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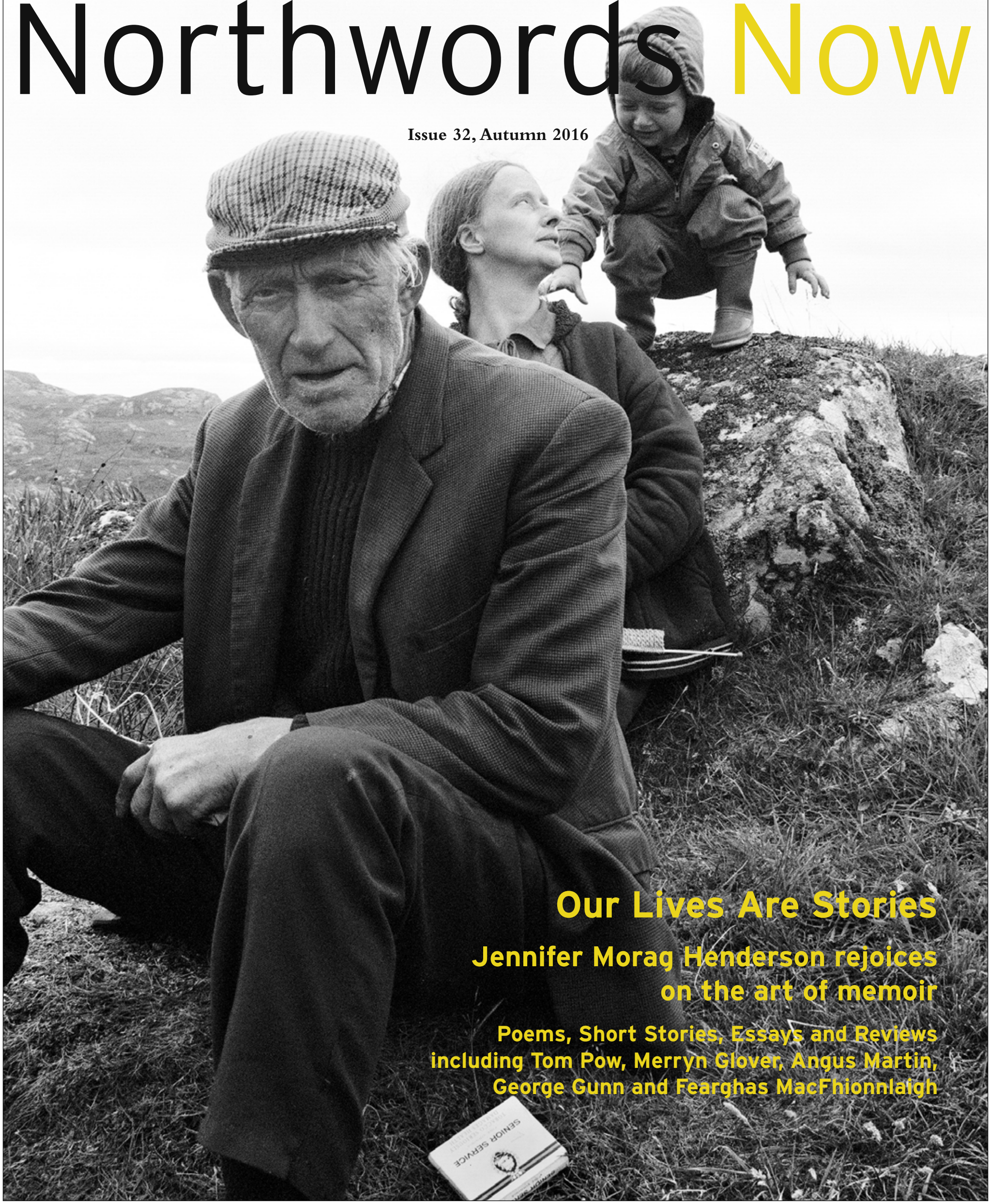

Our Lives Are Stories

Jennifer Morag Henderson rejoices on the art of memoir

Poems, Short Stories, Essays and Reviews including Tom Pow, Merryn Glover, Angus Martin, George Gunn and Fearghas MacFhionnlaigh

EDITORIAL

The art of telling stories and making poems is very old and very new. In this issue Jennifer Henderson describes the popularity and sheer durability of memoir and how so called 'ordinary' lives shine so brightly for being lived outside (as well as sometimes inside) the celebrity limelight. The real world turns out to be a pretty amazing place, which may be not quite so surprising when the real world turns out to be the Highlands of Scotland.

Roseanne Watt's article looks at a newer way of getting into the nooks and crannies of life, the filmpoem, where word and image blend and merge to renew our sense of people and place.

It feels good to know that both the pen and the camera, the page and the screen, are there to record our memories and desires, our passions and dreams. The technology may change but we are, in the end, story-making animals, and all the better for it.■

Chris Powici, Editor

At The Northwords Now Website:
www.northwordsnow.co.uk

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Submissions to the magazine are welcome. They can be in Gaelic, English, Scots and any local variants. Please submit no more than three short stories or six poems. Contact details – an email address or an SAE - should be included. We cannot return work that has no SAE. Copyright remains with the author. Payment is made for all successful submissions.

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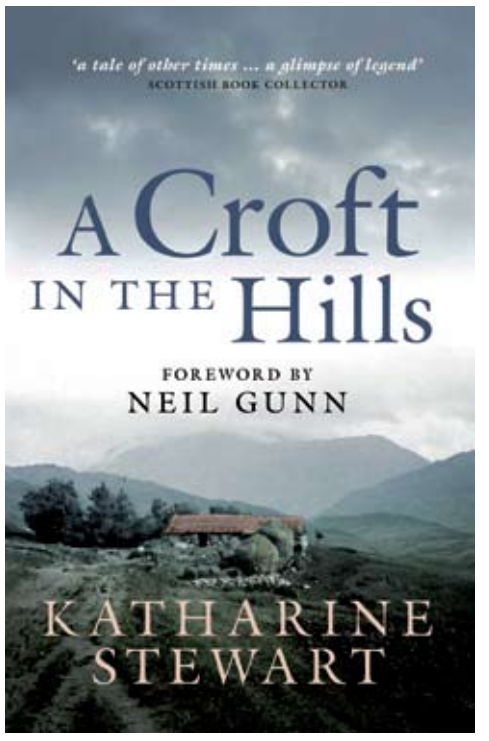
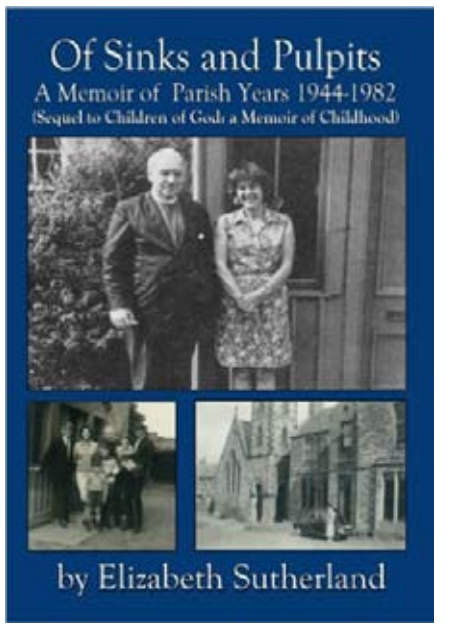
Our Lives Are Stories

Jennifer Morag Henderson delves into some Highland memoirs

"This is the oldest of all Highland adventures and will be the last. It is heartening and heart-breaking. Why do people go on thinking they can make a living out of a hill croft?"

-Neil Gunn, introduction to Katharine Stewart, "A Croft in the Hills"





There are many memoirs published about Highland life and by Highlanders: most simply, they can be arranged into two groups – the stories of those who stay on the land, and those who go away from it. From her home in Abriachan, Katharine Stewart recorded the dying days of the old crofting way of life in *A Croft in the Hills*. At first, her cheerful narration and optimistic outlook on life carries the reader on a wave of enthusiasm away from the city, but she doesn't gloss over the physical toll of hard work, the hard winters, the death of livestock, or the precarious fight with solvency that crofting brings. Katharine Stewart died in 2013 in her 99th year; she used to say that she must surely be Scotland's oldest working writer yet her memoirs leave behind the image of a woman who was always young at heart, who had a great feeling for the Highlands and their people, the sense of community and connection with nature. "Experience had taught us that the worst hardly ever happens," she said cheerfully, "and if it does, it can usually be turned into a best."

Richard Frere has a similar sense of optimism in *Beyond the Highland Line*, though he did not share Stewart's antipathy towards machines and modern living. What he wanted was to live as close to his beloved mountains as possible, as cheaply as possible, but preferably also while making a quick fortune. The trouble was, his enthusiasm for starting new schemes wasn't matched by his success. One of the many Highland memoirs to feature a very understanding wife, Frere installed his young family (two children under five) in three connected, converted railway carriages at Carrbridge. The unusual building had been designed as a temporary summer dwelling, but after he makes it (barely) liveable they reside there for around five years, inviting all the neighbours to eat sumptuous cakes at weekly afternoon teas while surrounded by sometimes near-total chaos. Frere survives a direct lightning strike on their metal-framed house, and a motorbike crash, sees his poultry all die from salmonella, watches his mushroom crop destroyed by storms, and comes through more than one disastrous fire. His co-workers, friends and family seem to catch his bad luck, with broken collar-bones, broken fingers and horrendous sawmill accidents, but they remain steadfastly loyal to the inherently likeable Frere, and the reader wills him to succeed and sympathises with his wife Joan when, after various ultimatums are finally met, she forgives him and they forge a life together.

A different type of memoir focuses on the places of the Highlands: the mountain memoir. Nan Shepherd's *The Living Mountain* is the classic meditation on why hillwalking holds such an attraction for so many, a masterpiece of nature-writing that goes deeply into the Cairngorms. Others prefer the thrill of a set challenge: *The Blind Man of Hoy* is by Red Szèll, a writer whose climbing career was cut short when he discovered, at the age of 19, that he was going blind. However, with the help of friends and instructors, he realised he could continue, in some fashion, with the sport he loved. Beginning again on indoor climbing walls, Szèll gradually built up his confidence, and began to dream again of a challenge that he had always wanted to tackle: climbing the Old Man of Hoy, the sea stack that stands off Orkney. His eventual extraordinary ascent of the stack was filmed for the BBC, and Szèll's book captures the same nail-biting tension that the swooping scenery of the film induced – the slow inching upwards, the elation of a piece of work well done, and the realisation that climbing is often not so much about physicality and the landscape but about the interaction and trust between people.

Not everyone enjoys climbing, but making the particular experience in some way universal is the hallmark of a good memoir. A focus on one particular event gives an immediacy and vibrancy, but an autobiography written when the person is old enough to make objective assessments about their whole life and its place in the grand scheme of things can give us something else. *Memoirs of a Highland Lady*, written by Elizabeth Grant of Rothiemurchus for her children, takes us back to the 18th century, bringing to life the doings of a Highland estate with fascinating detail and through intelligent, humorous writing.

Another classic Highland memoir is Hugh Miller's *My Schools and Schoolmasters*, which tells of his upbringing in Cromarty in the early 1800s and his work as a stonemason, geologist, writer and church reformer. Understanding of Miller is enhanced when his book is read in tandem with the modern biography of his wife *Lydia*, by Elizabeth Sutherland. Memoir often shows how interconnected the Highlands and its people are with other places, and Lydia's biographer's own memoir, *Of Sinks and Pulpits*, tells not only the story of Elizabeth Sutherland's move to the Black Isle and her career as a writer, but also of her time at Edinburgh University and as a minister's wife in both the Borders and in Africa. Written in an unusual format, with the action told in the third person – "I cannot write this memoir of my middle years […] from the personal pronoun because the person I was so long ago seems to have little connection to the person I am now" – Sutherland includes 'reflections' at the end of each chapter, which meditate frankly on how she now sees these events of long ago.

It is extraordinary, given this wealth of material, that so many people come to the Highlands expecting to find uncultured people out of touch with the modern world. That idea ought to be entirely impossible to believe after reading any of the memoirs written by Highlanders who go away from the land. Highlanders are generally good travellers – not least because almost every Highland idyll is reached by a long journey down a terrifying road populated by terrifying drivers – and the lack of opportunities for work and education in this area for many years mean that there are many stories from people who have travelled far and wide from their original homes. The jobs they have done vary from the traditionally Highland to the more exotic, from whaler-turned-London-policeman Jock Murray in *The Whaler of Scotland Yard* to Norman Macleod, the Mod gold-medal-winner in *The Leper's Bell* who plays the pipes for Brigitte Bardot, as well as a whole lot more besides that no one could do justice to in print except himself.

Dolina Maclennan is one of the many islanders who tells her story of leaving home in *An Island Girl's Journey*, an autobiography which was composed using recordings of conversations as a starting-point. Best known as a singer and actress, Dolina Maclennan became involved in the folk music scene when she moved to Edinburgh, becoming friends and sharing the bill with many of the best-known names in Scottish culture, such as Norman MacCaig, Hugh MacDiarmid and Billy Connolly. Many people ended up at informal ceilidhs at her house after poetry-reading sessions as part of the group known as the Heretics.

The Heretics evenings, recently revived as part of the 2015 Edinburgh Festival, combined performance poetry with the Highland idea of a traditional ceilidh, and one of the performers at the original nights was the author of two of the most extraordinary memoirs of recent Scottish writing: Ada F. Kay, otherwise known as A.J. Stewart. Ada, with her dramatic red hair, believed that she was the reincarnation of King James IV of Scotland, and she used to be a familiar sight walking in her black, fifteenth-century-style leggings and cloak through the Old Town in Edinburgh. Her book, *Falcon*, was the memoir of James IV, written in the first person. An astonishing piece of work, it does contain some new insights into James' life, and climaxes in a heartbreaking ending. *Falcon*'s companion book is *Died 1513 – Born 1929*: an extraordinarily lucid and disturbing description of the disintegration of an intelligent mind.

Ada F. Kay was originally a playwright, and a founding member of the Scottish Society of Playwrights, and the most high-profile Scottish biographical project in recent years has probably been Rona Munro's trilogy of James Plays, produced by the National Theatre of Scotland. These finish with the dramatic on-stage dressing of A.J. Stewart's troubled James IV, but offered an immersive look at James I, II and III, with the three full-length plays able to be watched over successive nights, or all in the one day, with on-stage seating allowing some audience members to be in the very heart of the action.

Highlanders will continue to write about their experiences staying on or leaving the land, but there are new trends. There is a strong focus on personal identity or identity politics, while the children of those who came here to try to live self-sufficiently have their own perspectives. Jackie Kay is the daughter of a Nairn woman who left the Highlands to work as a nurse, but her memoir *Red Dust* ▸▸

Road takes her mother's relationship with her Nigerian father as only one part of Kay's own journey as an adopted child. Meanwhile, the internet and the growth in self-publishing and small publishing make it easier for everyone to share their stories. Bloggers are perhaps too aware now of just what their potential reach might be to write as unselfconsciously as they used to, but people still do write versions of their life story online. Simon Varwell, Inverness-based travel writer and author of the now defunct satirical website *Inversnecky*, blogs occasionally at **www.simonvarwell.co.uk** and is also involved with twitter project @Hi_Voices, or Highlands and Islands Voices, a rotational account where different individuals take over for a week at a time to tell their stories – a new form of super-short, image-linked immediate, unreflective memoir for a digital age.

There is an extraordinary range of biographical / memoir experiences from the Highlands, and certainly not enough room to mention them all in a short article – without even going on to those who explicitly base their fiction on real life (Jessie Kesson's *The White Bird Passes*, for example, or the social commentary of Jane Duncan's *My Friends* series).

It is relatively easy for everyone to record something of their life in one way or another, and, handled carefully, it is something that can bring a lot of happiness and value not only to the person telling their story, but also to their wider family – and, in the case of a published memoir, to a much bigger audience as well. ■

Poetry

Tricks of light

Tariq Latif

I sprinkle refined flavours of the sea,
over slices of okra, ginger and garlic.
Add a measure of turmeric-powdered
sunlight and a handful of small red
chillies to the generous melt of butter.
I inhale the rich sizzling scents.

For days now the hills have been frozen
under dense layers of snow. For days now
the cold has set in the pores of my bones.
The bare wiry tree is smeared
with water droplets that refract the low light
creating a multitude of glimmering fruit;

glistening granny smiths, opaque plums,
tangerines and sapphire berries.
This is not the tree of life or of knowledge
but of hidden components of light revealed.
I love the tingling warmth of the sun
on my brow. If our bodies were prisms

then our actions and words would refract
the true colours of our hearts.
I nourish my body with generous
helpings of spiced okra and nan bread.
I sip milky tea and watch the tree
become bare black under a raven blue sky.

Westray Wifie

Jean Atkin

Cock-eyed, hunched on cracked flags, she's blowsy
among the stones, the bones, the midden left
by cattle tied indoors through the long-nights,
their bellies swollen, udders shrinking,
ribs sharp as groynes at slack,
the lack of fodder.

Propped so long on a throughstone,
she leans over the tether-posts,
over the hungry, sweltered cows.

She is her belly, brought to bear.

She – the line of her brow, her wide
scratched eyes, her claw of ancient hair,
her two high breasts, her broad haunch –

she'll see them through the dark
    to drop their calves
        at Noltland's inching
            door of daylight.

        to draw blood, to draw spring,
    bring milk, be
the quickening

Scarface

Short Story by Merryn Glover

'Oh, isn't he marvellous!' Sian cried, as she lifted layers of tissue away.

'A real beauty,' said Hector, the museum's Director of Antiquities, pushing his glasses up his nose. They were always greasy and speckled, and for three weeks now had been joined in the middle with a wad of sticky tape. Sian wondered if he had any intention of getting them replaced, or even repaired. They looked old enough to be one of his exhibits.

