. Then he drank and drank and washed his face, and when he looked in the mirror he saw his brother's eyes looking back at him. But he felt better and he slept until the following day.

He had no idea where he was when he landed except that he was somewhere in Brazil. The girl he spoke to in the shop told him the name in such a beautiful voice that for a moment he forgot Kirsty and wanted to ask her to take him home, to let him lie down and eat fruit and laugh again. But he didn't because he couldn't; it wasn't possible to do things like that, and he just smiled at her green eyes and went out to the pavement in the brilliant sunlight that somehow was brighter than anything he'd seen before.

How he got a ride with a man who sold hammers and spare parts for motorbikes he never really worked out. But it was enough to be heading towards the capital with the windows open and the wind in his face, listening to happy music the driver sang to all the way there. The man bought him a beer at

a roadside café, and Ranald told him that if he ever made it as far as his island he would have all the lobsters he wanted and a girl called Katie Ann. The man laughed and put his arm round Ranald's shoulder, and after the beer Ranald really meant it – he hoped the man would land up on his island one day! He left his mobile number on an old serviette and they drove on, into the night.

But in Brasilia a huge loneliness gripped him, a homesickness that almost made him cry. He was going home the whole time, after a day's fishing, after mending a tractor on the other side of the island, after being with his cousins at Torbeg. He was always going back home.

He counted the coins in his pocket,

changed his money, and took a taxi out to the airport. At a desk he asked the price of a ticket to London. He had less than a tenth of what he needed. He didn't even have the money for the taxi back; he walked a long way and then took the bus. What came to him was the story of the Prodigal Son; that was what he thought of in the dry silence of the afternoon at the bus stop. The air was full of insects; the sounds of dry insects.

He found a job in an Irish bar and it took him a long month. He ate like a mouse, saved the smallest coins for new meals. He prayed for tips. The owner of the bar was a man who had no idea where Ireland was, but one of the bartenders had an aunt who seemed to be distantly related to someone from Kilkenny. Everyone talked English, and everyone thought Ranald came from Ireland. In the end he told people that he did; it seemed to bring him more in the way of tips.

Then came a Thursday when he could go out to the airport and buy his ticket. It felt as though he had won the lottery. Something sang in the left side of his chest. And then it dawned on him: he had no passport. His passport was in his father's desk, in the top left hand corner of the upper shelf. He thought of phoning Angus to ask him to post it, but that was a matter of pride. He didn't want to ask any favours of Angus. Instead he found the

British Embassy and spoke to a man called Peter Constantine who furnished him with the necessary papers after an interminable conversation with the authorities in London. Ranald heard every heartbeat in his chest as the conversation went on in an office beyond the desk; he made out some of the words but not all of them. The following day he picked up papers that had been sent by email from the office in London; Ranald thanked Peter Constantine too profusely and afterwards felt embarrassed. He closed the door of the Embassy behind him with gratitude and a deep breath. He was going home.

There was one person from the island he knew was in London. He phoned Davie Macdonald from a callbox and got the fellow's mobile number, and late that afternoon he tracked him down. They met for a pint and Ranald was welcome to stay over; it was a case of a couch and a spare toothbrush.

They talked about the landing of a famous fish and he drank too much whisky, but he felt London around him like some gigantic beast. He was trapped right in its heart and he slept fitfully, too hot and restless until the morning. At the breakfast table the older man slapped some notes into his hand, told him it was enough for the train as far as Edinburgh. No, no – he would get it back some time; that was what being neighbours was all about.

At the station he got his ticket and by lunch-time he was onto the train. What was that about a Scot loving the last few feet of the King's Cross platform more than anything else in England? The train curled north: Peterborough, Doncaster, Leeds, Durham, Newcastle, Edinburgh. And the air was fresh when he got out at the platform; the sound of gulls raucous about him in windy blue sky.

He had just enough for the last ticket, but nothing for a meal. He drank all the water he could at the gents, then boarded the train. Three hours and he felt every moment; he never forgot rounding that bend and seeing the sea for the first time. He felt like a prisoner released after twenty years.

Fortunately it was the cousin of Donald Black who was skippering the ferry that evening, and he walked on for free. He had to go up to the wheelhouse for the half hour, but he said never a word about where he had been.

He stepped ashore and wouldn't take a lift from Jimmy the Post. He'd tell his own story in his own time; he didn't need Jimmy's help with that. And it came to him as he pushed the yards behind him going up the track he had no idea what day or even what month it was, or how long he'd been away. There at the top of the road was Kirsty, a couple of letters to post in her hand, as though she might have been waiting for him all that time. And her mouth was open with a question she never uttered; he didn't stop but kissed her, and there was something in that kiss that meant more, that wasn't to be misunderstood.

He went on up to the farmhouse and in at the back door, and he heard the television's voice in the living room. He went in and thumped down on the other side of the sofa, and Angus half-turned to look at him. Ranald kept his eyes on the screen.

'Where've you been?' Angus asked.

Ranald thought a moment.

'Out,' he said. ■

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'The Punch' was originally broadcast on Radio 4.

# Poetry

## Beàrn sa Chunntas-shluaigh

PÀDRAIG MACAOIDH

Trup ’s a-rithist nuair a nochd fear a’ chunntais  
cha robh duine beò a-staigh  
ann an taigh mo shin-seanairean.

*No no* chanadh an nàbaidh  
*chan fhac’ mi ’ad fad bhliadhnaichean –*  
*Ameireaga a bh’ ann no àiteigin –*

ged a bha an taigh glan sgiobalta,  
mar gun robh iad dìreach air ceum a ghabhail  
gus sùil a thoirt air a’ bhò no clach dhìon a ghluasad,

’s ged a bhiodh e a’ fìdreadh shùilean ga bhreithneachadh  
às na ceàrnan smadach, a’ fìdreadh anail  
air a cumail fo na maidean-ùrlair.

Air neo, nuair a ruigeadh e am baile  
bhiodh pailteas aige mu-thràth de ‘Iain Mac a’ Phearsain’  
pòsta ri ‘Anna Nic a’ Phi’, agus seachd searbh dheth

chuir e às leotha, le loidhne dearg ach gun fhacail  
a thoirt nan clann dhan chroit aig àireamh 23  
gus rian a chumail orra.

Co-dhiù ’s co-dheth, airson 20 bliadhna sheas iad  
taobh a-muigh na h-eachdraidh ’s sùilean na stàite  
leis an leabhar-chunntais, a comharran-sglèata.

Bidh mi fhathast cur thugam fhìn cairtean-phuist bhuapa:  
*seo mise, ’ille, air Pintabian ann am Patagonia,*  
*air an ran-dan ann an Rajastan,*

agus ’s buidhe dhut  
*gun do bhodraig mi thilleadh*  
*no rachadh do sheòrsa a bhreith ann an Tehran ’s dòcha, ’s dòcha*  
*Chile.*

## Misere

JIM C WILSON

A hot blue August afternoon and we’re  
in the gods at the Usher Hall. The seats  
are too tiny (my knees reach my chin): sheer  
hell as cramps attack our limbs, while the heat’s  
increasing each second. Five thousand feet  
below (or so it seems), a dot of a man,  
who can hardly be heard, reads from a sheet  
of paper. I hear *F Sharp* and *A*, can  
distinguish *Appassionata*.  
Forty minutes still to go, and I feel  
my circulation’s ceased. The sonata  
is being lectured on: an intricate spiel  
that’s passing me by. Now there’s thirty-three  
minutes to go. But wait – a change. A tale,  
a diversion has been introduced. We  
hear how two words were confused (but I fail  
to find it funny). Then all through the hall  
I hear shifting and creaking, an outbreak  
of clattering coughs. There’s relief (though small)  
at this slight change of tone. I now can make  
it through to the end. We wilting, stiffened folk  
have been revived by Alfred Brendel’s joke.

## The Visit

ELIZABETH ANGUS

It’s a charity shop now, the baker’s  
which sold warm rolls on blue mornings –  
still warm when I pulled out their insides  
and slathered yellow butter  
on that soft doughy prize.

I loiter at shop windows,  
dawdle down thin closes to  
waste time at the seaweed shore.  
The living room must be thirty degrees or more  
but you’re wearing your winter cardigan.

You seem pleased to see me.

From a biscuit tin of old photographs  
you name every girl in your year  
at school. Amo amas amat...  
But you don’t recognise my picture  
and your face is glazed with tears.

The roar of the game show soon  
mutes our attempts to talk.  
The subtitles are out of sync.  
I’m drowning in afternoons.

You seemed pleased to see me.

The sun smiled on the day I sailed home,  
and the sky and the sea shone pale.  
The fields were a bright, sheep-cropped green  
but the little town was still grey.