'We're very lucky to have him,' Hector went on and grinned at her, bits of lunch clinging to his teeth.

'Aren't we, darling,' she cooed, not addressing him but the figurine, whom she lifted in her gloved hands like a baby. 'What a priceless little monster you are.'

It scowled at her. 12 centimetres high, the man had big muscles, stout legs and a thick rounded beard. He wore a bone-coloured skirt with eyes to match, but the rest of him was greenish black and covered in scales.

'Careful!' Hector said, reaching out his own gloved hands, but failing to prise the thing from her grip. 'He's probably at least 4000 years old.'

'I know. I paid for him.' Well, not her personally, of course, but in her recent and much-celebrated position as Museum Director. Her latest triumph was to commission this exhibition of ancient Central Asian art and to secure little reptile man as centre piece. For an eye-watering sum, admittedly, but worth it. She was establishing an international reputation for this place and had persuaded donors, investors and the Culture Secretary that serious money was required. She was good at persuasion, good at directing, good at money. Frankly, the Museum was lucky to have her.

'Yes, of course,' Hector stuttered. 'Bronze Age, from the Oxus civilisation.'

'Indeed.'

'Lived in Northern Afghanistan, southern Uzbekistan and western Tajikistan.' He moved his hands in little circles, mapping the territory. With his white gloves and booze-ripened nose, he put Sian in mind of a clown.

'Shame he's been damaged,' she said, stroking a gloved fingertip down a gash that ran diagonally across his face, narrowly missing one eye.

'No, no! That's The Scar.' Hector looked at her with eyes wide, bushy brows pushing up to his hairline. She waited for him to expand, but clearly, he was waiting to be asked, waiting for her to seek his greater knowledge, to accede he knew more than her. Damned if she was going to give him that pleasure.

'Oh, of course, the scar,' she said. 'Silly me.' She turned the statue over, touching the ends of the legs where feet should have been and the twin holes top and bottom of its lips. Her curiosity was killing her.

'You know about these incisions?' he asked, searching her face.

'Oh go on then, Heckles, give us your spiel. Good practice for tomorrow.' She forced a smile.

He beamed back, his eyes disappearing into folds of mottled skin.

'This…' he said, trying to take it from her again, but failing. 'Is a Dragon-Man. A mythical being that represents the evil forces of the underworld.'

Like your breath, she thought, tightening her mouth.

'To gain power over the Dragon-Man,' Hector went on, spreading his clown fingers as if about to perform a trick. 'One did not kill –'

Sian's phone went off. She set the figure back in his tissue, peeled off her right glove and slipped the phone from her linen trousers.

'Josie! How's things? We're busy, busy up here, of course.' It was the intern, an eager little thing who was more interested in trying out her own ideas than learning from the experts. 'Oh yes! Meeting the Education Secretary – goodness, is that the time?! Right, tell him I'm on my way. Oh and be a love and ask him what he wants to drink and run out to Starbucks, will you? The usual for me. Thank you, dear!' And she hung up. 'You'd better crack on here, Hector,' she said, discarding the second glove. 'Nobody's going home tonight till we're done.' And she clipped out of the room in her stilettos, leaving him cradling Dragon Man like a holy relic.

Downstairs, Josie — who had a History first from Cambridge and was doing a Masters in Museum Curating at Edinburgh University – pushed through the main doors of the Museum and down the street to Starbucks. The Education Secretary merely wanted tea, which she could have whipped up in the staff kitchen in seconds, but Sian wanted a Skinny Latte, which, seemingly, could only be procured from the multi-national café giant that Josie despised. There were a lot of things she despised at the moment, not least the fact that her summer-long, twenty-hour-a-week 'internship' with Sian was unpaid. She only suffered it for the museum experience, the tick on her CV and dear Hector, who was a boring old windbag but also kind and passionate and, in truth, had taught her more about treasuring the past than anything else in her education. Josie had moved from joining the staff jokes about him and trying to evade his spontaneous lectures to affectionate respect and actually paying attention. And just as Hector ascended in her esteem, like a constellation growing bigger and brighter in the night sky, Sian had slid the other way. Initially awed by her intelligence, her ability and her flawless style, Josie had become increasingly sick of being little more than a PA, running errands, tidying the office, filing things, and – most demeaning of all - scuttling out for drinks and salads armed with Sian's extensive instructions on banned foods.

'I have horrific allergies,' she had said, handing over a printed list. 'No anaphylactic reactions, thank god, but can't touch these flavourings or fragrances or I'll turn into a reptile.' Dragon Woman exposed, Josie thought, but never said a word apart from polite murmurs of sympathy and agreement. She needed a good reference.

By the end of the day, Hector and Josie had arranged all the pieces of Ancient Central Asian Art into their glass cabinets, angled the spot lights and cleared away the boxes, tissue and bubble wrap. Hector was triple-checking his inventory as Josie secured the last descriptive panels to the walls. He had written the texts for them weeks ago - detailed and meticulous – and protested at Sian's red pen slashing through his drafts, re-written them, suffered more slashes, and finally arrived at a series of impoverished sentences that he felt were more like tweets from London Fashion Week than illuminations on these priceless antiquities.

'People don't want to read long-winded essays, Hector,' she had insisted. 'All that's in the companion book. Short and sharp for the gallery walls.' It felt like a travesty to him, but he had to admit (grudgingly and never out loud) that Sian's changes had boosted the museum's numbers, funding and reputation beyond measure. If not for her, they could never have afforded Dragon Man and the rest. But he still couldn't decide if she was good for the place or ruining it. His one comfort was that in the twice-daily guided tours, he could tell the whole story behind each object and hold his audience in rapt attention, as had been his custom here for nearly thirty years. Indeed, many of the regulars came more for his commentary than for the exhibits. Certainly, his mother did.

At 5.30 Sian walked in, crocodile-skin bag slung across her body, briefcase in one hand and a sheaf of papers in the other.

'Press will be here at 10 for the opening and STV want to film a bit of the first tour at 11.'

'Oh, goody!' Hector clapped his hands. He'd never been on the telly before.

'I'll do that one,' she said and waved the papers. 'I've got the full texts on all the artefacts and will bone up tonight.'

He stared at her. They were his texts. From a life-time of learning. And she was going to bone up? In an evening?

Josie, frozen mid-step with a small panel in her hand, was also staring.

'You've been so thorough, Heckles,' Sian said, slipping the papers into her briefcase. 'Made my job easy. Why don't you do the afternoon, tour? Oh and Josie,' she pointed a manicured hand at her. 'If you pop out for my coffee first thing, that should set me up for the morning's labour! You're a star. Toodle-oop!' And she swept out, not noting that Josie was failing to display much in the way of celestial sparkle.

By 9.45 the next morning, all the dignitaries and press had arrived and were milling about in the foyer with fizz and canapes. Josie and Hector stood with the other staff in the front lobby, she in high heels and a borrowed linen suit, with a French chignon and make-up lending sophistication and a pair of pearls dangling at her ears. He wore dark brown trousers and a favourite tweed jacket and was both embarrassed and pleased that Josie had brushed the dandruff off his shoulders, washed his glasses and secured them with the barest strip of fresh tape. Everyone was expectant and excited, chattering and giggling, licking teeth and shooting looks at the cameras. Everyone, that is, except for Sian. She hadn't been seen since her coffee was delivered at 8.30.

Josie's phone went off.

'Sian! How's things?' she said brightly. 'We're busy, busy here, of course – great turnout. You on your way?' Then her brows shot up and her mouth formed a little circle of surprise. 'Oh dear…. Oh that's terrible, Sian… Oh, how awful…' She looked at Hector, with full horror-face. 'No, I definitely ordered… Perhaps they – heaven forbid – do you think they gave me the wrong coffee?! Oh, nightmare! Can I help? What shall we -?' She listened for a while, sighing and shaking her head, then said, finally. 'Of course, don't you worry, Sian. We'll manage. We'll manage just fine. You just look after yourself.' She clicked her phone off and turned to Hector.

'You'll never believe,' she said. 'Sian's had an allergic reaction and can't come out.'

'No!'

'Swollen lips, red rash all over her face.'

'Oh dreadful - does she need help?'

'None whatsoever. She's got tablets, she says, but will just have to go home and sit in a dark room for the day.'

'How awful - the poor thing! Whatever has she reacted to?'

Josie shook her head, eyes wide. 'Something fishy about her coffee, perhaps. Starbucks must have changed the recipe without telling anyone. That's ruthless big business for you.' She threw up her hands. The nails were freshly polished. 'But it means you and I will have to do the honours, Hector. How about I handle the hellos and official opening bit and you do the tour for TV?'

Hector agreed at once, of course, and was super impressed by how well Josie stepped up to the mark with a witty little speech and charming welcomes, knowing all the names. Anyone would think she'd practiced.

Later, on his tour, as the cameras rolled and the VIPs smiled, he swelled into his full stature. Regaling his little audience with the story of each object, his eyebrows leapt, his eyes shone and his hands created in the air the empires, battles, rituals and ruins of the ancient world. As children's faces fell open in wonder and adults stood entranced (and Josie gave a manicured thumbs-up from the back of the room) his voice reeled them in like a magician, a powerful wizard, a high priest at the holy altar.

'And this astonishing figure,' he concluded, unfurling his fingers before the scale-covered statuette,'is called Scarface. These dragon-men of Central Asian mythology represented the violently malevolent forces of the underworld – they were feared and hated. But they could not be destroyed. Oh no! This is what you had to do.' And here he held up a finger, his audience dangling like fish on a hook. 'You must make a slash across the right cheek and insert nails in the tiny holes above and below the lips – see here? - thus preventing the Scarface from speaking. For you see, the only way to have power over the dragon-men was not to kill them, but to silence them.' ■

The Ballad of Jolanta Bledaite

b. Lithuania 1973 d. Scotland 2008

by Tom Pow

The story of Jolanta Bledaite -
nothing good in it, you'll see.
A child from the fag-end

of history. Her teenage
parents unbuckled. Drink
drove her mother on the road.

⋆

Early years with Grandmother -
ten houses, one track, the forest
all around. The old woman

wouldn't light a fire till night, no
matter how cold. The small rooms
smelled of earth and ash. It was this

⋆

for Jolanta, or else the drab
Soviet tower block, in which
her father tended his cancer.

Like someone in a fairy tale,
she said, Papa, don't worry,
I'll get enough to buy a house.

⋆

She took a few English words
and, with humility, set off
for a land where the only

rung clear to her was the last one.
No, it's not a news story yet.
(But it doesn't turn out well.)

⋆

The fruit fields of Angus don't grow
money, nor is Brechin quite
Shangri-La, but Jolanta came,

picking daffodils in spring,
berries in the summer. A van
picked the migrant workers up

⋆

early mornings and they put in
twelve hour shifts each day. People
who knew her then say she was

a good worker – Aye never
any bother - but she was shy
and kept herself to herself.

⋆

In the last month of her life,
she was spotted begging on the
edge of town – a plastic cup

held out – to add to her wages.
She was invisible to shame,
as she worked towards her dream.

⋆

One of those she lodged with
in a damp house in Brechin
was a young Pole – blue-eyed,

baby-faced. She confessed to him
how much she'd saved. He told
another, more experienced man.

⋆

Experienced in the snake-pit of life.
Soon the pair of them had a plan.
Early one morning, when no one

was around, the two entered
the room where Jolanta lay
reading. They taped her wrists

⋆

and ankles. They taped over
her mouth. They found her card,
but not the pin. They would kill her

if she would not tell. At first,
she gave a wrong number. (What
she couldn't know is that nothing

⋆

would save her. Disposal bags
had been bought.) The youngster
smoked a cigarette. Her eyes

must have been on him, pleading.
The smoke drifted to the ceiling.
Silence. Till they heard the other

⋆

on the stairs, his cold intent.
He sat astride her and let her
feel the end of his knife. Marks

consistent with the prodding of
a knife were found; also bruising.
The dividend: £200.

⋆

The youngster held her legs, while
the other snuffed her with a pillow.
'I felt bad after,' the youngster said.

'I smoked a couple of cigarettes.'
Jolanta was laid in the bath and,
with kitchen knives, the other

⋆

hacked off her head and her hands
while the youngster held the bag.
Blood bloomed in the water. There

are times in this story you want to
look away. Her broken body, they
crammed in a wheeled suitcase.

⋆

They took the bus to Arbroath with
the bag of head and hands. There
are also times when this story presses

on your senses. Did the other
take pity here? Or did he sit
on the aisle seat, as the youngster

⋆

stares out over a countryside
rousing itself with spring; a chill
east coast day, but bright, the sea

edged everywhere white, as the
weight of the head – a weight only
the cursed will know – bounces

⋆

slightly on his lap, the edge of a
finger pressing on his inner thigh.
They weighted the bag and threw it

in the sea, as if already it was beyond
memory. The next day, the same
with the suitcase in the harbour.

*

The tides at least were on Jolanta 's
side. Two children – sisters – found
the bag with Jolanta's head, washed

up on Arbroath Beach. Subsequent
searches discovered the hands.
It was a lot of evidence to work on.

*

Soon the culprits were arrested.
While the other remained casual,
dismissive, the youngster, weary,

confessed. From fragments, it was
possible to tell Jolanta's
sorrowful, betrayed life. So that

*

is the story of Jolanta Bledaite.
I said there was nothing good
about it. That is, except for this:

local people raised money so that
her remains could be flown home.
She's buried three kilometres

*

from the village in which she was
a child. If someone visits her grave -
and, in country cemeteries,

they like to converse with the dead -
what do they say as they drink
a vodka and smoke a cigarette?

*

We sent you one of our children
and this is how you send her back.
Or perhaps they simply stand,

as the wind moves through the trees,
and think of the berries waiting
to be picked beside a distant sea.

Culloden Moor

By Marion McCready

Our blood is still our fathers

And ours the valour of their hearts

(Inscription at the entrance to Culloden Moor)

When we came back to Culloden, it was early evening, not another soul was there. The moor came alive around us - no gimmicks this time, no satellite tracking headphones explaining each battle action as you walked across the moor, no echo of the wall-to-wall cinematic screening of the battle in the tourist centre. Just the land itself stretching for miles, the heather-thick ground pulsing with insect life, empty of the clamber of tourists wandering the maze of paths.

Odd shapes of jutting rocks, memorial stones, mark mounds of the dead - some buried where they fell. The bodies of the Jacobites, those who could be recognised, were buried in mass graves together with members of their own Clan. The moor hills glower on the skyline, the clouds change colours like the bubbles my children love to blow around our garden - floating and turning in the air; the salty smell of the Moray Firth never far from us.

I made my way to the main memorial cairn standing like a giant stone thimble on the right-hand side of the moor. When I came to it and touched the rough grey stones pattered with silvery constellations of lichen, I thought of Israel three years earlier. Standing in front of the Kotel, or the Western Wall as it's better known, pressing my hands against the huge warm sand-coloured stones, saying my own private prayers beside crowds of people side-by-side right along the length of the wall, each lost to his and her own thoughts and meditations. Though here there were no crowds, soldiers with guns, no hot sun burning my lips and drying out my mouth, no shawled women surrounding me; the cairn also felt like a sort of holy place drawing people from across the world, many of whom trace their ancestry back to this site, this battleground, glimmering in emerald shades beneath the midsummer setting sun.

I took a notion to search between the cracks in the stones for a message, a letter perhaps - like they do at the Western Wall - leaving scribbled prayers, words for the dead pressed into every conceivable and reachable opening in the stones. I slowly walked around the circumference of the cairn, mound of memory stones, peering in between the cracks. I'd almost completed my circuit when I noticed a glimpse of something white tucked deep into a fissure. I called out excitedly to my husband and son who were exploring nearby stones; my five year-old daughter was further away and lost in a dream of buttercups. I reached for my son's stick and gently hooked the white flicker in the dark crack like a fish and drew it out. A letter from the Clan Mackenzie Society commemorating the dead at the battle of Culloden. "For All The Fallen" it said in bold at the bottom. There was something else; we drew out slowly a batch of dried heather tied up with bright red wool. The intricate crisscross pattern of the fresh blood of the wool bound the heather sticks into the shape of a ram's horn. I thought of the fingers that tied the wool, the hands that pushed the heather deep into the gap in the stones.

We stood silently before the cairn caught up in our own timeless bubble; even the children were uncharacteristically quiet. The only sound was the occasional flutter of flags shaking in the wind - red flags representing the government battle line of soldiers, and in the distance the blue flags, high on white poles, of the Jacobite line. I folded up the letter and gently pushed it and the heather back into the cairn, as far back as it would go.

I like to think of the organic, heather heart beating in the middle of all that stone tied up in its red veins of wool. I think of the Orthodox Jew who stopped me, tied a bracelet of red wool around my wrist as I left the Jewish Quarter of the Old City, Jerusalem.

Stones, red wool, heather, flags, messages for the dead; the connections played on my mind. Words and symbols - all forms of the human need for communication.

The clouds thicken into a dirty quilt. I take in one last look of the stretch of land, a rash of buttercups wavering in the dull light, the grasses leaning. In my hand I carry stems of heather plucked from the moor; my own symbol of remembrance. ■

Creatures of Habit

Short Story by Rebecca Wright

I found the shed snake skin the summer I turned thirteen. The summer we moved to the new house. It lay abandoned and spent on the pile of woodchips, basking in the sun. The fine hair on my bare legs tingled with danger. I poked it with a long stick, and then, when I was sure it was just the crisp shell of a snake, I carried it home at arm's length.

We put the thin skin on the bookcase in the hallway, in the shape of the adder it would have been, stretched from Austen to Du Maurier. Dad explained over roast chicken and Yorkshire puddings how snakes yawn to shed their skins.