## Much Loved

*The other half of half-afraid*  
*opens many a door –* Brendan Kennelly  
LILLIAS NOBLE

*Much loved by her many friends and family*  
picked out on a pink granite rock.  
Not just a smooth-cut stone  
in a long straight line of straight stones. No.  
It fulfills the conventions of death,  
yet stands out but not enough. No.

When you suddenly died after forty years,  
your secretly grieving, secret wife, chose  
*many friends* as a final statement of a love,  
that still dared not speak its name –  
half-afraid,  
half-alive,  
half of half a life.

## The Parting Glass

*In memory of Adam Lewis*  
NEIL YOUNG

Now you’ve really torn the arse out of it  
And all my best words can’t make you less dead,  
Our big reunion, our chance to kick-start  
New times becomes a last visit instead –  
No trains to book, no hint your heart could quit  
Though all the while, unknown, the sickness spread –  
No more missed calls or casual laughter,  
Not even a joke – forever after.

I skipped your funeral. Sorry, but then  
You hated protocol. I could not grieve  
As others do, but came across you again  
In a backstreet pub, your ghost at my sleeve  
And there, oh how we talked, what time we passed,  
As if each glass, my friend, could be our last.

## Groundwork

HOWARD WRIGHT

Kicked out, harangued, I fall from grace and hit the spoilheap  
with a crash. I’m where poppies, those dopey symbols of the addiction  
to death, haemorrhage like statues. I lift my head and feel my legs.  
Over on your side the rockery is mostly rock and the lawn  
needs redressed, the saplings sprayed, and the itsy-bitsy weeds teased  
with teaspoons from the path. My love, my sweet, so what?

When the spade’s hairline fracture of light slices this impure earth  
it reveals all kinds of things which hint at other than neat futility:  
a clock mechanism aping Sir Isaac’s universe in a parlance of cogs,  
spindles and exhausted springs; and deeper down, under the epidermis  
of dirt and roots, an orrery of surgically-clean granite boulders  
like anti-matter bubbles; even the suspicion of a funny bone,  
a humerus, and at arms-length, a radius connected to the starfish  
of a flayed hand, a haptic frisson of joints I shake from the subsoil.

But other things are past redemption: dada toys, a toothless comb,  
the elements of a shoe-- things best left where they are, no harm  
to anybody, no business of anyone. The difference being,  
in the desert of our love, all this and more I prize and shall rebury  
away from the hungry heart, returning them where they fell  
because I want to, because I have to; no, not because of you.

# Inspecting the Poor

BY IRENE EVANS

## Note

The losers and the desperate  
are made to feel ashamed.

To protect their memory  
names have been changed.

### Parish of Muthill, 1845

#### The Inspector's New Notebook

Pocket-size pages, stitched and bound  
between hard, blue-marbled covers;  
corners and spine, dark leather.

Paper aged to creamy white,  
ruled faint with pencilled margin.  
A sepia tint to the words

surviving him in his writing –  
clear bold cursive –  
inscribing the interview questions

applicants must answer.  
To deserve their place on the list  
of the Acceptable Poor.

**Janet Graham**, 46, a widow.  
She has four children.  
James, 26, has gone to Canada.  
She does not know where.  
He never sends her anything.  
Margaret, 24, is married to a poor man  
in the parish of Dunblane.  
They have four children under six years.  
Robert, 18, is apprenticed to a stonemason  
but has suffered an injury  
and is unable to walk.  
Walter, 10, herds cattle for a farmer.

Her previous occupation was fieldwork  
She cannot leave her son unattended.  
'He is greatly changed and subject to fits'.

She knits stockings. Has been six months  
on the Occasional List. Four shillings.

This person keeps a very clean house.

**Agnes Baxter**, 65, unmarried.  
She has no children. Lived with  
her sister, now deceased.  
She has no other family alive.  
Her previous occupation was  
seamstress and house servant.

She is crippled with age  
and is almost blind.  
She is assisted by no friends.

Lady W sends her a peck of meal each month  
and a hundredweight of coals at New Year.

She wishes to be placed  
on the Permanent List.  
For this she is willing to sign  
her furniture over to the Parish.

Till an inventory be taken,  
three shillings and sixpence.

**Alexander Sinclair**, 40.  
Unmarried. He lives alone.  
His sister pays his rent.  
He has no occupation.  
He never has had any occupation.  
Appears imbecile.

He has been twelve years  
on the Permanent List.

He is disabled in one leg  
by a deformity. Does nothing  
but collects a little fuel.

**Christina MacKay**.  
Reported as a lunatic.  
Age 30, unmarried.  
Permitted to remain in the Parish  
by the Board of Supervision.

Lives with a distant relative  
who attends her.

**Helen Wilson**, 33, unmarried.  
She has no children.  
She lives with her father  
who is poor and dissipated.  
He does not attend to her.

She has no occupation  
and can seldom get work.  
Only eight days at harvest  
and a little spinning.

She is afflicted with a pain in the head  
which confines her to bed quite  
often for days at a time.

Gave her aunt four shillings  
to buy her some necessities  
from T. MacEwan, Merchants.

**Margaret Murray**, 26, unmarried.  
Previous occupation, farm servant.  
This year she was at Connachan.  
The preceding year at Achnafree.  
The year before that, at Acharn.

She has returned to live with her father,  
James Murray, 58, a widower.  
His occupation, gardener.  
He is disabled by rheumatism  
and can seldom get work.  
Lady W pays his rent.  
He has no other family alive.

The father of her child  
is 'a gentleman's servant'.  
He has enlisted in the 91st regiment of foot.  
She does not know where he is.  
He promised her two pounds  
but has given her nothing.

To provide for her confinement,  
four shillings.

**Janet Campbell**, 20, unmarried.  
She has one child.  
whose paternity is unknown.  
Occupation, yarn-winder.  
Claims she cannot get work  
sufficient to support them.  
Lives with her mother  
who pays her rent.

In good health and fit for work.  
Character, not good.

**William MacNab**, 65, a widower.  
He has no family alive.  
Previous occupation, ploughman.  
Is disabled by a disease of the kidneys  
and the infirmities of age.  
The Kirk Session pays his rent.  
He has no pension or allowance  
from any quarter. Assisted  
mainly by the charity of his neighbours.

**Isabel Roy**, 28  
wife of William Roy, a carter in Ardoch.  
He has abandoned her  
as a consequence of his being accused  
of sheep-stealing.  
She does not know where he is.

They have four children under eight years.  
She has two sisters, married,  
in the Parish of Auchterarder  
and a brother who is a cobbler  
in Toronto, Canada.

She is disabled by a withered arm  
as a consequence of an injury.  
Her sister, Jane Wilson, 15,  
has come to live with her  
to assist in the house.

Her brother sent her a little money  
but it is now exhausted. Note –

William Roy may be in Glasgow  
in the parish of Govan. Enquire.

Author's note: 'Inspecting the Poor' is the result of  
finding the original notebook in Muthill Village  
museum. This unusual and thought-provoking exhibit  
is usually kept in a glass case beside medals and other  
memorabilia.

# The Itch

SHORT STORY BY ANGELA ROBB



IT AFFLICTED HIM from the moment that he stirred on the morning of June 22nd. The deep, searing heat may have been what wakened him in the first place. He tossed beneath his woollen blankets, threw them aside, curled himself into a tight little ball as he scratched his arms and wrists, his face and the back of his neck, his legs and even the soles of his feet.

He flipped onto his side, and the little ball that he had become rolled off the mattress and onto the bare floorboards with what might have been a painful thud. But still his fingernails scraped at his pyjamas, and up his sleeves, and under his collar.

Then suddenly they stopped. He lay staring at the delicate pattern of cracks that decorated the ceiling. He got up and padded across the tiny upstairs landing to the bathroom. By pressing hard with the palm of his hand he found that he could clean the muck off an area of the mirror large enough to show him his reflection. His face was salmon pink.

‘Patrick!’

Auntie Ethel’s bark echoed a little in the stairway. Leaning closer to the mirror, he could make out the white score marks on his skin.

‘You’d better get out your bed and get down here now, mister!’

As always he gripped the banister with his right hand, and touched his left to the wall as he descended the steep and creaking staircase. No two houses in the village had been built according to the same architectural principles, but Auntie Ethel’s stood unchallenged as the most improbably narrow. The need for this narrowness eluded him, for the house stood alone in a meadow of wildflowers.

Auntie Ethel’s kitchen was steeped in the soft purple light of dawn; or at least it would have been, had the small windows not been obscured by her hefty oak furnishings. Through the idle dust particles suspended in the one true shaft of sun, her slight figure could be seen bent by the oven, from which she heaved a loaf of burnt bread.

He crossed the patchwork of old rugs that passed for a carpet, removed a pile of dog-eared knitting magazines from his usual chair by the table, and sat down. Amidst the buttons, pin cushions and trinkets stood a glass of milk and an eggcup holding a little blue egg.

On a sudden impulse he began scratching his left arm. Auntie Ethel turned and stared. She blew a wisp of grey hair from her mouth.

‘What you doing over there?’

‘Itching.’

‘Well, cut it out.’ Turning back to the stove, she tipped her loaf tin upside down and shook it. She shook it again. ‘Eat your egg.’

‘I’m itching all over.’

‘Just you stop that scratching before you cut yourself. I’ll have no sympathy.’

He thought it odd that she should think he might expect sympathy. What he wanted from her was an explanation for his sudden affliction; perhaps he even hoped for some small gesture of alarm.

‘You’ll get flakes of skin on the table. We do eat off that table. If your uncle comes in here and sees flakes of skin on the table, he’ll knock you out.’

He thought this unlikely, in view of Uncle Albert’s five-year absence. So many acts of violence his auntie had sworn would be committed by this man of whom he had no

recollection; yet such was the sincerity of these promises that to have questioned their probability would seem ungracious. For a moment he watched Auntie Ethel shake her tin, absently rubbing his itchy feet on the threadbare rug. He imagined her in the form of an under-nourished crow, flapping her ragged wings. At last the blackened bread hit the chopping board.

He ate his egg.

At school the itching only grew worse. He tried to relieve it with some determined fidgeting, but six lashes from Mr Figg dissuaded him from persevering.

‘I’ve got to scratch, sir,’ he told the teacher. ‘I’m itching.’

A class of seven was a good deal to cope with at the best of times – the largest with which Mr Figg had been confronted in forty years – but the hilarity that now erupted was too much to bear. Mr Figg sent him to the medical room.

This large and immaculate cupboard was home to Nurse Flaversham, a tiny yet formidable lady who impressed upon all her patients that high morals and personal hygiene are the key to good health. She was not enamoured with the itch.

‘Take off your shirt,’ she told him. ‘Lots of calamine, and a bath for you tonight.’

He felt perturbed by his reflection in the mirror opposite. Scarlet lumps, raw and flaking round the edges, were scattered across his back and chest. Nurse Flaversham grimaced. Tentatively, she dabbed his skin with a cotton ball soaked in sweet-smelling lotion. As the cotton ball moved across his shoulders, his skin tingled with sublime cold. Yet right behind it, a fire still more intense tore through his flesh, and his eyes squeezed shut against the pain.

‘There now,’ said Nurse Flaversham. ‘That feels much better.’

She dismissed him, with a reminder about the calamine.

He endured that afternoon at the back of the classroom. Jagged heat prickled his skin, until at last it passed into numbness. The figures of his classmates swam before his eyes, and he began to wonder if they, the teacher, the schoolhouse – even Auntie Ethel in her tall thin house – might be washed away in his crimson tears. Mr Figg’s voice came to him as a distant echo, and he would not have heard the bell ring for the end of the day had Cecilia Frittle not pinched his arm and said, her eyes bright, ‘Patrick! Time for home.’

He drifted into the playground, unaware until the sunlight pierced his senses that Cecilia was leading him by the hand. He blinked confusedly and she laughed, dark curls bouncing on her shoulders. ‘Try not to scratch!’

As she spoke, the heat in his skin flared anew, and he scratched with fervour. He bit his lip, and tasted blood. At the same moment he heard the laughter of the other boys, and there they were, clustered around him, wild

things drawn to the sweet scent from his broken lip.

‘Still itching, Patrick?’ said big Thomas Flanagan. ‘Maybe it’s those scratchy old hand-me-down jumpers your auntie makes you wear.’

He took a step back as Thomas tugged his sleeve. ‘Scratch those holes in it yourself, did you?’

Billy Foster was next. ‘I think he’s got something. Bugs or something. Big dirty bugs that bite and suck your blood.’

Now it was their turn to step back, but their laughter was louder than ever. The itch burned fierce, yet this time he would not scratch.

‘Can’t you afford soap, Patrick?’

‘He can’t wash them off, they’re his only friends!’

‘Oi!’ As one, they turned to stare at Cecilia. ‘Don’t you lot be speaking rough to Patrick. He’s going places none of you can ever go, with silver garb on!’

He knew what she was referring to. He remembered the game the two of them had played, running across the playground with arms outstretched, fingers brushing the cool breeze that had felt right then like a rush of speeding sky. Someone said, ‘What’s she talking about?’ but Thomas Flanagan was taking charge. ‘Now just you shut up, Cecilia Frittle, if you know what’s good for you,’ said Thomas.

He experienced a sudden, overwhelming desire to rise up and seize Thomas from on high before tearing him to little pieces. It was an unsettling sensation. Cecilia, meanwhile, seemed almost to be dancing, arms out, spinning, and as she sprang from the ground her shadow broke from the tips of her toes. Fascination quelled his violent compulsion. Her singsong laughter trilled in the air, purging it of Thomas’s words; he had never heard her laugh like that before, or perhaps his ears perceived the sound with a new clarity, for it seemed that her features were sharper than he had ever noticed, and her eyes – had they not been brown? perhaps green? – glowed with amber fire.

He felt curious, but also a little disquieted, so when Cecilia shouted, ‘Run, Patrick! Run fast, and don’t look back!’ he did the first, and forgot not to do the second, turning to see the other boys race after him as Cecilia called out, ‘*Fly, Patrick!*’

He ran as fast as he could, thinking only of his desire not to think, nor to feel, unless it be the air streaming past his face as he displaced the half-mile between the school and his aunt’s front door. As he ran, he became aware of several things: that rushing air, which seemed curiously warm; the thump of his footfall; his heaving breath. And quite suddenly, the air began to sing in his ears, and his feet fell silent; it seemed as though he was moving unnaturally fast as he failed, with repeated, failing strides, to make contact between his soles and solid ground.

He willed himself to a halt, stumbling

heavily. He clutched his side and breathed hard. But his pursuers were not forgotten, and he turned quickly lest they should soon close the gap. All he could see, far back along the road, were a few tiny figures kicking at loose stones, and all he could hear in the stillness were the shouts of Thomas Flanagan. He could not discern the words but guessed their meaning soon enough, as each of the boys went his own way across the fields, heading for home.

The pink sky weighed heavy on the horizon, and he couldn’t quite tell whether it was the heat, or the water still streaming from his eyes, that made the dry road quiver. A hot breeze rustled in the grass, and he tasted dust. He turned around once more, and there was his aunt’s house, leaning perhaps a little to the left, just yards from where he was standing.

The milky solution in which he sat, submerged to his chest, was probably lukewarm but felt much colder. Auntie Ethel didn’t hold with new-fangled medications such as calamine, but he was getting a bath all right, or, to be more precise, a lengthy soak in a concentrated dose of her favourite homemade cure-all. Of the many herbs and wildflowers that grew nearby, he wasn’t sure which had made it onto her list of ingredients; but from the way each drop seemed to pierce his skin like a shard of ice, he suspected that some of the more unusual stinging varieties might be included.

‘You’ve been scratching again, haven’t you?’ said Auntie Ethel. ‘I told you what would come of it!’ She splashed her concoction over him, wearing gloves and splashing with the aid of a ladle. He shut his eyes, denying the pain of cold by redefining it as the absence of that deadly heat.

Auntie Ethel stopped. Gingerly, she tapped a finger on his shoulder, and again on his back. ‘These here lumps,’ she said, looking altogether queasy. ‘I sure as heck know how to stop *this* before it spreads to anyone else!’

Before he quite knew what was happening, she had pulled him from the bathtub, thrown a damp cloth around his shoulders, and begun shepherding him across the landing.

‘Please, Auntie!’ he objected, ‘I don’t think it’s catching!’

‘There’s one way to be sure of that!’ came the reply. ‘Quarantine!’

He tried to dig his heels in as she steered him into his bedroom, but she was pushing too hard. As he stumbled across the threshold, she slammed the door behind him. A key turned in the lock.

‘No!’ As the heat welled beneath his skin once more, he seized the doorknob and twisted it hard. ‘You can’t! You can’t! It’s not *fair*!’

Auntie Ethel rapped her knuckles on the other side. ‘You pipe down in there, you hear? You’ll get out just as soon as those lumps disappear. Now behave yourself or your uncle will be straight back here and he’ll knock the lumps right out of you!’

‘No he won’t! He won’t ever be coming back, because he’s *dead*!’

Perhaps it was so, because without another word Auntie Ethel took off down the staircase, and the house fell quiet.