The summer I turned sixteen, I lay on the grass by the beck thinking of a boy's voice, his hands, his smile. I heard a splash. I watched an adder twist in the shallow beck, its diamond markings darker in the cool water. I wondered if it was the same snake whose skin I had carried back to the house. I remembered Dad's words - they can have up to twenty babies. A family of baby snakes, I thought. They'd grow up. Fall in love. Shed their skins.

The summer I came home from my first year at university was the hottest in forty years. I was taking Media studies, English lit. I bought my first ever broadsheet newspaper in the local post office and felt a thousand miles tall. I opened it on the grass by the beck and fought with the strange paper. It crumbled between my nail bitten fingers. I didn't understand the articles. Even the headlines were written in code. A different language. I lay back to listen for snakes and think about a man's voice, his hands, his smile. ■

Our Mam, But Not All Of Her There

Short Story by Douglas Bruton

Da says as how things'll be different and we'll have to get used to it and we'll need to help out. That's what being a family's all about, he says. Then his voice shrinks small as a hiss-spit-whisper and he says we is to tell no one. On no account, says he. If anyone asks, we's to say she's been sick and now she's better and nothing more than that.

Only, I've already told Mrs Parks and she works in the shop and I know she'll tell the whole town. Like she told about Mr Harrow and what he did with Miss Linda Martin behind the church one Saturday night and him a married man; it was a sin and should've been God's business, but Mrs Parks told it to everyone buying a morning newspaper, telling it like it was something that had slipped out of the pages of those papers and was missing. And didn't she tell everyone and his dog what the school teacher did with Emma Barr and it wasn't nothing more than kissing, but Emma Barr was short of a few years and so it was all wrong. And I told Mrs Parks about our Mam, and then Da saying we was on no account to tell no one, but everyone would know by now.

There's a car pulls up outside the house and it is old Tom's taxi and it's clean as a whistle or a new penny, except there's mud on the tyres now and I can see by his face that old Tom isn't pleased and he steps on tip-toe shining shoes to open the back door because he prides himself on being a gentleman. In the back of the taxi is our Mam. Da goes out to help and he slips old Tom a little extra to make things right.

Mam, home from the hospital, and when she steps into the house it's like she's a stranger or a guest, and we make a fuss over her as we do the minister in his black frock when he calls twice a year. And we tell her as how we've missed her, just like Da told us to say, which isn't a lie because we have missed her. And Prune offers to make a cup of tea for Mam, milk and two sugars and you put the milk in the cup first so it tastes right, tastes the way Mam likes it. And I plump up the cushions on Mam's seat, the one she always sits in, and she's been missed these past few days and no one has sat in her seat in all the time she's been gone.

She smiles, our Mam, and she says a cup of tea would be just the ticket, and she sits in her chair and she smiles again; but it's not really like mam's smile. Something is missing. Like when Prune lost her two front teeth, both in the one day, and then she smiled and it was not like Prune's smile at all. Same with our mam, only not teeth but something else is missing.

She seems smaller than our Mam, too, shrunken and hunched, more skin and bone than before, and like I said something missing. And she moves slow as creeping when she moves to her chair and it's as if she nurses a pain somewhere deep inside. When Da asks if she's alright, she says there's nothing between her heart and the world now and it takes a little getting used to is all. Da steps out then for a smoke and to breathe.

Me and Prune, we're waiting, but Mam don't take us into her arms for hugging like before. She says sorry, and how she's just dog tired, and she means tired as the dog is when it has been out all day working the farm and running sheep up and down the hill and its ears sharp to whistles and clicks since early doors, and it comes in at the last and is too tired to eat sometimes, and that's what mam means when she says she's dog tired. She says that maybe she'll close her eyes for just a minute and we're not to let her sleep past five o'clock.

Prune pours the grown-cold cup of tea she made for our Mam down the sink and we sit on the sofa, sitting like we do in church, our backs straight and our prayer-hands clasped in our laps, and we watch Mam sleep, a silver spittle thread unspooling from her open mouth. And we look for the thing that's missing from our Mam, a space in her clothes, just on the left side, a sag in the front of her dress, the thump of her heart pressing against the cloth. We listen too, hearing the rattle in her every breath and maybe the small hammer of her heart or maybe it's the fright-full hammer of our own hearts we hear.

And I don't know about Prune, but I'm praying then. Da says prayers can do no harm, only he don't put much store in 'em. And I'm praying that when she wakes it'll all be as it was before and Mam will sit up and scold herself for sleeping during the day and she'll scold us too for letting her, though they won't really be scold-words. And she'll dance into the kitchen and sing, and all the clatter of the pots and spoons and the kettle will be like a kind of music. And Prune and me, we'll point our noses in the air and breathe in and know from one breath what is for tea or for supper. But Mam just sleeps and the hands of the clock move past four and closer to five and we sit and watch; and I pray.

Later, Da brings things in for tea. He's been away in the old truck and there's a smell of beer on his breath. He says we wont eat at table tonight and there's no need for forks. He's brought in chips and battered fish, all wrapped in newspaper, and the air in the room is suddenly warm and smelling of fat and frying and vinegar. And though we do not turn it on, we sit in front of the tele and we sit in eating-silence, which is not the same as church-quiet. Prune keeps looking at Mam to see if it's alright and I keep looking the same, and Mam picks at her food like a bird. That's what she'd say if it was us, and she'd tell us to stop picking, and she'd ask us what was wrong, and she'd say as how boys'll like us just the same if we've a bit of meat on us. I want to say that to our thin as paper Mam, only I don't. I just think it.

She smiles, our Mam, and she says a cup of tea would be just the ticket, and she sits in her chair and she smiles again; but it's not really like mam's smile. Something is missing.

'Sgood, Da says with his mouth full, and it's an effort to say anything and we can see that. And Mam don't give any show that she's heard what he's said and so Da don't say anything more.

The dog gets to lick the newspaper sheets when we're finished, and there's chips and fish still in Mam's paper so the dog isn't sure at first and it looks to our Da to see if it's alright. Then, its tail wagging like flag day, and it eats without tasting anything, eats like it thinks Da might change his mind and take the fish and the chips away. Da burns the licked clean newspaper on the small ash that the fire has become and a bright and dancing yellow light is suddenly and briefly there in the room with us, but no one smiles or thinks it cheery.

It's not easy for Mam to get up from the chair. Da rushes to help, and there's a noise that Mam makes somewhere in the back of her throat, the same noise as Granpa used to make when he bent to pick up dropped keys or spilled money. And Da walks her slowly from the room, and it's like when women are helped from gravesides to waiting cars and they lean on the men. There are words missing in her going, for she says nothing but leaves like shadows leave when the sun goes down, and it's early to bed that our Mam is going.

Da has to wash our faces, same as he's been doing for more than a week now. Me and Prune, we've got used to the rough cat-lick he gives to our upturned faces, and used too to the smell of the cloth which is sour and old. And Da has to tell us a story when we're to our beds and he tells the one about Hansel and Gretel and the trail of broken bits of bread laid to lead them back home only the birds have eaten every crumb so the way back is missing. And there's something about the way Da tells it that makes me want to cry and I can see from the way Prune is looking at the door and not at the pictures in the book that she's feeling the same.

And Da stands to put the light out and 'Goodnight, sleep tight, don't let the bed bugs bite' he says and it is like a song when he says it, only it's a sadder song tonight. Then, because Mam disapproves of Da's talk of bugs in the beds that she makes, and the sheets that she keeps clean, boiled in a hot take-your-breath-away soap soup slopping in a great copper pot that she stirs with a wooden stick, because Da knows Mam will have something to say about his bugs in her beds, and he can hear her cross-words against him even though it is quiet, he adds a wish for us to have sweet dreams.

But we don't sleep, and we don't dream, not Prune and not me. We lie still as the Lady Alice Fell who sleeps in the church and she is cut out of stone and a dog that's like no dog I ever saw sleeps at her stone feet. And I can hear Prune breathing and I know she can hear me. And we listen for our Da sometime climbing into bed with our Mam and the sound of him finding her in the dark, the sound of the bed shifting and Mam moaning and Da making a noise like the horse blowing air. We strain our ears to hear, knowing if he finds her then there'll be smiles over breakfast, Mam-smiles and Da-smiles, and Da kissing Mam and touching her diddies through her clothes when he thinks we're not looking, and both of them laughing. But she's got only one diddy now, our Mam, and the whole town knows because I told Mrs Parks in the shop how the other's been left in the hospital. The doctors took it from her, I told Mrs Parks, and when doctors have taken something then they don't ever give it back.

And tonight Da sleeps in his chair downstairs and the dog lies on Da's cold-stone feet. And maybe that's just his way of getting used to it, and that's how it'll be different from now on, like he says. I tell Prune it'll be alright and she takes a breath and she says she knows it will, but there's something missing from what we both say and the minister would tell us it's faith as we don't have and maybe he'd be right. ■

Dàin le Fearghas MacFhionnlaigh

Reifreann 2014

1) Coire a' Bhreacain
Sgrìobh Seòras Orwell 1984 air Eilean Diùra.
Chunnaic mi pìos mu a dhèidhinn air an tv o chionn greis.
Thachair tubaist bàta ris aig Coire a' Bhreacain.
E fhèin, a mhac òg trì bliadhna dh'aois,
agus dithis dhaoine eile san eathar a bha seo
a chaidh a ghlacadh le sruthan-lìonaidh làidir
's a tharraing a dh'ionnsaigh a' chuairt-slugain mhòir.
Bhris an cùl-mhotair dheth agus thuit e sa mhuir.
Ach rinn iad a' chùis air iomramh gu creig leathann
far an deach an eathar fodha. Las iad teine an sin.
Ri h-ùine chaidh am faicinn le iasgairean giomaich.

Tha sinne dìreach às dèidh ar reifreann
air neo-eisimeileachd a chall.
Alba mar eathar air a dol fodha cha mhòr
ann an cuairt-shlugain Orwellach,
ann an Coire a' Bhreacain de bhreugan.

Ach mar Orwell fhèin, cha deach ar bàthadh.
Ràinig sinn creag nas àirde na na garbh-thuinn.
Agus las sinn teine a tha a' loisgeadh fhathast.

2) Baga Dòrnaireachd
B' ann dà mhìos às dèidh an reifrinn
a bha an co-là-breith agam.
Seasgad 's a sia bliadhna dh'aois.

Cheannaich mo mhac
baga dòrnaireachd mòr dhomh.
Chòrd e rium glan.

Bha e dubh, dearg, agus geal,
leis na faclan follaiseach
'Lonsdail Lunnainn'.

Lean mi orm
ga leadraigeadh
fad seachdainean.

Air a' cheann thall
bha mo ghàirdean goirt.
Siondrom tunail charpalaich.

Chuimhnich mi an uair sin
nach eil càil nas riatanaiche
ri linn còmhraig na co-chothrom.

Sin agus cridhe ciùin.

Sàidh-Fàidh

1) Gàidhlig Ghalàgtaga
Siolandair gleansach tiotànamach is mise nam laighe na bhroinn.
Capsal-fànais na ghath-solais a' tolladh damhna dorcha nan speur.
Lannsa-leighis a' tro-lotadh cràdh iongarach na bithe.
Àiria drùidhteach gam thogail nas àirde na fuaim fhèin.

Mise air thuras bho na chaidh gus na dh'èireas.
Sàr-Ghaeilge ri leughadh is àrd-èibhneas orm.
An impis leum-hàidhpeir gu ceann-uidhe nam bàidh.
Cluainean glasa, uisgeachan ciùine Talamh an Àigh.

Uair a thìd' a-mhàin bho àin an Latha.

2) Ròbot air an Oir
Sìos leathad breac sleamhainn na beinne,
siod seann ròbot fuamhaireil meirgeach
a' tuisleachadh le stàirn is le gleadhraich
tro iomairean làn chàl is snèipean.

Crùbte am broinn eanchainne loisgeach
mar luch bàn air bhoil 's ann an èiginn
mise ri spàirn le luamhanan reasgach
mus tuit mi sa mhuir fhuar dhomhainn.

Teaghlach

1) Mànas an Lagaidh
An t-iasg a' leum an-diugh san allt,
na òmar trìd-shoilleir fon ghrèin.

Faileasan an t-srutha drileannaich
a' dannsadh air duilleach nan craobh.

Iomadach òir-dhuilleag an fhoghair
a' cur car san doimhneachd dhonn-ruadh.

Nam sheasamh an seo air creig ghainmheach.
An t-uisge cas fodham a' siubhal seachad.

A-mhàin orts' air a' bhruaich thall tha m' aire.
Am math thu a-chaoidh m' fhacal tuaisteach,

cion-fàth mo chlach-thilgeil san aibheis,
mo chnàmh 's mo mhaistreadh mar ghrinneal.

2) Do Ghàire
Gad chluinntinn
ri lachan gàire
san rùm eile.

Mar eas àrd caol
de èibhneis gheal
thar creig mo chridhe.

3) Cò mheud itealan?
(Airson m' ogha Callan, 18 mìosan)
Cò mheud itealan
a chunnaic sinn madainn an-diugh
a' dol thairis oirnn
tron ghuirme?

Thar craobhan buidhe an fhoghair
fon a thogas tu le aire
nad chorragan beaga
iongantas dearcaig is duilleige?

Cò mheud itealan
air na thomh sinn madainn an-diugh
's iad a' sgèith os ar cionn
tro sgòthan nan speur?

Os cionn na seann chraoibh-ubhail
fon a thog thu nad làmhan beaga
cùramach na h-ùbhlan uaine ud
a thuit sa ghàrradh

gus an cur còmhla san t-seada
airson nan lon-dubh acrach bochda
nuair a thig fuachd a' gheamhraidh
nuair a thig fuachd a' gheamhraidh.

Aois

1) Eagal Ron Tinneas Alzheimer
Bruadar.
A' siubhal mòintich lem mhnaoi.
Thairis air talamh rèisg.

Mise a' gabhail ceuma ceàrr
's a dol fodha suas dham mheadhan
ann an làthach a thòisicheas

air mo shlugadh gu slaodach.
A bheil mo bhean còmhla rium dha-rìribh?
Ciamar an dèan i cobhair orm?

An gabh mo sheacaid a chur dhìom
's a chleachdadh mar ròpa?
No an gabh a sgaoileadh air mo bheulaibh

air a' chlàbar mar ràth-sàbhalaidh?
Ach an dèanadh seacaid a' chùis idir?
Agus mur eil mo bhean dha-rìribh an làthair

an cluinneadh cuideigin eile m' eubhachd,
a-muigh an seo air a' mhòintich cheòthach
a' dol fodha ann an lèig air cùl luachrach?

Saoil a bheil geata-feansa ann,
a ghabhadh togail far a bhannaichean
gus drochaid a dhèanamh?

Tha sin uile gu lèir cho mì-choltach.
Dè mu dhèidhinn geugan beithe, ma-tà,
nan robh doire faisg gu leòr oirnn?

A' sìor dhol fodha agus m' imcheist a' fàs.
Mar an saighdear truagh ud sa Chogadh Mhòr
a chuala mi mu dhèidhinn air an telebhisean.

Esan a' dol fodha fad làithean
ann an sloc grànnda eabair, 's a chàirdean
a' fàilligeadh air a shlaodadh a-mach às.

Fon àm a bha an truaghan bochd
an àirde dhan amhach aige sa pholl,
bha e gu tur air a chiall a chall.

Ach an uair sin dhùisg mi sa rùm agam.
Dhùisg mi rim mhnaoi 's rim mhac
air madainn bhrèagha dheàrrsach.

2) Inneal-èisteachd
Nam stad sa choille-samhraidh
a' rùrachadh ann am pòcaid lèine
airson m' inneal-èisteachd
ach an cluinn mi nas fheàrr an oiteag
a' tha sèideadh tron duilleach uaine.

Pàipear Maidne

leugh
le ugh

Cloud Inversion

Short Story by Paul Brownsey

After two hours there is no sign of the man. Gary is aware of himself only as an object of suspicion hanging around in a lane where big houses with cupolas and porticos lie in the silence of wealth beyond high hedges and serious gates.

His awareness is given sudden voice: 'Are you trying to make up your mind which house to burgle?'

The growly voice has enough joking tone to avoid rudeness but not enough to eliminate a warning that she isn't joking. She glares out from behind high spiked gates. She taps the gate with a garden trowel, as though belatedly to attract his attention.

'Oh, no, I'm just waiting for someone.'

'Waiting for your accomplice.' Her face has the wrinkles of sweet-old-ladyhood; her eyes are a border guard's sighting someone of the wrong race.

'No, no, for a man who walks a dog here. Well, he did yesterday.'

Her silence informs Gary that this won't do.

'A spaniel sort of dog, brown and white, on a retractable lead. We got talking because I got caught up in it. The lead. I couldn't make out whether he called it Molly or Milly. He was quite elderly, but his hair was still fair. He went to the village school here, then away to Glenalmond. Not thin. Wearing—is it called a *camel* overcoat? It looked very good quality.'

So the man was rich and it would be easy for Gary to mug him in a discreet lane of overhanging boughs.

'Very friendly and easy to talk to.' That was true, as people ordinarily speak. Yet it wasn't true, it tidied too much away behind a conventional phrase. 'What he said was ordinary enough, about how strict things were when he was a boy, the belt at school and church twice on Sundays, but''—and he realises as he says it that this is not an acceptable justification for his being discovered in the lane—''*how* he talked was different, somehow, not like I was a passing stranger.'

Yes, that was what it was *not* like. But what was it *like*? Twenty-four hours haven't produced a clear idea. No wonder he failed to seize an opportunity that is now, in retrospect, precious.

'He is not a friend of yours, then.'

'Oh, not a friend, we'd not met before.' And anyway, can an old man like that be a *friend* of a guy like himself? 'We didn't exactly arrange to meet today but he sort of suggested it.'