He dropped onto the dusty floorboards, too exhausted to weep. There he stayed for the rest of the afternoon and the evening that came after, fixating on the blistering sun

until it melted, a red stain oozing through the sky outside his open window. Bathed in cool shadow, he forgot his pain at last and crawled towards his bed. The wool blanket brushed his cheek, and as he curled up, right there on the floor, he had already slipped into a deep sleep.

He dreamt that a wondrous change had come over him: that a silver plumage had sprung from the sores on his skin, which no longer caused him pain. Then the first rays of a new sun slipped beneath his eyelids, and his heart leapt as he woke, for he knew then that his dream had passed into reality. Golden dawn and birdsong filled the small bedroom. He stood, a little shakily, and walked slowly to the window. It seemed as though his senses were sharper than before; he fancied that he could see beyond the meadows and the distant hills to the forests on the very borders of that country. He stepped out onto the windowsill. From his room at the top of Auntie Ethel’s house, the grass of the wildflower meadow seemed a long way down; but he was not afraid. He reached out, to his left and his right, and remembered playground games as he closed his eyes. He stepped off the sill.

Frenzied air whistled and whirled. Then brilliant yellow light was everywhere, and everything, and it warmed him as he rose, higher and higher. ■

## A Time To Write

NOW THAT WINTER is pretty much camped on our doorsteps and howling to come inside, you may well find yourself spending these long, dark nights writing a story or a poem. Don’t let it go to waste! Here are two fine Highlands and Islands writing competitions that would love to see your work.

### THE NEIL GUNN WRITING COMPETITION

The 2014/15 competition, sponsored by The Lydia Michael Trust, was launched on Thursday 11th September at the Neil Gunn Trust Lecture given by James Robertson at Eden Court Theatre, Inverness. The closing date for entries is 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2015. Full details of the competition together with the entry forms and contact details will be available at <http://www.harenet.co.uk/nmg/NMGtrust/trust.html> or from any High Life Highland Library. Details of the schools sections will also be sent directly to all Highland schools. See also the ad in this issue of *Northwords Now*.

### BAKER PRIZE 2014

Now accepting entries. Deadline 30 Nov 2014. Theme is “Dough”. Please visit [www.theskyereadingroom.wordpress.com](http://www.theskyereadingroom.wordpress.com) and click on photo strap link for full details. English/Gaelic/New writers categories. Sponsored prizes in association with Richard Neath Drawing & Design, Skye Baking Co, The Gaelic Whiskies and Moniac Mhor. Fabulous judges are Linda Cracknell, Donald S Murray and Kenny Lindsey. Publication in our 2015 Anthology guaranteed to winners and highly commended.

### Milk Bay

*‘Mamma is nie meer ’n mens nie’*  
Ingrid Jonker (1933–1965)

KATE ASHTON

Watch, my daughter, how the tide  
hides its mutability, glides  
hushed in lovers’ arms from ebb to flow...

the night I felt you breast womb water, tip slow  
somersault, anemone brush  
my floating rib, I knew to call you sea-moan,

sea-sure, something not like me – take care  
my sweetling, my heart, and don’t go  
in too far, never above your middle, Mamma

used to say, before her words turned whiter  
than wing lightening, *mon cheri*,  
bright flickering above Milk Bay. I was a starfish

cast from salmon-bellied cloud-clasp down  
between dune grass and wrack  
and in the shark-fin shadow of the rocks

made a sand hole for my precious things, quartz  
and conch and green sea  
glass but my friend would not come and see,

‘Later,’ he said, ‘later,’ and over and again the tumbled  
tide dismissed us  
with its promises, threw us its ‘perhaps’

and ‘when’ until the river mouthed him free,  
wrapping his tulip hips  
with weed, his face a sip of sea-mare milk

and saltspeak on his lips. Listen, my crimson-hearted  
one, my lamb, take care, the men  
are monsters here, beware blond appellation

breathed into your hair, kisses that dumbfound  
your mouth, as silver-clappered  
as a bell – fetch your bucket and spade,

a yellow moon lies on its back between  
a shell-strewn heaven  
and the galaxy-skimmed wave! all day we’ve played,

but mummy madness is a game I cannot win...  
wanting too rife, too near  
a daughter and too far a wife... see how

the shore wears water’s frown? It’s not the dark man,  
darling, you must fear,  
but he whose pallor weighs upon him like a crown,

I lay between black promises  
and the whiteness of their lies,  
it was baptism by desire, I would not learn,

they could not love my wildness or my rhymes. Stay  
safe, daughter, above the brim...  
frilled pennants lift, silk streamers fill Milk Bay,

I dream salt-sequinned Spartacus unbound  
and gentle as the dawn and yes  
and yes he says and draws me roaring down.

# Poetry

## Stad air Turas

ANNA DANSKIN

Bhoc an geàrr a ruith sinn sìos  
timcheall an rathaid  
air crom leumnach a’ chnàimh-droma.

Bha raointain–arbhair beothachail san dorchadas,  
bha sinne a’ dol tron dorchadas  
‘s na raointean–arbhair beothachail  
à aon àite sònraichte gu àit’ eile.

Bhrist sinn amhach a’ gheàirr  
is rinn sinn an t-àite sin, airson mòmaid,  
na àite nas sònraichte na àite sam bith eile

Far an robh sreang–bogha air a sgaradh  
agus bogha gu bràth air a bhristeadh,  
a bha air e fhèin a thilgeil tro  
uiread de dhorchadasan, de raointean–arbhair.

Dh’fhàgadh esan san dùthaich sin.  
Dh’fhàg e sinne ann an dùthaich eile.

*(Às dèidh Norman MacCaig)*

## a winter haven

MANDY HAGGITH

yet  
in a gale  
an ivy sail can capsize  
even the deepest-keeled tree

## Alone

MANDY HAGGITH

I like to walk alone  
or with the only one  
who tramps the way I do  
does not remark on every bird  
or stone

yet sometimes  
stops to stare  
in silent wonder  
at a bird  
or stone

among the crowd  
I walk alone  
they are not here  
the squeaky trousers  
rustly sleeves  
chattering comments on the rain  
again

blue ice growlers  
from Gully Breen  
float away  
across the bay

I am writing in the rain  
again  
alone  
just me  
that sitting bird  
that silent stone

## Mallachd charminadelica a’ ghalair-chlèibh

### Le leisgeul do Alastair

### MacGilleMhìcheil

SANDY JONES

#### 1 Asparain duibh

Gur mis’ th’ air mo chràdh  
Leis a ghalar–chlèibh  
A thàinig gun chuireadh  
Is le mì-rùn air m’eug.

Aspairin duibh o hi o ho  
antibiotica charminadelica  
mise fo mhulad ro hu ill o  
casadaich sgrathail o ho bha hu  
thalla, mo mhallachd ort!  
asparain duibh.

Gur mis’ th’ air mo chràdh  
Leis a’ ghalar–chlèibh  
A thàinig gun chuireadh  
Is le mì-rùn air m’eug.

Aspairin duibh o hi o ho  
antibiotica charminadelica  
mise fo mhulad ro hu ill o  
casadaich sgrathail o ho bha hu  
thalla, mo mhallachd ort!  
asparain duibh.

#### 2 Tobhta mo shlàinte

Tobhta mo shlàinte air na blàraibh  
tùchadh is smùcanaich fad an là!  
ho a ho thalla, tha mis’ air mo chràdh  
ho a ho thalla, o thalla gu math!

Trì nèapraigean ’s srùbagan ’s trì uisge–beath’  
an sreothart a’ srannartaich, thig mo sgrios dheth!  
ho a ho thalla, o thalla gu lèir  
an deamhan is olc ort, a ghalair–clèibh!

#### 3 Rann Prìosan–Tinneis

O is garbh an sgleò, is mis’ ann an cèo  
O thalla, a ghalair, is tilleadh mo bhèo!

Nar bheil fuath agam air m’ obair  
Ach tha gràin agam air sgìths  
Le bhith fulang leis a’ ghalar–chlèibh,  
Tha mi deònach a chur sìos!

O is garbh an sgleò, is mis’ ann an cèo  
O thalla, a ghalair, is tilleadh mo bhèo!

## The Realities

JEN COOPER

I know that  
as if waiting, the young roe buck  
was listening  
long before I was  
aware of him  
suddenly facing me, held up  
improbably  
by sapling legs, each knee  
like the knot  
after a branch has been  
lopped, and distorted  
by the regrowth.

Always  
that urge to move closer,  
to test  
the silent distance

and deeper still  
the need to touch the thing  
just out of reach  
to confirm  
the realities  
of bark, of skin.

He turned side on,  
suddenly huge,  
ears flicking tiny flies  
and moved off  
noiselessly  
through a mass of ferns

and the pine trees growing  
so close to one another  
they seem to be fused  
at branch and root. He sprang  
the burn and paused  
now close enough  
to see the air disturbed and  
the coarse red hairs of his back

## Corrou

ALISON BARR

The sliver of time

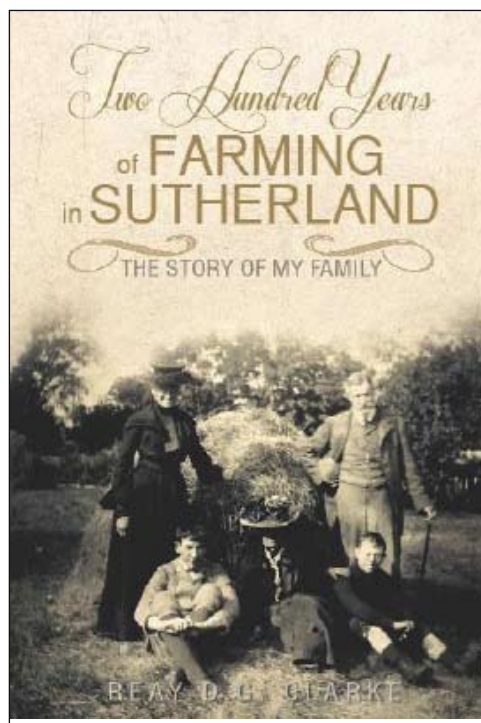
not long after a train  
pulls out of the station

clock paused

at the moment of departure

silver rails

catching light.



## Two Hundred Years of Farming in Sutherland

by Reay D.G. Clarke  
The Islands Book Trust

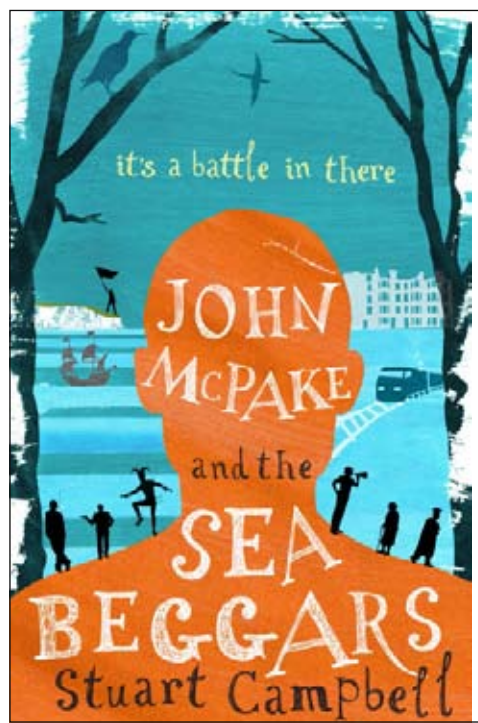
REVIEW BY CYNTHIA ROGERSON

The subtitle of this book is *The Story of My Family*, and that's what it is – a family history. But it could have been titled *The Story of the Land* with equal accuracy. Note I didn't say My Land. Reay regards that stretch of North West Sutherland with great respect and tenderness, never possessiveness. He is proud of his family, but that is not the point of this book. He began writing because he wanted to document a particular history – and in doing so created something much bigger and deeper, for the whole of society is reflected in every family history, if it is reported honestly.

In his view, the land suffered as much from the clearances as the tenants and various methods of farming have proceeded to impoverish it even further. He writes, not with grovelling apology or with defensiveness – like all good historians, he simply states the facts, and only now and then allows himself to convey his abiding affection for the land, and his forebears.

So, the land is a main character, like a cherished and forgiving child who is the victim of human caprices. Even the sound of the land's name is soft and full of personality – Eriboll. The land is constant, with families of Clarkes like Greek choruses, each with their own particular sheep farming method, their own level of ambition, their financial prowess or weakness, their family woes and joys, and above all – each had their sheep. Yes, I mustn't forget the sheep, for together they are the other main character. Sheep are bought, sold, herded, shorn, cured, bred and buried. I never realised how much went into taking care of sheep.

Two hundred years is a lot of history, and the danger would have been to drown the reader with information. Wisely, Reay focused on certain individuals, giving them each a chapter which begins with a summary of their statistics – birth date, spouse, children, death date. He quotes from research material like letters and account books, with enough anecdotes to fill in the gaps and add that



much needed colour and humanity. I love it that Alice Gibson Clarke drank a pint of sea water every day, and that twenty year old Elisabeth Clarke travelled from Tasmania to meet her Highland cousins, fell in love and married one of them.

I am not a great reader of non-fiction, but I found this book impossible to put down. I wanted to visit all the places described in this book – such was the author's power to evoke place and people. I also learned a few things about sheep farming, and the way methods have evolved. For all this I am very grateful. I highly recommend this readable and important book. ■

## John McPake and the Sea Beggars

By Stuart Campbell  
Sandstone Press

REVIEW BY JANE VERBURG

I loved this book. Every brush stroke, in every corner of its canvas is rich and funny; painted with craftsmanship and beauty.

*There. I've said it. Out loud. I know a book review should never start like this but it had to be said – shouted - from the outset: This is treasure!*

What a mix it is. Three 16<sup>th</sup> century characters wade through snow-covered and water-soaked landscapes searching for a child kidnapped by Spanish invaders; dogs at their heels, a skeletal bird above their heads. Somehow alongside, a man – a voice-hearing man – wanders the streets of contemporary Edinburgh searching for himself and his brother. This wonderfully complex plot steers majestically from a little known aspect of European history into the swirling seas of mental illness in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. What a combination. What a challenge.

Let's start with the Flemish boys – hearty weavers (subtle metaphors abound in this novel) who emerge from Bruegel's *The Hunters in the Snow* and who wander through *The Peasant Wedding* and into *The Triumph of Death*. Campbell dramatically dovetails us into the Bruegel paintings and leads us through the scenes and landscapes (I tasted the wine at that wedding). I found myself searching on the net for these beautiful paintings that I have only known by way of Christmas cards and High School enthusiasm. What a joy to be sent on

a journey into Flemish religious history and Pieter Bruegel's *Netherlandish Proverbs*. I find it so exciting when writing takes us beyond the plot and the characters – out the other side – to new lands and ideas.

Now to John – to the modern thread of this dexterously woven, highly structured story. I am pretty certain that we all have an internal voice that jogs along with us, commenting on daily issues and thoughts. For some people it may be that the origin of this voice becomes disconnected and divided from themselves, becoming specific in nature. This is voice-hearing. We are closer than we think.

John hears a constant flow of voices that comment on and guide his every thought, gesture and indecision. The voices have become characters – the Jester, the Academic, the Bastard and the Narrator (echoes of *Tristram Shandy* here). Campbell helps us to grasp the 'absolutely-no-space-left-for-any-other-thinking' nature of a mind filled (literally) with voices stronger than our own. Voice-hearers are part of our communities – neighbours, friends, perhaps. John's experiences bring about a desire to understand and to empathise. I am strongly reminded that novels can have an important role in helping us to share and connect.

Obviously, just as a reviewer should never declare their love for a novel, equally they should never comment on the final scene. *But how can I stop myself from commenting on the most beautiful thing? I cannot.* The end is like a friend taking your hand and brushing you with a feather, kissing you goodbye, a safe journey. Rarely is writing so delicate. ■

## A House Called Askival

by Merryn Glover  
Freight Books

REVIEW BY ALISON NAPIER

The young man who sells me my newspaper every Sunday is from Pakistan. He has been watching the referendum campaign closely and after the result he observed that the Scots have no idea how lucky they were to have had the chance of self-determination without a bullet being fired. Ah well, he said.

*A House Called Askival* is set in India. It wrestles with battles for independence both personal and national, and with the shocking fallout, in families and in countries, that ensue wherever power struggles take place. I read it during a stormy weekend in Perthshire, the rain bouncing off skylights and streaming down the road, and was transported to the monsoons of Mussoorie, a hill station in the Northern State of Uttarakhand.

Ruth is in Mussoorie, reluctantly visiting her dying father. She is a woman in her forties still consumed with the rages and losses of her teenage years and she is sulky, bitter, and prone to irrational tantrums. Yet as the story unfolds, darting between three generations of both Ruth's American Christian family and the very different India experienced by a series of faithful Muslim servants, the roots of her anger and incomprehension gradually become shockingly clear.

Corbett climbers will recognise the name Askival as that of a mountain on the Isle of Rum but here it is Ruth's family home, named by a homesick Scottish missionary

generations earlier, and now the ruined repository of a host of raw and shameful recollections which no amount of desperate scrubbing and rebuilding can erase.