Explain, says the silence.

'See, I was out here on a walk, a hike, down the lane here and along the Highland Trail, a bit of it. You couldn't see the loch to the north because it was covered by cloud but you could see the summits above the clouds. We had a bit of a discussion about whether the correct phrase is *cloud inversion* or *temperature inversion*.

'He said it would be ever so exciting—he actually said *ever so*—being up on the hills in sunshine when they were islands in a sea of clouds. I said I couldn't go in that direction today—yesterday—because of where I'd left my car, and he said, like he *knew* there would be, 'There might be another cloud inversion tomorrow, so you could come back tomorrow.' '

Even the slightest resemblance of that to an arrangement to meet has drained out of it under her judicial gaze.

'I was just, like, hoping to see him again.'

If she asks *What for?* he has no answer. *He seemed a nice old boy…We sort of clicked…There was something about him that drew me to him…* All are inadequate answers to a challenge about loitering in the lane for two hours.

'You can leave your name and address. If I hear of anyone meeting your description, I will let him have it.' Unspoken: and inform the police if there are any burglaries.

But the truth shall make you free, honesty will protect him. He pats his pockets.

No pen.

'Wait.' Her mansion might have been designed by Rennie Mackintosh. While she is inside it, two small tulip-shaped windows in the stylised turret keep him in their sights. After ten long minutes she returns to hand a pencil and a used envelope (''Miss J. Braid'') through the locked gates. Writing his name and address is like signing a police confession. She nods dismissal. She watches him until he is out of sight.

In front of a tree towards the foot of the lane, he halts, defiant as a teenager turning his music up loud. And when he notices the cassette still dangling from its branch, the hope that was corroded by her suspicion is renewed.

As he and the old man had neared the turn-off for the Highland Trail, Gary had been halted—had even for one confused moment thought it was there *because of* the old man—by something hanging by a piece of green twine: an audio cassette, not in its box, slowly twirling.

'It's like—do you know Doon Hill at Aberfoyle?' Gary had asked. 'The trees at the top have hundreds of things tied to them—strips of cloth, mainly—with messages attached, prayers: that someone will find a job or get money or someone will love them. Someone will get better. Some association with fairies and magic. All a bit silly.'

Magic is invoked here, too, by the dangling cassette. Milly or Molly had swerved away from it with a whimper. Dogs are renowned for sensing things that humans usually can't. Perhaps a prayer is recorded on it, perhaps music as an offering. How touching to expect the occult powers to have the equipment to access an obsolete medium.

'I expect someone found it in the undergrowth and strung it up so that whoever lost it would find it easily if they came back to look for it.' The old man's words had been the sensible explanation; but something was transmitted through his speaking them for which the puzzling word *grace* keeps suggesting itself.

You can't, though, knock on a door and say you're looking for someone whose words transmit grace. Gary transfers two £20 notes from his wallet to a pocket, handy to flourish in support of a lie.

He retraces his steps and chooses a single-storeyed house that appears to have been built on a corner of land sliced off by leylandii from a bigger demesne. Between visible metal girders, its walls seem made of rocks and glass fragments compounded together. The front door is concealed within an angle.

There's an instant smile and a cool-edged tang of vanilla from the blonde young woman in tight denims who opens the door to his ring of the bell. Nipples press their outline though her shiny slinky mallard-green top.

'Sorry to bother you.' No cancer behind these nipples. Probably. Unlike Alison's. 'I wonder if you can help me find someone who could be one of your neighbours.'

'We don't know the neighbours.' Her laugh invites him to find it funny, too. 'We've just moved in. My husband's out.'

'Well, you might have seen him walking his dog, this man, a spaniel sort of thing, brown and white, called Molly or Milly. He's quite old, but he's got a young face and a full head of hair, a big cloud of fair hair like a little boy's. He looks like life hasn't damaged him.' He waves the £40. 'I want to return some money he dropped walking his dog in the lane yesterday.'

'Oh, that's so sweet!' She leans a shoulder against the door jamb, thumbs in belt loops, nipples leading the conversation. 'You're from up in the village?'

'No, Glasgow. I was just out here hiking yesterday.'

'And you came back today just to return his money?' Her smile goes all over him, approving.

But from the eyes of the old man had come neither approval nor disapproval, only attention so selfless that conventional responses and promptings had no power to chivvy you.

Behind her in the hall a large wall mirror gives back Gary's earnest eyes, his full head of hair still almost entirely black, his puppy-fat cheeks with the experiment of designer stubble, his unassuming zip-up jacket and cargo trousers: Alison had loved that person.

'I just took another day's leave.'

'To let someone have some money they'd dropped? Oh my God! That is *amazing*. What do you *do*? You are a *good* person.' The arms are fervent but the embrace is over before he realises what is happening. The press of her body against his was as quick as though they were playing a new form of playground tag using quick body-body touches. Tagged by her nipples.

'I'm just in local government. Trading standards.'

'Look, we're having a party on the 22nd to meet all our neighbours. You must come! You'll probably meet your man there to give him his money.'

'"And why did you not hand it to him when he dropped it?'

He is gaunt, older than she, but straight-backed as a soldier. The angle in the wall masked his approach.

'Oh. Darling. Hi. Hello. Couldn't the garage—?' She folds her arms over her nipples. 'Yes, I wondered that, too. Why you didn't do it at once?'

'Well, I didn't notice him dropping it—'

'So you can't be sure the money was his.' The ribbed sweater with leather patches at elbows and shoulders confirm a military impression, though avant garde architecture does not seem a colonel's natural habitat. 'Garage hasn't got the part.'

'Well, not *sure*, but, well, no-one overtook us and when I walked back the money was lying just where he'd stopped to take out his hankie.'

'You'd better go,' the man says. He goes indoors without looking at the woman, then turns to say softly, 'My wife does not want to be bothered by your tuppeny-ha'penny stories about lost money.' As he vanishes she smiles and shrugs.

The door that shuts on their lives shuts, too, on yesterday's promise. A promise of something pure, something real. Why, oh why, couldn't he have just have taken the chance and replied, *Right, let's meet tomorrow and walk above the clouds?*

But suppose Gary's lie had paid off and she'd said something like, 'Oh, that sounds like Len McMeechin at Dumfoyn House at the top of the lane, it's got, like, a parapet, he's wonderful for 80, used to own a big firm that hired out excavating equipment, branches all over the country, his wife died last year, sad.'' Mightn't it have been self-defeating? Whatever the old man had conveyed—offered?—it was like something glimpsed in the background of a photograph, not what you were supposed to be looking at. A name, an address, a history giving rise to expectations—these would stack up in the foreground, diminishing what could be detected in the margins…

…But here, where the lane meets the main road through Killarin, is a man walking a dog. No, it's not *him*, and the dog is a white-footed boxer, but it is suddenly obvious that Gary should have asked a dog-walker for information, for there is a freemasonry of dog-walkers.

No lie this time.

'Excuse me.'

The man is quite young, but this is disguised by a flat cap and a large pear-shaped body. He'd halted before Gary spoke, apparently to allow his eyes to follow a schoolgirl in a skimpy black skirt that she repeatedly pulls down with a coarse comfy functional tug that has nothing to do with the poised allure you might think she'd been aiming at. When he turns to Gary he widens his eyes and purses his lips and nods towards the girl, inviting a shared appreciation.

'I'm looking for a man—'

'Each to his choice. Can't help feeling you miss an awful lot, though.'

'No, not like that.'

It wasn't *that* with the old man, surely.

'No, someone who dropped some money. He walks a dog in the lane there, a brown and white spaniel called Molly or Milly.' He waves the money. 'I wanted to return it to him. Very tall and upright, rather imposing. A big bright halo of fair hair, like an—' He'd been about to say *angel's*. 'A nice old boy.'

'A brown and white spaniel called Molly?

No, I don't think I recognise *him*.' The disavowal in that *him* embraces anyone who knew him. 'Perhaps someone from Craigholm. Come along, Shamba.' The boxer licks Gary's shoe with delicate reverence, then stares up at him, the savagery of her boxer jaw eclipsed because through her eyes comes pure patient compassion from another world.

'Uh—Craigholm?'

'The Doolally Dump. The rest home, whatever it is.'

'I'm not from Killarin.'

'Ah! Well, we didn't want it here, I can tell you. But these old houses are so large... After Archie Lindsay died it was sold for some sort of—well, not the really serious cases, but, *you* know, people too fond of the sauce or life gets a bit too much for them, stress, that sort of thing. Not the sort of place you want in a village like this. Children...

'They got planning permission, though. They go in for *pet therapy*.' Irony lies heavy on the phrase. 'A bloody great pack of dogs and the inmates pat them and look after them and take them for walkies. Your man could have been one of them. They don't pick the dogshit up, either.'

I couldn't make out whether he called it Molly or Milly. Or he switched between *Molly* and *Milly* because he wasn't sure what was the name of a dog that was one of the common stock of the Doolally Dump.

'But would a patient from there have £40 in his pocket?' A last attempt to save the day.

'Don't see why not. Place costs a packet to stay.'

The look that neither approved nor disapproved and freed you was nothing but gaga vacuity. How could he have been taken in by the babble of someone in a home?—He'd been on the brink of saying, *Right, let's meet tomorrow walk and above the clouds*; he'd traipsed out here again today, using up holiday leave, to look for an imaginary once-in-a-life-time opportunity. Someone whose job is clamping down on scams to save the public from their fantasies falls for fantasies himself!

And actually, cloud inversions are very rare: that's what the internet said last night.

'Well, thanks anyway.' Gary pockets the notes with a decisive air of that's-that-cleared-up. The girl walks haltingly, engrossed in her mobile, still pulling her skirt down every few steps. If Alison had lived they might have had a daughter. She might have had the shrewd mean eyes of this girl. Gary mimes a glance at her and gives the flat-capped dog-walker a man-to-man smirk in farewell. He says, 'Goodbye, Shamba,' but now the boxer refuses eye contact, lowering her head as if sad about something.

He hurries to his car. He drives fast. No-one in any of the cars he approaches or passes, drivers of sensible vehicles on ordinary sensible errands, would ever lurk in a secluded lane on the off-chance of *something pure, something real*—what the fuck does that even *mean*?—from a stranger they had a mundane chat with the day before. He's been as daft as the time he made his secret journey out to Doon Hill and fastened to a tree a beautiful black and silver tie, a gift from Alison, with a useless message that was neither a prayer nor the mere expression of a wish: 'Let Alison's cancer go into remission.' He does not notice that for the second day in a row there is a cloud inversion over the loch to the north.

Poetry

Oh, Tell Me What Was on Yer Road

Henry Bell

Portishead pier's not special it's rust
and concrete and no pavilion.
But there,
there after your father's death a dolphin
breaks the surface and you know it's him.
I know it's not.
Across the water the lights at the top
of the power plant chimneys start to blink on
just at the moment the dolphin leaves.
But then,
it is getting dark.

At the wedding you talk about him
and the dolphin and you read 'Wild Geese,'
because geese are the souls of the dead.
And as you read it, we hear flapping and honking,
great fat Canada Geese land
in the graveyard; they're souls visiting bones,
having crossed the water and found you.
Though I know they are just geese.

Offerings

Peter Gilmour

When I left out food and drink for her ghost,
I realised I must be going mad.
Even though many many years had passed
since she cut her throat, I had such thoughts,
and made lists of snacks she might appreciate,
also the hours when I should put them out.

I would promptly take them in the next day,
disappointed, in spite of myself,
that they had not been touched. Some animals,
it seemed to me, had nosed them, sniffed them,
but apparently gone no further.
I would put them out again the next day.

Once I had set out a glass of red wine,
for towards the end she had been a lush,
and it had been spilled on the front steps
quite badly. I stopped to inspect the stain
and, as I did so, a fierce wind arose
as if to blow the ill sense out of me.

Blew, instead, the picnic down the garden,
many of the things she had truly loved,
grapes, apples, yoghurt, mince pies, oranges,
chicken legs, pork pies, bread and humus, cheese.

I left them to the wind and the animals
and to whatever else, whoever else,
was grimly harboured there, where the woods began.

Moonrise, New Year's Eve

Chris Agee

The moon rose behind us.
We turned to face

its full large dial
low over Bloody Foreland.

It cast its wavering
phenomenological foil over

the bay's whale-road and seal-road.
A wisp of cloud

twisted a half-veil
over its shadowy

seas. A scudding bank
first topped it

like a matador's hat,
then blocked it

with a backlit darkness.
Spindrift's suds

fled the rising tideline
in a tumbleweed

of moments
whitening the night.

Glad your old Dad's
still here? Give me a kiss.

It's good being
together, huh?

That was always, of
course, the real reason

for our time
in Donegal.

for Jacob

The Swimming Lesson

Short Story by Nick Holdstock

Here are some interesting smells:

Chlorine
Nutmeg
Perfume
Fear
The temple of someone you love.

Which of these does not belong? You will probably say 'fear', that it is not a smell.

But most of us know little of fear— we often confuse it with worry: our choice of shoes, the state of our hair, where we parked the car.

There is nothing everyday about fear: it heralds catastrophe. You breathe it in, through your nose, through your mouth. Its odour is bitter and tight. Like pencils crushed into shards. Like chalk dust in the nose. But it is not these other smells. It is only itself.

So yes, fear is a smell. I know this, and so does Tariq, standing in front of my office and saying he has forgotten his swimming trunks. For the third time this term.

He looks at my white face. I look at his brown face. He says, 'I thought they were in my bag.'

'Did you?' I ask, then breathe in sharply. I consider his desperation. The quick glances he throws at the pool already containing his class.

And because I have taken a deeper breath, or because he has distracted me, my resident smell shifts. Instead of fear, there is chlorine. I am walking miles of hospital floor while surgeons cut into Susan. After four hours, I was sure she had died: there could be nothing left to remove.

I force the air from my nose. This is not chlorine. What we call 'chlorine' is something else besides. It is the odour of things from the body reacting with chlorine. Urine, skin, shampoo, sweat, deodorant, hormones and blood: these combine with chlorine to form chloramine. This is that fabled swimming pool smell. There is nothing clean about it. When the water brings tears to your eyes, the problem isn't too much chlorine, but nowhere near enough.

'Yes,' says Tariq and stares at my shoulder. 'I told my mum to put them in.'

If this were out in the open, it wouldn't be so bad. The light would help to break things down. The air would move the smell.

Instead it is hidden, shut away, in many ways, denied.

I check my watch. The lesson— which will be water polo —is due to start in five minutes. In the pool, the faces are waiting. They can see the goals, the ball. The caps with bulges over the ears that do not really protect. If you are struck by an ill- (or well-) aimed ball, you feel like a dropped box of glass.

'Come on, Tariq!' shouts Macraw, a boy so grown, so powerful, he seems in the wrong place. He is on every team that deserves him— cricket, rugby, cross-country, football. He is liked by most of the staff and pupils. He is the kind of boy that reminds me I don't have a son.

Tariq bites his lip and moves his eyes to my face. He can have no reason for thinking that I will relent. He probably does not even see me as a person. I am not a husband, a teacher, a man with his own fears. To him I am merely Caesar with his thumb outstretched.

'Make him skinny dip,' shouts Nisbett. His body is so white and scrawny it disgraces the pool. But improbably, he and Macraw are best friends. They are a double-act in-waiting for their audience, their victim, who stands before me. I have already denied him mercy twice this term. Then I walked the few steps to my office, opened the green metal cabinet, drew out the brown pair of trunks worn by six years of boys. I do not know who they belonged to; they were here when I arrived. Being neither black, nor dark blue, they are not even regulation. It is as if they were left for the sole purpose of shaming.

'Let's see your elephant,' shouts Nisbett from the shallows. I point at him and say, 'Be quiet.' My words bounce off the walls and water; the echo is a shout.

But they do not stop swimming and splashing; Nisbett even looks pleased. No doubt he will say, with a sneer, that I have a soft spot for Tariq. The truth is that I dislike him as much as Nisbett. Though nowhere near as puny as Nisbett, he is as poor a swimmer. His arms and legs could do the work, if only he would try.

And they will not drown him. They will poke or kick him underwater, throw the ball at his head. Although I have found blood in the changing room— a line of small red drops as from a bleeding nose —it could have been anyone's.

I start towards my office. Tariq blurts my name.

'What is it?' I say, and stop, words being redundant. Several seconds pass. Then he says he's ill.

'What's wrong?' I say, because I have to: a child is allowed to cry 'wolf'. Better that we look like fools than something happens to them.

As adults, we are expected to have self-control. We are supposed to contain our fears, to keep them submerged. To tell ourselves we're mistaken. She loves us. She wouldn't. There are many reasons why she does not answer her phone.

'My stomach. It hurts. I think I'm going to be sick.'

Tariq brings his hands to his belly, even groans a little. The action is so overdone that I actually smile. On seeing this, he half-smiles back, looks slightly less afraid. He is trying to reassure himself. To think away the fear. Which of course is possible. There are reasons for everything: for why I might let him off (a sudden swell of pity); for Susan having her hair cut short (just because she fancied a change); for her getting rid of her fleeces (the new tops do look better); for her drinking more (well, why not?). For why, when I kissed her palm last night, there was the odour of nutmeg.

The question then is how this nutmeg got onto her hands. A simple matter that only required a simple, mundane answer.

'Do you want to see the nurse?' is what I should say. It would be far easier than keeping an eye on him in the pool.

Myristica fragrans. An evergreen tree. Indigenous to the Banda Islands of Indonesia. It is the only tropical fruit that produces two different spices. Mace, the covering of the seed, and nutmeg, the seed itself. It is said to be a tree that 'bruises easily'.

I am allergic to nutmeg. Not so much I go into shock, but enough to make me sick. There has been no nutmeg in our house for the last ten years.