For this is a novel about betrayal and reconciliation. Families fight, fail to listen, make assumptions, impose rules and break promises. So do governments. So do religions. And the skill and scale of this novel lies in the weaving together of multiple parallel themes and timescales. The stifling culture and rules of the Indian boarding school and the warped vestiges of the fading empire are echoed in the misunderstandings between Ruth and her parents, which in turn mirrors the gulf between Sikh, Hindu, Christian and Muslim.

Disgracefully, my scant knowledge of Indian history comes from *The Jewel in the Crown*, scratchy tapes of George Harrison's Concert for Bangladesh, and Madhur Jaffrey. Merryn Glover fills the gaps with an uncompromising trip through colonialism, independence, partition, the Punjab and Kashmir, to Mahatma Gandhi and beyond.

Occasionally the excessive details and rigid structure get in the way of the story's flow, but this is not regurgitated library research. The author knows Northern India intimately and all is forgiven with the following description of the pale sun emerging at the end of the monsoon. 'It was like a delicate queen recovering from flu, appearing on her balcony still wrapped in blankets of cloud, raising a limp hand and a smile for her subjects, but with little strength.'

Glover gives us an epic and raging sweep of history through many eyes, for there are no victors. The road to independence and its aftermath is indeed a bloody and complex process, as newspaper sellers the world over well know. ■

## A Northern Habitat

By Robin Fulton Macpherson  
Marick Press

REVIEW BY JOHN GLENDAY

Here's the luxury of the Collected Poems: it grants a cross section of a poet's opus from early development through maturation of voice. In this respect, it is dendrochronous, measuring growth against time, like rings on a treestump. In Robin Fulton Macpherson's case, we find a creditable 500 pages of poetry and notes covering fifty years of his poetry. This book is especially welcome because Fulton Macpherson's own poetry has for too long been growing in the considerable shade of his translations. I approached the collection from a position of almost complete ignorance of Fulton Macpherson's poetry, other than those luminous translations of Tranströmer and my concern was that his own work would stand pallid next to those magnificent translations. I needn't have worried. My only quibble with this edition from Michigan-based Marick Press is the number of typos that have slipped past the editor.

What impresses me most about this body of poems is how enduring RFM imagery is. From first poem to last, he returns to the recurring tropes of nature, light, stone, childhood, Scotland, movement and stasis, distance, history and sea travel. In fact the first poem describes a clear morning on a

hill and the last, sailing down the east coast of England in mist. The weather changes, the land remains, but in that final poem it is invisible to the poet, lost to sight in darkness and fog.

As one would expect from a poet who has lived in Scandinavia most of his life, he turns his gaze frequently on Scotland, but there is no fuzzy retrospect or idealised lyricism here, it is as if the distance between his home in Norway and his homeland in Scotland had allowed the latter to stand out in clearer focus.

From the right distance I can see  
The Summer Isles levitate above the water  
and Cul Beag bright and transparent as a lace  
curtain. If I were closer, it would ripple in my  
breath.

(‘Coming South from Loch Lurgain’)

And of course although he writes of landscape so well, he’s really writing about something else. Here he is describing Iain Crichton Smith, but he may as well be describing himself: ‘It takes/a rare person to look through stones/to the other side, to see blood in them’

These are lean, appealingly spare poems, almost the literary equivalent of the Giacometti he so admires and it struck me how little this style has changed through the half century the book encompasses. This means the collection is marked with a cohesion often absent from Collected Poems spanning such a period of time. To me, this is a mark of Fulton Macpherson’s authority and confidence as a poet. If the leitmotif of his work is man and landscape, it’s music is Time, a subject he handles deftly and incisively:

‘I have no present tense. There’s no room  
left in the past for more of the past.  
Much has fallen into the future,  
which never stops containing nothing.’

and similarly in the impressive sequence ‘Homing I – X’: ‘In my home country/the present tense is greedy./It won’t wait for me.’

Fulton Macpherson’s father was a Free Presbyterian Minister, and his childhood was a childhood of moving house – Arran to Caithness. He frequently returns to his childhood in Helmsdale, a Clearance town – an entire town of exiles, in a way. In the fine poem ‘Rain’ he delineates his ancestry – John Fulton,/father, Margaret Macpherson, mother,/their stones, as stones go, still unweathered.’ –

but the poem ends with a moment of almost agoraphobic emptiness – the teenaged boy baulking at climbing a hill above Helmsdale because of its absence of folk:

What stopped me was not the gradient  
but the unbearable loneliness  
that would crowd in on me from the  
moors  
and would stare at me and not say a word.

This is a real treasure of a collection, a weighty, important reminder that Fulton Macpherson is a prominent figure in Scottish poetry, and someone to be held in regard. His

poetry is enduring as granite. It will weather well:

My memories are not against me.  
The future tense loses confidence.  
I am not drifting and I won’t drown.

(‘At the Mercy of Secret Machines’)

### The Space Between : New and Selected Poems

by Sheena Blackhall.  
Aberdeen University Press  
REVIEW BY LESLEY HARRISON

Sheena Blackhall is a poet and storyteller, an illustrator and a traditional ballad singer. She has published novellas and short story collections as well as some hundred poetry pamphlets. The task of distilling her creative output into a single volume must have been considerable; Alan Spence has managed to narrow it down to around 150 poems which, in their range of form and subject matter, give a real feel for the poet’s work.

Among the range are ballads, Buddhist meditations, cut-up and found poems, haiku and bairn sangs. She has translated or responded to other poets, as in ‘Echo of Rumi’. She is also alert to the moment, for example in ‘Meditation on Winter’, written in vivid, unrhymed stanzas:

The nicht is in ma mou  
Craas race in a breist fur the wids

Wytin fur snaa  
Burns jeel aneth ice

Her poetry is written to be read aloud (or chanted or sung), and there is often a wink to her audience. ‘A Puckle Doric Wirds I Like’ rhymes (sometimes predictably) a whole wheen of words for which there is no adequate translation – though there is a long glossary at the back, which is itself a great read.

She likes a list; some even have bullet points. Here, from ‘In a Handbag Darkly’:

A mother of pearl urinal  
Five Confucian slippers  
A buzzard’s rhapsody  
A republican seagul  
Death, dressed as a cucumber  
A necklace of wasp stings

but in ‘Schemies’ the list has a real sting in the tail, as she itemises those clichés the Daily Mail reader in us all loves to hate; but then she comes back with a “there but for the grace of” ending to wipe the smile off your face.

My favourite poems are the ones where she starts to turn away from her audience, to concentrate on the landscape itself, and her own deep and genuine understanding of it, as is evident, for example, in ‘City by the Grey North Sea’:

For one whole week I walked out blind in beauty  
Like a woman who can’t see her lover  
For looking at everyone else’s  
Forgetting my own city, lying by the sea  
Tide washin his lovely hair, birds in his eyes

Perhaps one day a slim volume will be published of poems such as these which dip below the surface, offering a cool, fresh, honest experience of the north-east through her eyes. However, *The Space Between* is broad and generous enough in its scope to allow readers to forge their own path through her poetry, creating their own wish list of ‘Selected Works’. ■

**Any Other Mouth**  
By Anneliese Mackintosh  
Freight Books  
REVIEW BY CAROL MCKAY

Some people know how to command a room. Whether this stems from confidence or charisma, some people speak and everyone listens. This is what happens with Anneliese Mackintosh’s fiction. Her voice is strident. It’s brash and brazen, blunt and brutal. It can also be fragile, despairing and brittle. Whatever mode it’s in, it’s a voice that compels you to pay attention.

In these linked stories, focal character Greta comes to terms with a father dying of cancer, a mother-carer pushed to extremes, and a sister with severe mental health issues. Greta’s inability to cope with grief manifests in self-harming behaviours, from cutting herself, to over-medication with wine, to seeking out damaging and destructive sexual encounters.

While Mackintosh has a fluid, natural writing style, *Any Other Mouth* can be an uncomfortable read. There’s a queasy fascination in tracing the path of her despair, and it’s tempting to read the stories as if they’re factual, giving an insight into the writer’s own life.

Is this short fiction? A loosely structured novel? A hint in the opening pages suggests *Any Other Mouth* is thinly disguised memoir. There’s a tendency to conflate the German-named main character with the German-named author. This may be a playful trick on the part of the author; there’s an element of play in lots of the stories. In fact, the precise genre is irrelevant. What matters is the integrity of the text, and this text resonates with integrity and import as Greta navigates personal anguish and breakdown followed by taking those first slow steps towards stability. This is hard-edged, no holds barred writing from the perspective of a young woman who is anchorless in modern British society. It’s writing which is urgent, contemporary, and aggressive.

Mackintosh’s stories have been previously published in quality literary magazines or have won prizes, but this generously sized collection includes plenty of previously unpublished work, too, all of the same high standard. My favourite was ‘Like Runner Beans, Like Electricity’. It muses on astronomy, the place of humans in the universe, farming, and the father-child relationship, and it’s one of the most polished stories in the collection. Curiously, it’s one which doesn’t hinge on the shock factors of graphic sex or self-harm, and may be a sign of Mackintosh’s writing style to come. Then there’s the desolation and self-loathing Greta feels in ‘Doctors’: a story as different from the anodyne daytime TV programme of the same name as you could imagine.

Grief does strange things, and you might argue that sometimes, such as in ‘When I die, this is how I want it to be’ the narrator is self-absorbed and self-pitying to the point of inducing a cringe factor. Honestly, it’s just a blip. Most of these stories feature a Munchian scream everyone who’s ever grieved will identify with. In creating this collection, Mackintosh has documented the debilitating impact of loss – of loved ones, of self – and she’s done so in a voice that demands, and earns, attention.

**Island Of Dreams: Stalking Gavin Maxwell’s Ghost**  
By Dan Boothby  
Published by Cork Street Books available on Amazon/Kindle  
REVIEW BY JIM TAYLOR

There’s always been an overlap between the bohemian and military wings of the aristocracy which has produced individuals like Lawrence of Arabia, Lord Byron or Gavin ‘Ring of Bright Water’ Maxwell – renaissance action men as comfortable in a Hindu souk as on a Highland shooting estate, at the wheel of a Maserati or holding the reins of a camel. These wanderers stop off along the way to start a revolt, compose a series of sonnets, unearth a tomb or give their name to a species of butterfly.

Dropping out of conventional society, to get back to nature or find yourself, became a seemingly more accessible lifestyle choice in the affluence of the late twentieth century, but it was still the avant-garde upper classes who led the way along the roads less travelled and into the communes and ashrams of North Wales and the Highlands of Scotland. But what happened to the children of those barefoot posh types with flowers in their hair and a rotovator or outboard motor in their hands? I’ve met a few of them, mostly in their thirties or forties now.

A proportion of these hippy kids went native, adapting and surviving in local schools to become indistinguishable from any other joiner or primary teacher in Ullapool. Some became consciously bi-lingual – able to switch from the barking tones of the Sandhurst parade ground to the patois of a pub in Lerwick as the need arose. A conservative few became keepers of the flame of new ageism, with a joint in one hand and a Dylan CD in the other, as though permanently overshadowed by the charisma of their parents’ generation. But one or two never lost a fractured sense of identity, a chippy awareness that although some of mum and dad’s school buddies may have become leading actors, designers or musicians, somehow the path to similar status has been lost down an overgrown peat road.

Standing aloof from these trends is Dan Boothby, who grew up in the experimental melee of the stoned seventies in an ever-changing constellation of siblings and adults, and has since been plotting a unique journey around the world while at the same time tracing his own intellectual and spiritual roots. For much of that quest, thanks to a random childhood discovery at the local library, Gavin Maxwell has been a faltering star, guiding the author ever back to the haunted island of Eilean Ban.

► To be clear, Dan Boothby is not selling any myths about Maxwell or offering philosophies about the good life. His view of Maxwell, as of the landscape and people of Skye and Lochalsh, and especially of himself, is impressively honest, but always lightened by a welcome strain of compassionate humour. His descriptions of his friends, acquaintances and chance encounters are unsparing and empathic at the same time. And he sees the modern land and seascapes of the Minch strait with a lyrical clarity, as though the constant Highland smirr has sharpened his vision like a massive lens. The millennial architecture of the Skye crossing now looms overhead, while beneath ‘...undulating lumps of oily green sea rush under the bridge to crash onto the beach at Kyleakin, grab fist-sized pebbles and drag them down into the deep.’ A bird makes tracks in the snow – ‘dizzying motifs; like an absentminded professor, eyes to the ground, lost in thought, twirling around in the street, bird-brained.’ And a gull stands on a chimney pot, ‘squawking and gabbling and wagging its rump, warming itself like an old gent standing with his back to the fire.’

Although no biography, this is an addition to the Maxwellography, and, in this the otter man’s centennial year, readers will include those who still regard Maxwell as part of their own journey or cultural heritage. If you are trying to trace where the various experiments in alternative living of the last century have led us, likewise, this is an interesting personal addition to the sociology. But it could also be four pounds thirty well spent if you simply enjoy the companionship of a perceptive writer who describes his nomadic life with a mixture of forensic introspection and fair but clear-sighted observation of the people, animals and landscapes he meets. ■

## Poetry Reviews

BY SALLY EVANS

Brian Johnstone, *Dry Stone Work*, Arc Publications

Richie McCaffery, *Cairn*, Nine Arches Press

Martin Bates, *Zigzag*, Whiteadder Press

Graham Fulton, *One Day in the Life of Jimmy Denisovich*, Smokestack Press

Christine De Luca, *Dat Trickster Sun*, Mariscat

Hugh McMillan, *The Other Creatures in the Wood*, Mariscat

Ian Blake, *Disciplines of War*, Three Cats Press  
Sheena Blackhall, *The Housewife’s Dream and Biting Dust*, Lochlands, Aberdeenshire.

A whirling variety of human activities, from the dry stone walling of the title poem, along old tracks, to circus personnel, through small towns with school milk, joke shops, a Durham city street, ghosts and needlewomen, hotels and memories, a cinema, tea drinking, tree surgeons, and the words we throw away to history. All this subject matter full of movement is stilled by Brian Johnstone’s elegant and sophisticated verse, honed and matured by his wide reading and acquaintanceship with international poets. Nothing in here is humdrum, nothing is over-personal. It’s a kaleidoscope of language as well as of the world.

The title poem gives a clue to the whole: building a world with the bricks or stones of

words. The walls of these poems are worked smoothly and expertly. Brian Johnstone’s voice has reached mastery in these poems. You can tell who wrote them.

Richie McCaffery’s *Cairn* is full of short poems, many of them generously personal, and all so pared down to the point that they sometimes seem shorter than they actually are. ‘Ink’, where his father hunts our bottles of fountain pen ink for him, as a mute apology, is an instance of this. So is ‘The Truth So Far’, about a schoolteacher. Nearly all the poems have denouements, moments of enlightening the whole.

There are several links to McCaffery’s wide reading and knowledge of Scottish poets. *Sighting*, after Derek Thomson, is drawn from Thomson’s poems in Gaelic, with their often basic self-translations to English, while McCaffery’s tribute to Edwin Morgan, ‘Homecoming’, captures the atmosphere of the Scottish poetry world on the day of Edwin Morgan’s funeral:

The sun seethed when Eddie spoke, the light  
of a mothership glaring between high tenements.

And here’s another way to be Scottish. Martin Bates has spent most of his life teaching English abroad and writing textbooks. His exotic countries of residence have given him meat for his lively, expansive poetry, but living abroad does make it difficult for poets in Scotland to know of his work. Martin Bates has started to put this right with his appearance at StAnza in 2014 and the simultaneous publication of this book.


Likeable, straightforward poems include a memorial poem to David Tipton, Bates’ main poetic associate. There are some long poems or sequences – travel poems almost. The poet is always integral to the accounts. This from his ‘Shaggy Dog story’ while out hunting mushrooms:

he is called Seamus  
after the poet  
though neither knows it.

I particularly like the simple design of the book cover – unpretentious as the poems inside. And there is or was a nice cotton book-bag with the same design.

I have come round to Graham Fulton. He writes and publishes a lot, yet as a poet he never does anything wrong. This is a Smokestack book, and he also has other publishers on the hook, according to the inserted publicity sheet. With so much writing behind him, his work is smoothly assured and good humoured. There’s a wide range, from ‘Things I have worn that I won’t wear again’, to ‘Page Twenty-three’ (a policeman gets on a bus...) or ‘The Godgrocer Giveth, the Godgrocer Taketh Away’ – a title that is really a poem in itself, sparked by an onion lying in the gutter. They are city poems, and for the title of his next book I would like to suggest *Fulton Misses Nothing*.

Christine de Luca’s *Dat Trickster Sun*, a well produced pamphlet from Mariscat, contains Shetlandic poems interspersed with English ones. It ends with an ambitious poem on the



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subject of dialect, which is mostly in English. The middle section here quoted talks of who decides what is dialect. The poet first suggests “it is the boundaries and commissions/ that decide,” but is that true?

It’s the way our forefathers moved  
to the forest floor, and in the tonality  
of their vocal chords said ‘I’ and ‘You’  
in a thousand different ways ....