The question then is how this nutmeg got onto her hands. A simple matter that only required a simple, mundane answer. She could have said she picked up the wrong packet— a burst packet —in the supermarket. Or she was in Alice's kitchen and saw the jar and thought to herself how many years it had been since she even smelt it. Either reply would have worked. I would have gone to sleep.

Tariq is looking at his feet. I say, 'You seem alright.' Which should be perfectly clear: this is my thumb twitching, pointing directly down.

But Tariq, like Susan last night, does not seem to hear. As with her, there are seconds of shock. But with him, that's all they are. Not a panicked search for a lie. Not an attempt to make her voice casual when she says, 'Don't know.'

'There's nothing wrong with you,' I say, and then Tariq looks up. He stares and says, in a voice now steady, 'No, you're wrong. I'm sick.'

He glances at the water, adds, 'I'll probably throw up.'

It sounds like a threat. He fears them more than me, and probably with good reason. If I so much as touch him, I could lose my job. Whereas they can hold him under. Punch him in the balls.

'You're going in,' I say. This time he does not say 'wait' when I go in my office. I look at the folders, letters, the photo on the desk. I and Susan just before her surgery. She is pale, smiling bravely. Her head is on my shoulder. She probably thought it her last picture; I'm sure we both did. I am kissing her long brown hair. Burying my nose.

And what you smell is never just perfume. No matter how expensive, how evocative its name, the scent of it means nothing until it is worn. Then what we smell is no longer Calvin Klein or Chanel, not these oils and solvents pumped into stupid bottles. These are just a medium, a way of drawing something out. An essence. Some quality of hers that cannot, should not change.

I open the cupboard. Take the shorts. Go back out to him. He is standing where I left him, arms folded, hunched over, as if he were cold. Although his lips are moving I can hear no sounds. His eyes are closed. He seems to be praying.

This is what I would say to him if I thought that it would help; if I still believed in whatever I felt as I sat on that hospital chair:

Do not ask for the wrong things. Make sure you ask for enough.

I asked for her to survive, for the cancer to be gone.

I did not ask for her to be the way she was. So that at night, when she is sleeping, when I bring my face to hers, I do not smell my fear, or nutmeg. Just the temple of someone I love.

And however bad school is for Tariq, however much he bleeds, or is bruised, he will get over it. Perhaps when he's at university, or later, when he has a job, there'll be a morning when he sees school uniforms, hears the bay of boyish laughs, and does not flinch, is not afraid; just slowly inhales. After disbelief, and a flicker of memory, he will realise the fear is gone.

So I hold out the swimming trunks. Say, 'Now put these on.'

For a moment the pool goes quiet. Then his classmates cheer.

Eulogy to Barefoot Fathers

Donald S Murray

The old ones marvelled at our footwear,
the shoes and boots
worn out each day
en route from primary school,

envying the way our feet
were never rinsed in mud or peat
the way theirs were at that age,
recalling too how skin

was often brown as tan-hide
the way they stepped within
cow-pats eased out on the village road.
Or how heel and toe was often ringed

by the chill of spring-water,
bruises like thick leather chain-stitched
by needle-points of weather.
Yet later on, they mocked us

as they watched us go
rocking past on platform soles, stilettos
heading out to dance-halls,
following the path they walked down

en route to growing old.

Washed Up

Olive Ritch

Sent from the sea, a porcelain doll –
headless, handless, and footless –

a reminder of the *Lessing*
and its cargo, driven onto rocks

at Klavers Geo, Fair Isle
in a storm in eighteen-sixty-eight.

After years on the seabed, the doll
was washed up at a beachcomber's

feet on Papay, broken (but beautiful),
and the beachcomber picked the doll up,

and put it in her pocket, knowing
the doll's hope of salvation.

Pantoum to the Swinging Sixties, Anstruther

James Andrew

We often visited the fair and hung around;
young men who hankered for horizons,
our legs like sticks in dead-tight trousers;
our half-grown sideburns only half-concealing acne.

We did a lot of brooding on horizons
as speakers blared out 'Yellow Submarine',
and yet more acne sneaked from sideburns
as music lifted well above its lyrics

that found more joy in silly submarines
beside the dodgem cars that bashed and crashed
as music danced away from lyrics.
Girls giggled in short skirts, with pampered hair,

and dodgem cars bashed on
beside the harbour with its washed-out mud and half-turned boats
and giggles girled beneath their bleached-out hair
beside the pier that pointed to the sea's horizon

beyond the mud and stranded boats
and youth that bashed from car to car
beside the harbour wall that hid horizons
past which we found these seats, watched films about the sixties.

We youths crashed on from car to here,
dreamed on of fun we longed for,
then found our way to this settee, this DVD
about the fun we knew the rest had.

The fun for which we longed so much,
gauche boys on legs like sticks in such tight trousers,
was always had by someone else.
We hung around, then hung around.

The Shins

Ingrid Leonard

Wet tarmac and an outside toilet,
sticky plant pods in the school garden,
a-raking over fresh earth. The only tree trunks
for miles are the tibiae of boys
and girls, though ours don't count
in the apportioning of justice, long and fine
though they are. These shanks carry the weight
of a human being in the washing machine
of the world, set to rinse and full of tumbles –
the grass is wet, the rain dull and old.
We watch as they line up, smooth
or scrape-kneed, to receive a kick from the boy
with bent head and trainer swinging,
who doesn't want to think, as hills look on
through drizzle and a child with a bell in hand
tolls an afternoon of guitar and fiddle.

Grace Notes

Kirsteen Scott

When I watched you drown the kittens
in the old zinc pail, I was curious
about death

curious about the blob of blood on the nose
of the mouse in the trap we had set in the cupboard
under the stairs

still curious when we drew the curtains
for the hearse to pass and I keeked to see.

Then stories came of the laying-out,
the shawling of the mirrors and how they coffined
him quick for the days were warm.

There were bigger, deeper deaths when boundaries
were lost in haar and I had to trust the ground
beneath my feet

trusting to hear again, like wind in the wires,
the grace notes in an old lament.

Rains January 2016

Marie-Therese Taylor

These once were fields.
Now small tides lap soft over land
sunk beneath an unmapped lake

Cattle float comically upended
a mare and foal - piebald balloons
a ewe, her lambs at once defended
and condemned
inside a fleece clogged useless
as a twisted umbrella in this rain

Roads are mocked
navigable only by boat.
Rivers disregard their boundaries,
breaching walls of homes that
no one wants to leave.

What, you ask, is left to save
save paper memories
soiled in the creeping sludge,
and soft furnishings
caught in the slick?

In churches and halls they gather
and pray
Cleanse me from my sin
Oh wash me, I shall be whiter than snow.

Squalls

Short Story by Chris Lamb

Now that she was out here, she felt a change was coming. There was a slight stirring of the air, a gentle shift and resettling. Not a wind exactly, not even a breath, but enough to ease the sun's heat from your skin, enough so you'd notice.

She looked over to where the Allinson's sheets were hung, white as sails and as still as the moon. Besides hers she knew they would be an admonishment. But today she had towels, worn and faded and no two the same.

She looked up to the sky, to the west from where the radio said the clouds would come *'late afternoon/early evening'*. Remembering it now she could hear that slash in his voice, the man on the radio, the certainty of it that had no time for an or or a maybe. It was two now, the Allinson's sheets had been out since eleven. And three gardens down a row of shirts hung motionless. There was no sign of the cloud to come, just a black dot and its disembodied vapour trail, its progress barely discernible and as silent as the stars.

There was no one in the neighbouring gardens. No faces at overlooking windows. She looked to the back door, then grabbed her clothes line and slipped her shoes from her feet. Quickly she wound one end of the line around the nearest pole and pulled it tight. She turned and walked along by the fence, holding the line taut, and his voice came suddenly in her head now as she plucked at it, testing. *There is a right way and wrong way for everything Sarah*. She veered to her right, diagonally across the lawn and wrapped the line tightly around the second pole. Along the fence, to the next pole, then diagonally again and finally back to the starting point.

She worked quickly now, four pegs from the bag, two in her hand and two in her mouth, and two towels from the basket. A glance to the back door – it was still shut - then towel, peg, peg, towel, peg, peg. Again the look, again the pegs and the towels, until they are all there, on the line, the first ones already dripping.

Only then does she remember that she has only one clothes pole, that its slotted end grasps the lines where they meet at the diagonal, that this way she can lift two lines of towels higher into the air with just the one pole.

It had almost been as if he had waited. The summer had been long and hot but now the first of the winter was blowing in from the northwest and the horsetail waves chasing the gulls from the sand suddenly seemed a long way from inviting.

'I'll come,' she'd told her mother on the phone two days before. She'd been at her desk in the halls of residence trying to start an essay when there was a knock at the door and someone shouting through it 'phone for you.'

'Grandpa's dead' her mother had said, after she'd said 'hello?' and just as she was about to say it again.

'Oh,' was all she could think to say, then 'what happened?' when it was clear her mother wasn't going to fill the silence.

'Just old, I guess.' You could hear the shrug in her voice.

Two days had passed before there was a train to take her back. She stood on the doorstep, feeling the chill of the north-westerly and waited, though she had keys somewhere in a pocket of her backpack. The door opened and her mother stood there, saying nothing, looking her up and down. Then her mother's hand reached out and briefly clasped her forearm.

'You didn't need to….,' she said as Sarah passed her on her way into the house.

'Well, but who else?' Sarah said.

The house was just as it always was, with its walls forever painted and repainted the same colour, its smell so familiar and at once comforting and disheartening. It held a damp in its walls that no amount of heat or light seemed able to shift.

'You'll need to use the sofa bed,' her mother said. 'He's in your room. They moved him…it's colder.'

'He's in…….' she began to say, but instead turned and moved towards the door that was so familiar, put her hand on the brass handle, the shape of it, like an egg, the cool solid heft of it, so known to her hand it was like the tread of a parent's footstep on the loose board of the hall floor. She could no more dislodge the memory than dislodge the hand itself.

She stood on the doorstep, feeling the chill of the north-westerly and waited, though she had keys somewhere in a pocket of her backpack. The door opened and her mother stood there, saying nothing, looking her up and down. Then her mother's hand reached out and briefly clasped her forearm.

The door opened soundlessly. Stillness spilled like liquid from the room, like the sunlight that poured through the window and glistened from the walls, from the desk and the chair, from the china doll and the jewellery box, from the motes that hung like stars and from the white dead skin of her Grandfather.

In the hall she waited, listening for familiar sounds, the ticking of the clock, the window that shuddered. And for sounds she knew would not come.

'There's soup if you want it,' her mother called.

Sarah had a hand on the bannister, a foot on the stairs. In the kitchen she saw her mother on her knees, loading towels in to the washing machine, one of them folded and on the floor to act as a cushion. She didn't turn to speak but nodded her head to one side to indicate the pan on the hob.

'And bread,' she added, closing the door of the washing machine.

'Thanks.' Sarah went into the kitchen and took a bowl from the cupboard. She stood by the hob, turning the bowl in her hands as if unsure what to do next.

'Could you hang those out when they're done? Next door are popping round this afternoon,' said her mother.

Sarah nodded, still turning the bowl. 'Where did you find him?' she asked.

'In his room. I made him breakfast but he didn't come down,' her mother said.

'He's gone now,' she added, a few moments later.

Next door had come while she was hanging the towels. She could hear the hushed tone of condolences being offered through the door of the living room as she put her foot on the first step of the stairs. She began to climb, each foot placed carefully in the centre of each step like a child trying to be quiet, her hand trailing on the bannister, her fingers gliding along the grooves of it. At the top she moved to the door straight in front of her and placed her hand flat on the centre of it, the other hesitating on the handle.

The warmth inside surprised her, a feeling underlined by the sparseness of the furnishing, the bare walls, the cool blue of the sky in the window. She walked over to it and saw for the first time the view he'd had, of the washing hanging unmoving, the long sweep of the bay and the sea and the sky almost the same.

On the bed there was only the mattress, the bedding already gone, the thin wooden frame left looking oddly insubstantial. She could see where he had lain, where the weight of him had left its mark over the years, his shape.

She lay down in the hollow and smoothed her clothes out and folded her arms over her chest. From there she could see the salt streaks on the window and the way the sun played through them. Looking up she saw the chaos of cracks in the ceiling and the swirl of dust in the shafts of light.

She watched and she waited for something of him to emerge from it. Downstairs she knew he would be being remembered and glasses raised to his name. Here only the silence spoke of him The weight of it pressed down on her, kept her still. After a while she closed her eyes and was soon asleep.

When she wakes it is to a half lit room, to brightness and shade together. She hears the first spots of rain tap against the window, unhurried fat drops that fall with the last rays of sun before the gloom that will come with the squall.

The towels are flapping when she reaches them, tugging at the line like birds in a snare. Next door she sees the Allinson's sheets still out, billowing now, their corners cracking like whips in the wind. Out to sea she sees the rain coming, shimmering curtains that are touched with red by the setting sun. The sea drives to shore, furious, relentless, its surface heaving and strafed with rain.

It hits her before she can take the first towel down; in just a few seconds the water is streaming down her face and into her eyes, her mouth, the back of her neck. So fast she has to swallow to keep from feeling like she is drowning. Her clothes are stuck to her with a wet so cold it is difficult to move, to lift her arms high enough to take the pegs off.

'Hurry up' he had shouted from the back door, his frame in silhouette, his anger all the worse because she couldn't see it but knew it was there. A dark and sudden squall had come then too and Sarah had frantically grasped at the pegs holding the shirts to the line, her fingers frozen, the strength in them gone. She had pulled at the pegs with her teeth.

'For Christ's sake get a move on, they'll be soaked' he'd said. He didn't swear, was careful never to swear. Not in front of a woman, she'd once heard him say. Or a child.

Sarah worked faster then, the fear driving her, she had found her method. She pulled the pegs in her teeth, clasped the shirt with the palms of her hands and pulled it into the basket. By the time she had done the third one they were all sodden.

She turns her face away from the sea now just for the relief of it, just so that she can peel the clothes from her front and catch her breath without fighting the wind for it. Just so that she can see. She can hear only the roaring. She squeezes the water from her eyes and opens them to see her mother slapping her hands hard against the window then beckoning her, beckoning her in.

Her mother says nothing to her, as she did then. She had seen Sarah kneeling by the shirts, the water pooling by them, the fury and shame of his back turned to them, but had said nothing. Now, as she takes the two towels Sarah has brought, Sarah shivers in the memory and reality of rain and she recognises fear in both of them. ■

Poetry

the time it takes to boil an egg

Ali Whitelock

the last taste
in your mouth would
have been that of terror
as strangers in white coats and non-slip shoes
punched you hard in the fucking
chest while i wandered the house of fraser
smearing creamy tracks of hot plum and shocking
coral on the thin underside of my forearm
at the counter with the french sounding
name and when my phone rang i heard the words
alright—as though florence nightingale herself
had said them and i raced like some kind
of lipstick coated crazy fuckwit from the house
of fraser to the car i cannot find in the car park
i am sure i have parked in and i queue
the excruciating twelve seconds
for the man in front to pay i smash my credit
card in the slot insert my ticket at the boom
am urged by electronic ticker tape to please drive
carefully and have a nice day please—fucking—spare
me the clichés as i race down the antiseptic hall
past the hand sanitiser cover your mouth when coughing
and have you had your flu shot this year i hurtle
towards the nurses' station with its limp carnations
and male nurse kevin plastic aproned stewing tea
and arranging supermarket custard creams
for the three o'clock highlight okay
so you called him a poof that time but still
he took your vitals checked your stools updated
your charts and points now on my arrival
to the side room where you have lain since
they got you breathing again so we could be with you
when you died for the second time today
once you were gone male nurse kevin
shat out insincerities from the section
of the manual 'suggested phrases on the passing of loved ones'
each one thin and worn as the elbows
of an oxfam sweater and i don't doubt it must be hard
to know what to say kevin but no it wasn't
as if he held off dying till i got there
as if my father could perfectly estimate
the time it would take for me to get from
the house of fraser to find the car in the car park
i am sure i have parked in as if my father was somehow
able to factor in that i would join the motorway
in the wrong direction and go speeding north
when i should have gone speeding south
as if he could have timed so precisely
the traffic jam on the kingston bridge let alone
the parking nightmare that is wishaw hospital
at three o'clock on a tuesday when all the out-patients
are in you'll trust me won't you kevin
when i tell you i am not interested in your clichés
nor your supermarket custard creams fanned
out to look fancy on the plate my father
died kevin forty seven minutes after i arrived
and for every beat in the metronome of his slowing
song i counted his breaths in and fucking
out watched his adam's apple rise and fall
held his hand swallowed salt silently
screamed as entire cows and roofs and hairy
dogs called toto blustered through the eye
of my internal shit-storm if kevin, my father
truly was waiting till i got there then surely
he would have died say sixty or ninety
seconds after my arrival or in the time
it takes to boil an egg say four
minutes tops—two if you want
to dip soldiers in it?

i.m. Sandy Hutchison

Pàdraig MacAoidh

Tha e seachad air meadhan-oidhche an Olomouc
agus tha sinn nar càpraid eadar Ponorka
agus Hotel Gol, 's ged nach robh guth-seinn
agam riamh, tha thu toirt orm 'Raglan Road'
a ghabhail leis an dà nòt' a th' annam.

Ach far am bu chòir dha bhith
'On Grafton St in November' tha thusa
gabhail thairis le 'On a quiet street…'
agus tha sinn a' seinn còmhla, na rannan
air sgaradh ann an sèist robach – tripped
lightly along the ledge … away from me
so hurriedly – gus cha mhòr g' eil sinn seinn
leis a' ghàire.

Ach, Sandy, tha thu air mo chur às a rian.
Tog a-rithist thu fhèin e on tùs.

Banais Ghàidhealach

Pàdraig MacAoidh

agus an eaglais ro bheag
rinn am pìobaire limbo a-staigh ro bhean-na-bainnse
an dos mòr mar amhach chrom na h-eala

tron t-seirbheis
tha bean-na-bainnse a' toirt seachad iomradh
dhan a bràthair, a mhinistear

tha na fir ruadh a' co-thional sa bhàr fhiodh
gus mùchadh geal seòmar
na bainnse a sheachnadh

a' chiad dannsa seachad,
tha am pìobaire a' traoghadh sios dhan tràigh
le searrag-phòcaid làn fuinn

anns gach foto, tha athair fear-na-bainnse
na sheasamh beagan car ro fhad' air falbh on mhac,
mock-baronial

tha Bmh. NicFheargais, a bha na ceannard-sgoile, ga suidheachadh fèin
ri taobh na h-uinneig, ri taobh a' bhouncy castle
ri taobh nam fear òga nam fèilidhean

gun sgot mu cheumannan an dannsa
tha an seòmar a' cur car 's car 's car –
cha tèid ach aon chnàmh a bhriseadh

air an dithis fhear air achlaisean a chèile
tha dà shùil dhubha -
's an dithis dhiubh nan cadal san dìg

tuitidh a' bhouncy castle dhan trainnse

na aonar aig an taigh
bidh am minister uisge-beachdachadh
mu leabaidh na bainnse

Dumyat

Richie McCaffery

On the way up Dumyat
I saw a huddled group
on the peak scatter ashes.

They made a toast
and began their descent
just as I reached them.

In the stubbly heather
I found the cheap urn,
left as if they could just

abandon death on the top
of a high hill and it
would simply stay there.

Am feur a-staigh

Maggie Rabatski

a-nochd
anail mhileach na grèin'
a' suathadh
broinn chloiche 'n t-sabhail

is a' ghealach
a' dùr-amharc
iongantas an achaidh luim

Gul a' ghuilbnich

Maggie Rabatski

Nuair thug mi iomradh
air glaodh cianail a' ghuilbnich
thuirt fear rium Tha thu ceàrr,
cluinnidh mise ceòl aighearach ciùin.

Leig mi seachad e 's fhiosam
gur fear e a bhuineadh
do chluaintean uaine na Galltachd,
mòinteach fhada chòmhnard rin cùl.
Eun-san tè na mìosan grianmhor,
eun an t-suirghe, eun an togail àil.

Ach air bàrr mo theanga fiathachadh —
Thig cuide riumsa dhan iar-thuath
gu cladaichean aonarach m' òige'.
Èist ris a' ghuilbneach agamsa,
innis dhomh nach sgian i tron chridhe,
nach bi cianalas gad thadhal gu sìor.

Largiebaan: a place and a mind

Poems by Angus Martin

Solladh

It's a ghost-word this *solladh*
and once or twice I've heard it echo
off an evening cliff or in a cave
or just in my own lonesome head
with its accumulated remembrances
like rolls of storm wrack set for decay

It came from old Calum a shepherd who fished
that coast with rod and a tied-on line
and *solladh* to him was limpets
chopped up and chewed then spat
into a limp sea at dusk from a rock
to gather in lythe and stenlock

So here it is down on paper now
solladh returned from the ocean air
of this brain that's always casting for
a catch to exhibit in literature
but the word will go down in its own way
through tangles and boulders to a dark bottom

Old Woman Picking Plants

She was picking plants
when I suddenly surprised her
on the side of the mountain
cut by cliffs and air

quaintly attired, a veritable witch
I thought with a shameful tremor
but wrong I was and the proof
was stamped in her demeanour

She held for my inspection
a tiny flower of white and blue
and named it in the language
she alone there knew

I smiled and nodded sagely
and passed between her and the sea
cursing the times I straddled
that left me nothing to say

Shieling Children

From bright unhurried waters
looping bays of old pasture
undisturbed in dreams of butter
the many voices of the mimic stream
summon back the shieling children
from the moors and hills they wander
in death's dissolving after-dream
saying nothing is impossible
in the mythic times you budded in
be as the celandines that come
to catch the warming of the sun
and strew my banks in golden constellations

One-Horned Ewe, 18 July 2013

There was the afternoon beneath the cliff
I was sitting pretending to relax
but waiting for a big event to arrive
from the immensity of all around me

say an eagle gliding low
to greet me on my arid perch:
'Hello and goodbye you daft shite'

or the biggest whale I'd ever seen
travelling a sparkling road of tide
out with a spout and back below: 'Cheerio'

but all I saw was a one-horned ewe
from a distant outcrop staring through me:
'Are these bones yours?'

Evasion: 6 August 2013

Months afterwards he stopped me in town
and apologised for ignoring me
a confession which totally threw me
until he mentioned an evening at Largiebaan
and an incident I struggled to understand
at the time and barely understood
when he chose to explain it

I was leaving, and somewhere between
cliff top and forest I noticed a man
carrying a rucksack and dressed in green
coming towards me along the track
so that it seemed we'd meet and talk
and I'd find out who he was and why
the cliffs had drawn him so late in the day
but he suddenly turned and angled away
withholding even a glance or a greeting
and crushing my comradely expectation

One year on and he was dead from cancer
which turned the meeting that never happened
from rude avoidance to a missed opportunity
of fixing the living man in the landscape
by an invisible monument built of his words

Flora MacMath

What's left of her is doubtless
still underfoot and out of sight
in Kilcolmkill where her grieving parents
John and Helen buried her
in 1818 when at age 32
she was borne on the backs of homespun men
the seven rough miles from 'Leargybaan'
the spelling carved in her stone
which spelled her out as 'Flora McMath'

which ought to suffice for an idle browser
or even, since I know the type too well,
a convert to the cult of genealogy
grateful for even a name and date

Photo by James MacDonald

but not for me who sees the woman
in probable beauty a Gaelic captive
of cliff and sea and sky and mountain
and poor little fields of corn and barley
which drank her earthy sweat in harvest
and then in a winter's sleep forgot her

Was there 'romance' in any of this –
a sunset's blush, a lover's kiss –
or mere insufferable poverty
material and emotional both
locked in a deadly embrace?

There is no answer but the one
I'll keep to myself by intuition
in a secret bog-hole of imagination
the very one she sank a keg of butter in
to keep it cool and then forgot the place
or died before she could return for it

Bog-Eye

Bog-eye with its idle lid
of bubbled green slime
conserves in its peaty sediment
the history of diverse skies
the passage of a million birds
and the dart and dance of insect multitudes
but in its archive none of my kind
to which it is vengefully blind
has yet been found
and I've heard moor grass complain
in a weary whisper all its own
when wind assails the pool's wet margins:
'You with your dangerous brain
and creed of taking
desecrate my ground'

I Won't Get There

A time is coming when I won't get there
when the west with its open skies and ocean
will close at the back of infirmity
leaving me only dregs of memory
but I hold these gloomy thoughts in check
as an animal exposed in time of threat
might stand stock-still mistaking
arrested motion for invisibility

Thus I refuse a track that narrows
into a landscape of imagination
soon to distort and darken
with menacing figures and features
half-seen and wholly unrecognisable
impeding my way which, anyway,
will conduct me towards a nowhere
something the same as death

The Brothers Gunn

Meg Macleod

Their fishermen's hands turned
towards the winters crafting of creels.

I followed
unofficial apprentice
over the short cut
to the faithful willow
a rare find in this sparse land

it was the younger man of seventy
who cut the willow withies
from the trees' summer harvest

the elder
walked only
the path to the boat
relying on instinct to guide his feet

it was a strong partnership
querulous
complacent
acquiescent

their first language,
one of gesture,
mute and expressive
between themselves

their second was Gaelic
their third
a slow translation into English
that was how they spoke to me

a summer tantrum
brought the first hint of winter
one last trip to bring in the creels
to beach the boat

I followed
to the clinker built boat
that was their fourth language

in silence
I found my place at the oars
the elder just there for a last look
before the winter closed the door.

we headed out for the cuil

the younger read the edges of the foam
for signs of danger
for the green light to go
we set the small prow forward
into the dark paragragh of the cuil

my eyes averted from the cliffs
my heart rising
with the huge swell
we plunged downhill into calmer waters

and lifted the last of the creels
drifting on the tide
my trust was their trust

the cuil no longer a word unknown
inspired fear

with the boat piled with creels
we rowed against the swell
the narrow harbour entrance
no bigger than a needle

the elder waited
for the thrust of the wave
to carry us

we got our soaking
the boat was pulled
to winter in the hayfield
alongside the cows

I learnt the craft of netting
a meditative
orchestration of twine and fingers
without sound
only the smirl of pipe smoke and peat
and the slurp of tea or whisky

the elder died that winter
their language already silent
diminished further

the younger
became the elder
he only walked the path to the boat
the willow grew
and was not harvested.

My Mother Ate Crab Claws

Yowann Byghan

My mother ate crab claws
like there was no tomorrow,
smashing the rose and ivory ridges
with their tiny, stiff, black hairs
like angular boxers' knuckles
with a steel-handled knife.

She bought crabs straight from the boat,
plucked from the tarry baskets,
paid for in quick, shiny coins
to the smiling, shifty fisherman
with the red woollen hat and red hands,
looking over his shoulder for the skipper.

She boiled them red as Billy's hat,
not hearing any screams, but sharp
with the one-two blade to flip
a scallop from its shell, or lop
the head and scrape the guts
from a brace of mackerel.

The crabs steamed as they cooled,
filling the kitchen with their stink
of dark, sea-floor scuttling, resenting
their imminent dismemberment,
brick-red, sullen, savage as pirates
in a stifling hold under battened hatches.

She thumbed open the body shell,
like opening a russet envelope,
flicking out the inedible brown mush,
rinsing the innards quickly under the tap,
pulling the legs and body apart, laying them
like sterile trophies on the clean, white dish.

When she cutlassed the chalky shell,
the whole kitchen filled with sweetness,
and she schoonered to her harbour mouth
the mild, salt, wet, white, exquisite meat,
in a ritual of dedication as ancient
as the heaving seas themselves,

in such heavenly abandonment
that the little flecks sweet and small
clung to her chin and fingers like sailors
to wreckage, like grains of white sand
to the pull and suck of the dark, green weed
grating on a wild and desolate shore.

Poetry

Wedding gift
Kenny Taylor

Below a hunter's moon
By the high grey rocks,
Beneath streaked snow shards and
The round-backed ridge,
I will follow the hill fox trail
For you.

Where the burn spills silver and
The rowan crooks, dark
Over drooling falls,
Where his prints pock mud
I will trace his path,
And pause.

And when one shot has
Brought him low,
Down by boulder and bog
I will bring him,
Then, when his pelt is peeled and
Picked and cleaned,
Then you will feel his softness
Across you.

And when the vixen barks,
Wild beneath the weeping screes,
I will feel you bite my skin
In half light,
See the dog fox grin
In the fire's last glow.

(In 1913, when the Maclennans became
first tenants of a bothy at Coire
Fionnaraich, Achnashellach, they were
pictured with Mrs Maclennan wearing
the fur of a fox killed by her husband
shortly before their marriage)

In a Dwaam
Edith Harper

Gin Ah'd little tae dae, Ah stare oot the windae,
past the yella curtain an a bowl o broon eggs
laid on the stane windae-ledge.
Past twa-three sarks hingin fae pegs
on a washin-line streetched atween the hedge,
fu o squabblin spurgies, an the aul rodan tree.
Past the park fu o ripenin barley
an on doon the strath till Ah come tae the sea
whaur the gulls ca on me tae come oot tae play.
Ah see masel dancin on diamonds that drap
fae the sun, like steppin-stanes, on the waves.

Crossing the Strand
Catherine Eunson

After we die
and because we have been there
we will stand looking out
through the waves

knowing it approaches
first a speck
then the hull pulling nearer

let us walk on the strand then
where life still disrobes
near to the edge
now
where its cloths are left

then let's forget
go back inland

oh
the shade
the scented leaves
architecture
autumn
the warmth

surface water flowing through the streets
drainage
renewal
familiar faces
everything
lit up.

Twenty Twenty
Jane Swan Fuller

One day I noticed I had a peregrine's eye.
I had to hide it from my other eye with a darkened lens.

My peregrine's eye could weigh up my neighbour's
heart as he walked his dog on the far shore.

It took in a tiny swift, sprinting across the Galloway sky,
a silent sister sitting above it, summoning up the stoop.

My other eye realised and said,
'who do you think you are, Horus the distant one?'

My peregrine's eye knew it was as jealous
as the fickle moon when it looks on the sun's brightness.

My other eye began to bleed. To get attention.
The blood was an oozy blanket to keep things soft and fuzzy.

Spiteful as ever, it made me move my peregrine's eye into
a special box marked, 'use with extreme caution.'

Mary Queen of Scots Doesn't Get Her Head Chopped Off
Maggie Mackay

She's our new librarian, this Ms Stuart.
A natural redhead, she sweeps towards us
in her vintage gown, like a barge on the River Seine.
She claims she is a true Scot. Doesn't sound at all like us.
Who let her in? She's lost her way to the French class.

She whispers prayers each study period
and bans our dog-leaved young adult fiction.
The spines split like walnuts as they hit the floor.
She spits a *sacré bleu*. We offer her Google.

We snigger at a Virgin and Child poster.
She plays a lute, a lute, who's heard of that?
Her embroidery sessions drive Miss Murdoch
to breaking needles on the Singer Scholastic.

We sit at her knee, like ladies in waiting.
She tells fairy-tales, family stories of book collections,
of a Europe once upon a time.
We learn about harps and Latin,
a Dauphin, and plots.

She'd make a wicked history teacher.

Almost to the Sea
Joan Lennon

The currents are complicated here.
The river's single-minded journey
is hijacked by the tides.

Shove you back the way you came -
Swoop you up and fling you forward -
Fight you to a standstill that is all undertow
and white horses -

Just now, the long brown sand bank
in the middle
is lined with sleeping seals.

Breathing with Cameras

Filmpoetry in Scotland

Essay by Roseanne Watt

When it comes to the integration of film and poetry, you will soon find yourself entering a world muddy with neologisms: poetry film and film poetry, filmpoems and poemfilms, cin(E)-poetry, kinetic poetry, digital poetry, videopoems… the list goes on. It is certainly revealing that such a variety of terminology should exist for this particular hybrid art, for the marriage of film and poetry seems an obvious and relatively simple one. Indeed, Orcadian filmmaker and poet Margaret Tait spoke of the film format as 'essentially a poetic medium, and although it can be put to all sorts of other – creditable and discreditable – uses, these are secondary'. Perhaps it is precisely because of this that the form resists an all-encompassing term, signposting instead the complexities and ambiguities surrounding the definition of what we consider the 'poetic' to be.

The need for a succinct term for this form is something of a necessary evil. When I must use one, my preferred coinage is 'filmpoem': the lack of hyphens or spaces between the two words captures for me the essential aspiration for *fusion,* a wish to create something in which neither visuals or words (in whatever form they take) are ever subordinate to the other, but are instead at once independent and interdependent of each other. By this means, a filmpoem should unlock a vital dialogue through exploiting the synergies, rhythms and tensions inherent within *and* between the languages of literature and cinema. As you will soon discover, this remains a fairly inadequate definition.

Filmpoetry has a significant presence in Scotland's film tradition, perhaps most crucially in the work of the aforementioned Maragaret Tait. Kirkwall-born, Tait spent most of her lifetime living between her home islands and Edinburgh, though from 1950 to 1952 she was enrolled at the Centro Sperimentale di Photographia in Rome. She made over 30 experimental short films and the feature length *Blue Black Permanent,* yet despite the scope and evident quality of Tait's work she has remained, until quite recently, something of an underrated figure. Whilst it's important to acknowledge that women have long been omitted from film histories, Tait's relative obscurity is also partly down to the (quite admirable) manner in which she made and distributed her films. These were usually self-funded, entirely-independent ventures, going against the grain of perceived 'correct filmmaking methods' of the time. She shirked the grittier edges of the then neo-realist movement (though she embraced its use of authentic locations), favouring instead a closer, observational style focussed on so-called 'smaller subjects'.

Photograph of Margaret Tait courtesy of Orkney Library and Archive

Tait's refusal to compromise on her vision allowed her to create a body of work that is intimate, playful and deeply engaged with poetic technique. Her films use a variety of different styles, from animations and drawings both hand painted or scratched directly onto film, to 16mm film poems, observational pieces and portraitures. Though they don't always facilitate traditional poetry, it is poetic language in which her films always speak. She spoke of frames becoming 'the equivalent of notes, or words, (or letters might be nearer it) or blobs of paint', and their editing 'a matter of composition'. We learn then, to take notice of certain resonances in her work: how red flowers reference back to a shot of a red scarf, or how a languid take of a smoking chimney pot is soon juxtaposed by a brief shot of a bare, lit lightbulb. It is the same sort of 'crystallising of a moment' that a written poem achieves, but with an added intensity about it, with something else moving beneath the surface of the film-grain. Tait described her technique as 'breathing with the camera', and this is certainly an apt description. Her films never feel constricted by any limiting parameters, but instead give the viewer a certain amount of breathing room within them, reflecting something integral of the white space in which a written poem rests.

In her time, Tait struggled to find a platform from which to exhibit her films to the kind of audiences she perceived would like them, and even went so far as to throw her own film festival from her Ancona

Image from Nort Atlantik Drift courtesy of Susan Kemp

Film studio on Rose Street. Today, there are numerous festivals, organisations, magazines and awards dedicated solely to filmpoetry, due in part to the digital era's democratisation of filmmaking technologies. A few examples are the ZEBRA Poetry Film Festival in Berlin, the online Moving Poems and Poetry Film blogs and magazines, the Out-Spoken London prize for Poetry in Film, the Weimar Poetry Film Prize, the LUX Artists' Moving Image arts agency, as well as Scotland's own inaugural Filmpoem Festival, helmed by Scottish filmmaker/photographer Alastair Cook. This festival was borne from Cook's 'Filmpoem' scheme; an artists' moving image project founded in 2010, which was set up to deliver education and community projects, as well as produce and promote the work of poets, filmmakers and composers.