...It’s the famous thesaurus that suggests  
three meanings for *dialect* – other than  
*dialect* and *language* – *speciality*,  
*unintelligibility* and *speech defect*.

...dat *Heron Heights* and *Hegrehoyden*  
is baith languages but *Hegri-heichts* is dialect,  
dat *Hrossagaukur* an *Snipe* is language  
but *Horsegock* is dialect.

The answer comes at the end, in Shetlandic:

Hit’s da passion we haad whin we nön ta wirsels,  
whin w baal soond fae wir bosie inta da heevens  
whin we lay a wird o love apön een anidder  
whin we dunna budder wi nairrow definition.

Still from Mariscat, another batch of Hugh McMillan’s clever and often humorous verses. I liked his encomium on ‘The Alexandria

Quartet’, with a personal twist – “Shug” is great for unusual subjects – also ‘Book Launch, Oxford’ which ends surprisingly and satisfactorily thus:

...I spend  
the rest of the night  
teaching a woman in a wheelchair  
the right way you say get tae fuck.

I’m just about to say there aren’t any themes in this book, when I come to the *Street of ...* poems, culminating in ‘Street of the Poet’:

This is the world of poetry,  
stumbling on words  
like a cliff-path  
carved in cloud

*Disciplines of War*, Ian Blake’s selection of his war related poems includes an influential piece against The Bombing of Dresden first published in 1964. At 125 pages with a historical appendix, this is a good source book as well as impassioned and lyrical poetry.

Sheena Blackhall’s new pamphlets arrive regularly. You are lucky if you receive them, but this year she also has an essential and well deserved Selected Poems, titled *The Space Between*, from Aberdeen University Press, which must take precedence over her newest work. ■

CONTRIBUTORS’ BIOGRAPHIES

**Donald Adamson** is co-founder of Markings and winner of the Herald Millennium Competition. His collectionsinclude *From Coiled Roots* (Indigo Dreams), *A Landscape Blossoms Within Me* (from Finnish of Eeva Kilpi, Arc, September 2014).

**Elizabeth Angus**, an Ileach now on Loch Lomond, spends the long days walking (sometimes for money) and the long nights writing. Her work has appeared in various places including Octavius and the ‘All Write Then’ anthology *Still Me...* (available from Amazon: all profits to Alzheimer’s Society).

**Kate Ashton’s** poems have appeared in magazines, including *Shearsman*. A pamphlet came out from Lapwing Publications in 2012, and a second is currently in preparation.

**Alison Barr** was born in Edinburgh and now lives in a small village in Cumbria. She reads and writes in order to escape and to discover.

**Sheena Blackhall** is a writer, illustrator, traditional ballad singer and storyteller. In 2009 she became the Makar for Aberdeen & the North East of Scotland.

**Maoilios Caimbeul** – Bàrd agus sgrìobhaiche às an Eilean Sgitheanach. Tha cruinneachadh ùr bàrdachd leis, Tro Chloich na Sìla, a’ tighinn a-mach bho Clàr san dàmhair 2014.

**Aonghas Pàdraig Caimbeul** À Uibhist a Deas. Chaidh urram leabhar bàrdachd na bliadhna ann an Alba a bhuileachadh air a’ chruinneachadh mu dheireadh leis, Aibisidh.

**Jen Cooper** is currently completing a PhD in Creative Writing at The University of Aberdeen. She has had poems published in *The Rialto*, *Envoi*, *Ambit* and *The North*.

**Anna Danskin** À Bhatairnis an Eilein Sgitheanaich bho thùs. Dàin leatha ann an irisean leithid An Guth is Gairm. Ag obair air a’ chiad chruinneachadh aice aig aois thairis air ceithir fichead.

**Irene Evans** has published two pamphlet collections and is currently working on a third. She lives in Muthill, Perthshire.

**Sally Evans’** most recent collection is *Poetic Adventures in Scotland with Seventy Selected Poems*. She edits *Poetry Scotland*.

**John Glenday** lives in Drumnadrochit. His most recent collection, *Grain*, was shortlisted for both the Ted Hughes Award and the Griffin Poetry Prize.

**Charlie Gracie’s** poetry and fiction have featured in a range of literary publications. His poetry collection, *Good Morning*, was published by diehard in 2011.

**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

**Lesley Harrison** lives in Angus. Her most recent poetry pamphlet is *Beyond the Map*, published by Mariscat.

**Diana Hendry’s** most recent book is *The Seed-Box Lantern: New & Selected Poems* (Mariscat). Her YA novel, (*The Seeing*, 2012) was shortlisted for a Costa Award.

**Haworth Hodgkinson** is a poet and playwright, composer and improvising musician, who specialises in cross-artform collaborations and solo performances combining words and sound. www.haworthhodgkinson.co.uk

**Andy Jackson** is editor of *Split Screen* (Red Squirrel Press, 2012), and *Double Bill* (2014), anthologies of poetry inspired by popular culture. A Dundee anthology *Whaleback City* was co-edited with W N Herbert in 2013. His first full collection *The Assassination Museum* (Red Squirrel Press) appeared in 2010.

**Pàdraig MacAoidh** – À Leòdhas. Na fhear-teagaisg aig Oilthigh Chille Rìmhinn. Cruinneachadh xy 2013.

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

**Martin MacInnes** is from Inverness. In 2014 he won a New Writers Award from the Scottish Book Trust and is

the 2014 winner of the Manchester Fiction Prize.

**Ian Macpherson** is a writer and performer. He has just completed *The Book of Blaise*, a series of connected stories, and *Scullery*, a full-length play.

**Richie McCaffery’s** first full length collection of poems, *Cairn*, was published in 2014.

**Carol McKay’s** fiction has won her a Robert Louis Stevenson Fellowship. She teaches creative writing through the OU. Her collected short stories, *Ordinary Domestic*, are published in a Kindle edition by The Pothole Press.

**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.

**Lillias Noble** is retired and lives with her partner in the Highlands. The Open University’s course A215 (creative writing) provided both impetus and encouragement to develop her writing.

**Wayne Price** has been publishing poetry and short stories for many years. His story collection, *Furnace*, was published by Freight Books in 2012. He teaches at the University of Aberdeen.

**Angela Robb** lives in Stirlingshire. She had a short story published in *New Writing Scotland 31* and is currently writing a children’s novel.

**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).

**Janice Ross** recently completed her first book, *Voices Galore*, based on the radio show Barra Island Discs. She is working on her doctoral thesis documenting island voices.’

**Kimberley Roxburgh** was born in Edinburgh but schooled in the Lochalsh area of the Highlands and iscurrently a student at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, Rugadh mi

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**Kenneth Steven’s** first and foremost a poet: his 12th collection *Coracle* was published in 2014. He’s also very much a writer of fiction: his short story collection *The Ice* appeared from Argyll.

**Judith Taylor** is the author of two pamphlet collections, *Earthlight* (Koo) and *Local Colour* (Calder Wood), and was a runner-up in the McCash Poetry Competition 2013.

**Jane Verburg** is a teacher who lives in Cromarty. Local history, nature and landscapes inspire her short stories and poems.

**Maggie Wallis** lives in the Highlands and devotes most of her writing energy to poetry. She is enjoying reading the work of Vona Groarke at present.

**Roseanne Watt** is from Shetland. She graduated from the University of Stirling with a BA (Hons) in English and Film Studies. She has since returned to complete the university’s M Litt programme in Creative Writing.

**Christie Williamson** has been writing and publishing poems for many years. He is sad about the No vote. His first collection, *Oo an Feddirs* is expected from Luath late in 2014. This makes him happy.

**Jim C Wilson’s** fifth collection of poems is *Come Close and Listen* (Greenwich Exchange). There’s more information than you’ll need at www.jimcwilson.com

**Howard Wright** lectures at the Belfast School of Art and recent poems have appeared in *Arete* and *Brittle Star*. His first collection, *King of Country* was published by Blackstaff Press, Belfast, in 2010.

**Neil Young** hails from Ireland and now lives in Stonehaven. Described by Brian Patten as ‘a socialist poet par excellence’, his first book, *Lagan Voices*, was published in 2011.

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# 2014 / 2015

neil gunn

## WRITING COMPETITION

### THEMES

#### ADULT POETRY AND SHORT STORY

"For love is the creator and cruelty is that which destroys"  
"The secret loveliness and laughter in things"  
"The extra magic of distance"

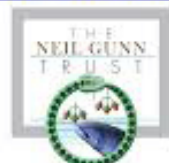
#### SECONDARY SCHOOL

"It was as if happiness itself had worked and dwelt here.  
The feet of happiness still moved about the grass  
and eddied in the wind."

#### PRIMARY SCHOOL

"The stone stair wound upward..."

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