Cook's approach is one of close collaboration with established poets, organisations and musicians. In an interview at the ZEBRA film festival, Cook defined this sort of collaboration as the 'quiet and modern converse of ekphrasis (the driving out of words by a wordsmith from an existing visual artwork)'. I love this, for it reveals the second face of the filmpoetry playing card: as Tait already established, there is poetry inherent within the film format; Cook, here, highlights how there are also films within poetry. Filmpoetry, then, is not so much an art of translation from one form to another, but rather it is an act of interpretation, an unlocking or drawing forth of meaning which was already present in both. This is a vital distinction to make, for filmpoems which use their source material as mere 'footage scripts' often add little to the poem but background noise. It seems an obvious statement – after all, a shot-by-shot summary of a film would, in most cases, not be considered a poem. Still, a surprising number of filmmakers choose to interpret poems in this manner.

Cook is certainly not one of those filmmakers; his work displays a deep concern for, in his own words, 'driving forward' its source poem. He is also proficient in a vast range of recording and editing formats, both digital and celluloid, which allows him to bring even further dimensions to his interpretation of a piece. Take his filmpoem *The Shipwright's Love Song*, a collaboration with Jo Bell, as a prime example of this: it was shot on Kodak Ektachrome Super 8, the last colour reversal film Kodak made in the Super 8 format. It doesn't really matter if you know what that means on a technical level, but what does matter is that the subsequent filmpoem is imbued with the story of its stock; the resonances of loss become part of the final work.

In academic circles, it is widely accepted that there is a distinct difference between filmpoems (or your term of choice) and 'poetry films' – the latter being films which document or feature poetry in some form, but do not integrate it artistically with the footage as such. This means that films which mainly document poets performing their work are not classed as filmpoems, as the act of interpretation is missing from the film. Susan Kemp's *Nort Atlantik Drift: A Portrait of Robert Alan Jamieson* expertly blurs this once well-defined boundary. Kemp's film is a seventy-minute documentary on the Shetlandic poet's return to the isles, following the death of his father. The film is structured around interviews with Jamieson, and studded with sequences in which he reads from his collection *Nort Atlantik Drift* at various, relevant locations around Shetland. It is a moving and beautifully shot piece of work, but what the film does – and why I believe it merits inclusion here – is that it completely immerses Jamieson and his poetry within the landscape and crofting communities that are integral to fully understanding and appreciating the quality of his work, whilst also belying tensions between Jamieson's familiarity and strangeness within this landscape (for Jamieson no longer lives in Shetland). This is achieved in a beautiful and nuanced way during the sequence where Jamieson reads his poem 'Metadist Metafir', whilst sat in the church of the poem's setting. Sunlight spills from an unseen window, illuminating one half of Jamieson's face whilst casting the other into complete darkness. Over his shoulder, the door of the church has been flung wide open, and you can see the daylight of the island outwith the dark interiors of the church.

Kemp's film is very much a meditation on the connections between landscape and the self, a motif that often crops up within the Scottish filmpoetry oeuvre. The delicacy in with which this is dealt can sometimes obfuscate the fact that to engage in Scottish landscape can be an inherently political act in-and-of-itself – Tait, for example, in focusing on the so-called 'small subjects' of her island-setting, opens up a critical dialogue on what we imagine centres and peripheries to mean, how they are defined. A recent filmpoem collaboration between Kathleen Jamie and Kyra Clegg, *Lochmill in Two Weathers*, beautifully and subtly captures the socio-political implications of land-ownership, and the impossible notion of claiming nature as one's own. The film was created to mark the outcome of a vote made by local Fife residents, who voted in favour of the Lochmill loch being brought into community ownership – a victory that defies Scotland's deeply unequal land-ownership statistics. The film itself plays as a split-screen: one side is a still, wide shot of the loch, the other features a sequence of overlaid close-ups of the loch's wildlife and surfaces. Jamie speaks her poem over the film's soundtrack, and as the split-screen fades into unified image of the loch reflecting the above clouds, Jamie concludes: 'Whom do you belong to loch? The sky, and the sky to me.'

Filmpoetry in Scotland still remains something of an obscure art, though it is certainly growing in popularity, particularly as a collaborative practice between poet and filmmaker. This obscurity seems relatively surprising, considering the fraught climate of heightened identity politics and the explosion in popularity of the spoken-word scene across Scotland's cities, both of which seem ripe subjects for filmpoetry to engage with. That's not to say, however, this rich source will remain untapped for much longer – filmpoem workshops are cropping up across Scotland, and Rachel McCrum (of the recently disbanded spoken-word duo 'Rally & Broad') has just started a new project called 'Cinepoems', an international collaboration between 'Scotland, Quebec, and everywhere'. In the year before her death, Margarait Tait said that 'a Scottish Cinema can only come from what is welling up in people to make'. In the wake of two hugely emotive referendums, with questions of identity and nationality now at the fore of the national psyche, it is going to be extremely interesting to see just what it is that is 'welling up' beneath this surface, and what filmpoetry's position will be within it. ■

Resources:

Sarah Neely, *Stalking the Image: Margaret Tait and Intimate Filmmaking Practices*, Screen 49:2 Summer 2008

Richie McCaffery & Stefanie Van de Peer, 'Acknowledged Legislators: 'Lived Experience' in Scottish Poetry Films', *International Journal of Scottish Theatre and Screen*, Volume 7 Number 2, 2014

Tom Konyves, *Videopoetry: A Manifesto*, *Moving Poems Magazine* (movingpoems.com)

Margaret Tait's films can be viewed via the *Scottish Moving Image Archive* website

Alistair Cook's films can be viewed at filmpoem.com

Susan Kemp's documentary can be viewed at nortatlantikdrift.com

Kathleen Jamie's and Kyra Clegg's Lochmill in Two Weathers can viewed on the Bella Caledonia website

Information about Roseanne Watt's filmpoems can be found at www.documentingbritain.com/roseannewatt/

Nine Worlds

By George Gunn

1

The silence left behind by the geese
is drunk by the Pentland Firth
it fills the air with a feathered emptiness

a man looks up from the mouth of a strath
"We get reverse weather in Caithness" he says
as lambs jump their elastic jig

along the coast Scrabster suffers from a schizophrenia of energy
nuclear waste shipped out in the dead of night
the unmarked ship sailing South East to Cumbria

wind turbines shipped in on the morning tide
steel cocoons stacked on the concrete pier
Winter gales painted onto their curved blades

in the Sunlit houses along the shore
phones ring out their voiceless messages
angry ghosts spit on the orange receivers

hypnotised by the pink feet of the greylags as they pass overhead
the people watch their future heading North
beneath their boots the landscape consolidates from the lack of geese

2

The brief savage Spring ice storm
batters the daffodils yellow bells
& unlike the voices on TV
will not give up
on this rugged ancient country
& moves out horizontally across the bay
lambs shiver in the eighteenth century fields
& rows of turnips roll like severed heads
in scattered untidy rows
to compensate the ewes for the lack of grass
the sea is the colour of thin green milk
as thirsty as grass & as insatiable as the sea
the humans move through Atomic City
like shoals of fish on the flow tide
or stand in dark melancholy
like scarecrows on a moonless night
they tie their lives like flags to a pole
& begin to fray in the relentless wind

3

Poking a stick at nothingness
the ghost of Rob Donn Mackay watches
the bombing of An Garbh-eilean
sees the NATO fighter jets & warships
reduce a piece of Cape Wrath to rubble
he is without cattle or community
& the piobrochd of his voice
is frozen in the Spring snow on Beinn Laghail
hailstones fall through the mist of his hair
& out of the dust of An Garbh-eilean
Rob Donn forms a poem
& gives it the necessary hard stone music
of the violent age he finds himself in
so that it can be heard as far as Atomic City
where the war workers live in boxes of time

"Soon" he says "on a chosen day
the people will rise up
& fly like the fulmars out
over the clifftops & out
out across the open sea
to the fishing grounds where dreams shoal
in the clear deep landless ocean
& the people will feed yes
fearless & free on sustaining ideas
of their own potential
safe from the predatory lies
of the night-crammed land grabbers
who speak of a good life
in the prison of theft
in the land of illusion & slaughter"

Rod Donn looks West and sings
"The fulmars won't let you sleep
you liars in Atomic City
for your town is full of phantoms
who sell themselves to the cause of war
& shoot black arrows at the stars
to alter everything that has to do with truth"

Rob Donn pokes his bardic stick harder
further into the empty space before him
to trace the shape of the future
& finds the outline of An Garbh-eilean
lieing wounded & shattered
in the blood of the sea
he sighs knowing that we
will kill each other for our shadows
shadows that are milled
to the fine powder of history
as the NATO jets turn to moths
& the submarines to skerries

"The fulmars won't let you sleep
you phantoms in Atomic City
until An Garbh-eilean is remade
standing proud once more in the sea"
Rob Donn is reminded of his own country
in the cattle filled years
before war left its steel containers
on this Northern shore
before both the wild geese
& the people flew

Rob Donn walks the stone path
until he comes to the stone clock of history
which is accurate once
& for all time

4

Skein after skein of greylags heading North
fly over a hill of skulls
three foreign grey shades
with a hyena on a chain
look skywards but do not see the beauty
only bones & feathers & noise

the last rain of the world
falls on Cnoc nan Fith
the new Spring Moon endures the night
the shadows move across the hill
the geese continue on
the memory of Icelandic grass on their tongue

the night is everywhere
the three grey shades & the hyena
take the low road down to the harbour
& watch a crane load steel asphodels
onto a silent ship

"Remember", said the lead shade
"that Hell & epiphany are the same"

the shades release the hyena who eats the harbour lights
& so empowered turns the grey shades
into three fellow hounds
as the ship sails in the darkness to Acheron

a poet who stumbled from a harbour pub
it has been reported
was torn to pieces by a pack of wild dogs

the greylags fly on

5

The shochads have been back a full four weeks now
they have brought us the light from North Africa
& in the Voar everything is a matter of light
it grows like hay in the thirsty fields

the shochads open the heart of Spring with their piping
their wings mark an X
on the blue paper of the Dunnet sky
the rhythm of their flight
stays in the demos of the day

music lives in the hearts core of the shochads
through perpetual movement they become immovable
they are the constant moment of light
a drama of feathers above the rough theatre
of the newly ploughed brown orchestras of the barley parks

the Sun so loves the shochads
she leaves the sea naked
to petal-nest their sky dome
a fragrant flight of sea pinks & tulips
all the descent & upsurge of a tide in the air

the birds speak with their wings
as along a road beside a cliff
an old man walks composing speeches from their songs
people will gather like seals to listen on the rocks

6

The coming & going of Sunlight & snow
turns Caithness into a blur
yellow & black butterflies
the size of Stroma
flit across Dunnet Head
the firth is the colour of indigo
the streets of Atomic City
smell of the sea
ozone sails across the flagstones
like fog
the dreams of haddock
cod herring mackerel
all turn to music
& sticks to the boots of the shift-workers
as they board their early busses
& to the stubble

of the growling creel-men
in the doorway of the corner pub
spewing the thick breath of argument
out over the firth
the butterflies love them

history has brought itself this far
& stayed faithful to what it is
so will the birds fall from the sky
& light shine from human fingers?

So we die & we live again
the voice at the back of the wind
sings "no fear, no envy, no meanness
& nothing in vain"

This is the sea the land the people
this is the new language
formed from zeppelins of blue lowering clouds
born out of Sunlight fading & the snow vanishing
as the night descends with Venus bright
& the Moon a thin cut curve
in the vast dark forge of the North

it is then I see you with your seaweed hair
& your smile like a tide flowing
crossing the causeway from the island
the lighthouse behind you
the seals swimming between the skerries
everything is revealed when you speak
the white birds are flying over the blue navy sea
& I call to you from the lonely deep
as we go now
pressing into the wind

7

The hailstones pummel the eager grass
they harral the skeletons of the birch trees
yellow eyed primroses at the edges cluster
they have stripped Winter of her thin colour
their scattered passion defies the hail
in the cold air above the low cloud
the mavis finds her measure
she has the taste of the storm in her song

a heron launches from a flagstone ledge
flies out across the naked water
this ancient bird beats back in time
each wings down-stroke is a message to memory
the heron's head is bent back like a question mark
hanging over the empty firth
counting out the deeply felt consequences of human folly
nothing can be said to add to the wisdom of the heron

listen, you who wander the high sandstone cliffs
& the swept essentials of Atlantic beaches
it is not for you to surrender hope
now that the hailstones have awoken this moment
aroused the primrose promise of your lips
unlike the heron you cannot go back
you are the conundrum of your own time
listen as the mavis instructs you

embrace this small storm & the longer storm
that no birdsong can perfume clean
that no paper-boned birch tree can embrace
the salty battered grass is waiting for your footsteps

go now wanderer
to meet the coming passion

8

Our meaning has been eaten away by argument
& Scotland for once has no contention
we have been resolved & like an exposed rock
at high tide are reborn as an island
& yet we have been wounded
we wear a Summer shirt as red as blood
our dreams limp to a forgetful place
a province where short shadows fall
on nuclear waste disposal silos
& nitrogen swathed lager
cools the hot throats shouting
about empty straths full of wind turbines
where dog-foxes are nailed by their tails to strainer posts
as young girls vomit in the back of four by fours
in the long Simmer Dim

the boor tree in the garden has turned
into a flowering organ of mad flutes
a tanker heading East off Hoy
is bilge-full of angry American crayfish
who will put light & meaning
into the green baskets of Spring?

Tell me a hundred times tell me
it is the fulmars who drink the wind
the hissing blue sea on the black & yellow rocks
is the hungry name I call myself
when I am lost in shadows

tell me that the argument has drowned
that the tide will never go out
& that this cold I feel
is the world standing alone in her petticoats
her wound healing

9

The abecedary of the stars
is carved in light & time
above Dunnet Head
with the impossible alphabet
shining down on the specific
anonymity of a self I no longer know
I celebrate & cross the sea
of the heart's desire
forming words out of Deaths illusion

the night tells me I no longer know
what I thought I once knew
& that the stars will reveal everything now
they tell me Dunnet Head
is a fallen standing stone
a runic inscription in the sea
reading itself between the shallow
& sudden North Sea
& the deep & slow Atlantic

these salty vedas refine my tongue
so I can speak of the stars
& read the night like a book of dreams
so that nothing can be denied
to those who sail to the obvious freedoms
humanity has constructed for itself
a creation nebula both ancient & new
it is the coloured dust of knowledge
the endlessly forming letters in the vocabulary of desire

the rain falls from the furthest star
into the restless sea of syllables
the Sun burns into my eye
the lambs grow warm & eloquent
knowing exactly who made them
the lambs are clothed in golden words
they dance & skip through the sentences of Sunlight
the rain falls in Andromeda
where millions of Suns conspire to shine

time passes in decades of delirium
& in frightened glances at passing cavalcades
as the heads go down & rise up again
it took a long time but it is burning
they see & feel it in the South
in the headlines on the TV flashing
in the orders from the light snatchers
which feed down into the marketeers of silence
& the red rusty nail is still driven into the abandoned gable

in the North we have become radically identical
to the air that surrounds us & breathes us in
as the smoke pours over Beinn Graim
in the Springtime fires of touch & memory
in the uncertain morning hours of reason
that changes the step of the running deer
the smoke rolling over The Ord & The Scarabens
paints the sand black in the blocked harbour mouths
that empties the space it instructs us to fill

how can anyone hate the wind
even if it blows the flames closer
to the shame of our leaving
with our names scratched on the outside of the window
a signature of oatmeal in the margins
of the printed orthodoxy of flesh
& visions of stones & begattings
beyond the far sandstone mountains
in the depths of the salt-parting sea

a gale blows in suddenly from Faroe
everything is flushed into an invisible corner
the moist coupling of Scottish & Southern Energy
with the Countess of Sutherland
so it is that Death slouches out of the Dunbar Hospital
clutching a mobile phone
such is the loyal dictionary of the mind
full of hill fires owls & cod roe
the last tenderness of the peatlands

Time the actor concludes his performance on Dunnet Beach
he buries his contract in the sand
review by review & letter by letter
the North wind feeds liberty to the surf
this is my liquid learning stone
from the cold time to the white war
to this public reckoning of history & words
for in the year of the poet every season is Spring
as the Northern sky tears itself apart over Thurso

Widow Kharms's Guesthouse

Short Story by Gabrielle Barnby

'What was your life like with Daniil?'

'Our life? Well, we had our quarrels like anybody else,' said Helena.

There was a 'Hmm,' from the telephone earpiece.

Through the faint crackle of the long-distance line Helena imagined the man on the other end. He probably had a pen in his hand, or maybe he was sitting at some sort of computer ready to type what she was going to say. He would be wearing an open-necked shirt and creased trousers. There would be a window glowing grey-white by his desk. It wasn't too late in the year for snow in Leningrad.

His patient silence bore down the line, like a car heading toward a pedestrian on a street crossing – she had seen that once. How absurd it had been! An old woman, barely able to see above her steering wheel, forcing her car like an arrow towards a middle-aged man slouching across the black and white stripes. You would have thought that it was some extraordinary act of revenge or the culmination of a family feud. But no, Helena found out there was no connection between the two. It was simply absurd, a random act.

Daniil had clapped his hands and laughed when she'd related the story to him. He'd taken the steak she'd been saving for dinner with their friend Alexander out of the larder and thrown it slap against the wall. Then he'd sat at his desk, every few minutes turning to look over his shoulder at the mark of the raw beef on the wall, grinning broadly.

'He could have a temper,' she said breaking the silence. 'Not violent, but sudden.'

'I see,' replied the researcher.

'There were times we lived very happily,' she said.

There had been joyous periods where Daniil's delight in the most insignificant things would send him into poetic raptures. It could be the knots in the floorboards and the particular way they yawned like little mouths or peered like a hundred eyes up her skirts. He'd say, 'I wish I were a plank of wood, then I'd really see what the world was like.'

Her husband's obsession with the body and bodily products did not in general disturb Helena. She was in this respect a realist and prepared for the work of motherhood by unfussily tidying and sanitizing objects regardless of their condition, but she never became pregnant. She should have done; but she didn't.

There was a cough from the other end of the telephone line. Helena imagined herself on the road crossing with a car fast approaching.

'How did you cope with his writer's block?' said the voice.

'There was one thing I didn't like,' she said. 'Vomit. Vomit for me is worse than anything. Daniil said it was my weakness that I could not leave behind my bourgeois roots. Bourgeois! He said he could leave me and pick up a trollop from the gutter with better principles.'

'I see,' said the earpiece.

Helena straightened the corner of her apron and leaned back against the wall. Her low wooden stool rocked against the terracotta floor as she shifted her weight.

'I have some notes,' said the voice. 'There was a performance where the audience witnessed individuals coming on stage and vomiting into buckets. Were you involved in that?'

Helena started slightly. She'd been beginning to doze. She'd risen early to get breakfasts ready and there was still all the preparation to do for the evening meals. She looked over to the alcove at a right angle to the stove. Here were her few photographs, her plastic trinkets that returned imperfect bent reflections, her memories. Yes, she remembered the theatre.

'I told them to buy something from Fedya Davydovich on the market guaranteed to make them sick. But no, they ate chicken broth and potatoes then stuck fingers down their throats. Except that young one who later became notorious – he ate nothing but beetroots.'

'Can you remember the audience's reaction?'

'What do you think? How do you feel watching someone splatter out their lunch?'

'I…'

Helena had sloshed the pails into the backstage toilet. The flush barely functioned, so floating pieces of half-digested food bobbed on the surface of the water at the bottom of the toilet bowl. The beetroot-eater had rushed in while she was on her hands and knees cleaning, shoving her aside, desperate to relieve himself. Daniil had seen through the open door and began to laugh. He doubled over, slapping his hands on his thighs. When he could speak he'd said, 'This is where an audience should sit. Oh, my beloved, Helena.'

It wasn't a scene she had ever cared to think about. But lately her exile had begun to feel so long. She could no longer prevent herself from thinking about Daniil's disappearance the way she used to.

'I'm losing my discipline,' she said to herself.

'What? What was that?' came the voice.

'Are you looking for him?' she asked.

'I'm collecting his manuscripts. The publisher wants…'

'He didn't really write much.'

'But the little we do have indicates an important development in Russian literary…'

Helena let him talk. At least she had a garden now; she could grow onions and potatoes. Drought was the main problem in the shadow of the mountains – she assiduously copied her neighbours who were artists in the channelling and preservation of water.

She had onions hanging on the wall, rosy brown, glowing like peasants faces strung up in a line, their heads shaved. She would slice them thickly, fry them in chicken fat then mix in rice and chopped greens, and finally she would add pork sausage.

'…there are scenes from a play, but the manuscript is incomplete.'

'He never finished anything,' she said. 'Do you like soup?'

'Er… well. Yes, I like soup.'

'Daniil liked soup.'

'There's a family in the play. Do you remember it?'

'Of course, but why bring it up?'

'I'm gathering manuscripts with a view to…'

Above Helena's head the dribble of water began – the last of the backpackers. It was his bad luck being so lazy; the girls had used all the hot water. She'd once been like they were; nice clean skin, white teeth. But Helena could tell they were afraid of the dog, or if not afraid there was something about the dog that made them very nervous.

Helena smiled to herself. She had such a soft spot for Kasha.

He had come over on the boat to South America. It was a miracle he'd survived because the animal was possessed with an insane impulse to jump into water whenever he saw it – it could be a bathtub, a swimming pool, a bucket.

The dog had known her husband. No one else she had contact with now had ever known Daniil.

'What else do you have of his?' she said.

'I have the Mini-Stories, the bird poems…'

'Anything else? His coat? His hat? I never saw them again. I'd like to see them if you could send them to me.'

'I don't have anything like that.'

Helena sat silent, running her index finger along the frill of her apron.

'When he disappeared,' said the voice,' was it just like that, completely unexpected?'

'If he expected it do you think he would have gone out that morning? You really are a stupid man at times. No, he just went out. He didn't come back. That was that. It was a fashion at the time.'

'I understand the political repression of dissident…'

The man was beginning to try her patience. Was that how Russian was spoken now? Where had all the distinction and elegance gone?

She thought about the morning Daniil disappeared. There had been cherry blossom, black tea and dumplings stuffed with strawberries. They had been laughing at the look on her mother's face when she saw the smashed crockery from their evening spent trying to nail it to the wall. Daniil had pulled out chairs like a waiter for people to sit on, laughing like a drain.

She was glad that he'd not taken Kasha because then she would have had nobody. But then if he'd taken the dog perhaps he would not have disappeared, or perhaps he would have disappeared and the dog found its way home. Perhaps all these events did happen, and at each moment with each passing second an alternative reality diverged from what she was experiencing now; an infinity of different lives sent spiralling in different directions.

Daniil was always trying to subvert reality; to stop; to kink; to insert something so utterly unexpected that Time and Space would have to sit up straight in their chairs and say to each other, 'It's not meant to happen like that.'

'I don't have a protocol for this.'

'What will happen next?'

'Anything could happen.'

'But this is a disaster.'

'What about our spirals?'

'Who is it that dares break the pattern?'

'Daniil Kharms, again!'

Helena narrowed her eyes. The onions became dull glowing spots.

It was a crime to break the pattern. But she had the dog and she was glad of it, even if young female backpackers were nervous of the way it twirled when the breeze caught in his fur.

'…if you have any of his personal effects or can remember anyone who might have had a typed manuscript I'd be very grateful.'

Helena yawned. She lifted a foot from the floor and held her leg out straight. The ankle was thick. Her slipper had tufts of thread poking out around her big toe. The Spanish words for slipper and cotton ran through her head. She spoke Spanish badly, but well enough for South America. She also spoke English and Italian; and of course she'd learned French as a girl.

'I can call back another time,' said the interviewer,

'Yes,' she said. 'I have to start preparing food.'

'If there is anything else you remember about visitors to the flat or manuscripts it

She liked having people to stay; they could be so interesting. She imagined them in the big European cities with busy streets, full of energetic modern living. She doubted anybody lived like she and Daniil used to, sharing toilets with a single tap outside.

would be very helpful. Perhaps you could make a note if something comes to mind?'

The sound of water stopped above. There were heavy footsteps across the ceiling. She liked having people to stay; they could be so interesting. She imagined them in the big European cities with busy streets, full of energetic modern living. She doubted anybody lived like she and Daniil used to, sharing toilets with a single tap outside.

Her guests had higher standards – she supposed they believed she lived crudely. She couldn't charge as much as other accommodation, although at least her place was clean and she did have hot water.

If travellers ever inspected the shared bathroom facilities they would stay. The shower room on the third floor had grand views over the dry plains to the foothills of the Andes where the rabbit pelt-toned dust and rocks stretched tight over the mountains.

Above the bathroom was her roof terrace. This was a place where the sun loved to linger, warming the walls, making the red geraniums glow bright in the thin blue air.

When her legs were tired or her arms ached from cleaning the bathroom tiles, Helena would go to the terrace. There was a recliner, the faded floral cover worn thin in places – a bit like the toe on her shoe. Here she would lie. She would let the sun into her wrinkles, let it prize open her cardigan, let it warm the marrow of her bones.

She hoped this would be where her spiral ended. Of course, in the end Time and Space would be satisfied.

'Did he manage to cheat them?' she said.

'I'm sorry, cheat who?' said the voice.

'Time and Space,' she said. 'They were always there at the table, leaning on his desk. He never got rid of them some days.'

'I see…'

'No, you don't. They tormented him. Laughter was his only escape.'

'Right…if I could remind you...'

'Yes, yes. But I tell you, I left with nothing except the dog.'

In her mind's eye Helena saw the car hitting the man on the crossing. This time she was the old lady driving. She stood over the prostrate body. He lay there. It was just how it had been.

'Same time next week,' said the voice.

Helena hung up, got to her feet and walked slowly across the kitchen. She ran her fingers over the brittle paper skins of the onions. She didn't take one. Instead she walked into the reception area where the tables for guests were arranged. A handful of flies flew around Kasha's stiff snout. The dog's fur had darkened from the colour of wheat to the same shade Daniil's beard had been.

Seeing the dog always made her smile. It was suspended from the ceiling and posed in mid-stride. The local man had done his best, but he wasn't a professional taxidermist by any means. He'd told her to let the animal dry out in the desert, but she would not risk the damage from scavengers.

Helena turned away and walked stiffly to the stairs. She took hold of the rail and placed her slipper on the first tread.

'Oh dear,' she said. 'It's too funny, too absurd.'

She laughed all the way up to the top, tears streaming, sides aching. Exhausted from laughing she went out on the roof terrace. Finally, she lay down and took her rest. ■

Dàin ùra le Maoilios Caimbeul

An Speireag

Tha àite againn aig cùl an taighe,
àite-biathaidh nan eun,
agus thig iad a h-uile latha a dh'ithe an t-sìl
agus bheir e toileachas dhuinn
a bhith gam faicinn fo sgàile nan caorann
a' ceilearadh 's a' bìgeil
a h-uile càil cho ionraic, sìtheil
gus an tàinig an speireag.

An t-àite cho beothail le,
gealbhonnan is calmain,
loin-dubha is breacain-bheithe,
curracan-bhaintighearna is glaisean-daraich,
druidean is brù-dhearg
gus an tàinig banrigh an uabhais

agus an uair sin dubh-shàmhchair
agus falamhachd,
gun aon eun ri fhaicinn
ach itean sgapte air an talamh.

Ainglean

A' dol seachad air Loch Hàsco,
na laighe ann an creathall nan cnoc,
grian bhlàth an earraich a' deàrrsadh
is osag bheag air uachdar an locha,
dheàrrs na reultan cho dealrach,
's ann a shaoil mi gun robh treud ainglean air teàrnadh.

An Seòrsa Eaglais a dh'Iarrainn

Bhiodh cumadh cearcaill oirre,
gun suidheachain eaglais.
Bhiodh beinn air a cùlaibh
agus a' mhuir mu a coinneamh.

Shuidheamaid mun bhòrd mhòr chruinn,
crann-ceusaidh agus uaigh fhosgailte na mheadhan,
sean agus òg ag adhradh còmhla.
Cha bhiodh sgeul air cùbaid,

ach bhiodh cuideigin ann
a' treòrachadh an adhraidh
agus daoine a' labhairt
mar a ghluaiseadh an Spiorad iad,

agus fios againn gun robh E beò
nar meadhan, an Crìosd a dh'èirich.
'S bhiodh an-còmhnaidh
sèithear no dhà falamh

agus aran is annlan dhan acrach
agus na dorsan fosgailte
dhan fheadhainn a thigeadh bhon t-sràid,
's bhiodh ùrnaigh ag èirigh mar thùis
airson na Rìoghachd ri thighinn
far nach bi caoidh no bròn
no murt no marbhadh
no tarcais no dìmeas,

ach bhiodh craobh aig an doras
le eòin ioma-dhathte
bho iomall an domhain
a' seinn anns na geugan.

Bloighean is Mìrean

Nàdar air fàs mì-nàdarrach,
na geòidh air sgèith gu tuath
sàmhach ann an calldach an crè.

Sinne an seo nar ceallan sàbhailte.

Tha a h-uile càil na bhloighean,
clachan nam ballachan nam mìrean
sgapte air achaidhean an t-saoghail
's na trustairean a' dlùthadh ris na bailtean.
Cò tha liùgadh air beanntan a' chùraim
le gunna na làimh?

Am bàs na nì a lùigeadh an ceannairceach
às dèidh a làmh a bhogadh ann am fuil nan neoichiontach:
gunnaichean nam poileas gun fheum
gus bacadh a chur air casgairt.
An robh ciall riamh aig an t-saoghal,
no a bheil an saoghal a' dol glan às a chiall
gun fhios aig duine dè tha tachairt
ann an com na cruinne?

Na sràidean a' sruthadh le fuil neo-lochdach –
far a bheil olc tha àidseant,
ciùrradh a' tighinn bho thoil an donais,
ùmaidhean buairte gun smid truais nan cridhe.

Sinne an seo nar ceallan sàbhailte.

Ciamar as urrainn dhuinn an àmhghar a thuigsinn
gus an tig e aon latha oirnn fhìn.
Ach cò dh'fhàg sinne saor o uallach daonda?

Prionnsa na Sìth air dhìochuimhn'
's na meadhanan sòisealta nan craos,
le daoine baoth nam màl a' sgrìobhadh
fuath is mallachd air an 'nàimhdean',
is Taigh nam Bumailearan le gaoith.

Ò, a ghràidh ort, cha tig am bàs leis fhèin.
24/07/16

The Mirror

Short Story by Lily Greenall

The homeless woman was in her usual spot on the corner of Market Street, tucked in between the entrance of a nail salon and a café Nero. I'd walked past her several times in the past few weeks on my way into the city, breaking my stride some days to drop a few coins into her outstretched cup. Sandra and I stood at the traffic lights opposite and Sandra was telling me a long story in a loud voice about John's parents. His mother wouldn't eat meat – or maybe fish – and this was throwing out plans for the wedding dinner. I clutched the strap of my bag and watched the traffic lights above the intersection switch from amber to green. A new wave of traffic roared across the lane, honking at a bus that had pulled out too far.

'All these cars,' Sandra cried, jostling me forward a pace, 'Its mind boggling. Why do people need to drive everywhere anyway? I mean, never mind pollution, it's only the planet we live on after all.'

She let out a great forced laugh that rang in my ear. A woman nearby on the pavement gave us a cool glance. The lights changed. Sandra nudged her hand under my elbow and propelled me across the road.

'I'll just call John,' she said brightly, 'Double check which cupcakes he wants for the reception.'

We slipped out of the flow of human traffic and paused under the café awning on one side of the double doors. I was feeling tired. The noise and crowds of the city and the constant effort of grinning every time Sandra spoke was beginning to grate on me. I felt washed out and thin, as though the day was rubbing me down until I was nothing but another grey smudge on the pavement. I was relieved when Sandra turned her back and paced to other side of the doors with her phone pressed to her ear.

I leaned against the wall and stared at the patch of dull grey sky in the space between the buildings. A rustling noise to my left startled me. The homeless woman was hoisting herself up from her pile of blankets and newspapers. She peered around the doorway at me and I smiled at her. She grinned back nodding, and took a few steps towards me. Her steps were stiff as if she'd been sitting for a long time and she was draped in several shawls, the colours of which were faded. I began to dig in my bag for change. The woman continued to beam and nod at me and stepped a little closer. I resisted the urge to back away then immediately felt guilty. I felt my purse in my bag, wedged between my notebook and a half empty water bottle and I undid the clasp without lifting it out, probing the cotton lining with finger and thumb until I could draw out two pound coins.

I held out the money out to her. She nodded and stretched out her hands.

'Thank you,' she bobbed her head, looking down at the money, then after a pause, 'You are shopping?'

Her English was slightly broken.

'Yes,' I smiled, blushing, 'Shopping.'

'I love shopping,' she grinned, 'My fiancée – he is always saying,' she cleared her throat, made her voice deep, 'Do not go shopping; no more dresses.'

She broke off, chuckling.

I smiled, slightly confused.

'My friend is getting married,' I said, nodding at Sandra, who was walking in circles with a hand clamped over one ear.

'Ah,' the woman nodded, 'My fiancée is in Romania. He is working and working, and then when we have money, he will come and we will get married. It will be my dream wedding.'

I listened, frowning slightly, and peered at the woman as she spoke. She was not old but she did not have a young face. Her skin was tanned and there was dirt in the creases around her eyes. Her lips were dry and spotted with white flakes, eyes very large, and they glowed with a deep brown lustre as she spoke. I hoped all of a sudden, very sincerely, that there was a man making his way over, on a bus or a boat or a plane.

'Are you ready?' Sandra was bustling over, slipping her phone back into her bag.

'Congratulations!' the woman cried.

'I told her you were getting married,' I said.

Sandra stopped short and I felt her hand grip the underside of my arm. She gave the woman a quick glance but didn't smile.

'Come on,' she said, tugging at me.

I glanced over my shoulder at the woman as we went. She smiled after us, nodding, then noticed a man approaching, who was digging in his pockets for change. She turned and shuffled towards him; a dense wobbling shape in her mantle of shawls.

'You didn't give her any money did you?' Sandra asked, as we made our way up the high street.

'Just a couple of quid,' I said, surprised, 'She's getting married too.'

Sandra scoffed as we approached the door of a bridal boutique. The window housed a row of long limbed mannequins decked out in tulle and floods of white lace.

'Yes, well,' Sandra said, holding the swing door for me, 'They've all got a sob story haven't they?'

I shrugged, 'Did you get John on the phone?'

'No,' Sandra answered, 'I got his secretary. She said he was in a meeting.'

I was sweating in the dress that Sandra had picked out for me. The fabric was stiff and unyielding, an ugly muted gold. I dug my thumbs into the seams that were pinching beneath my armpits and tried to stretch them out a little. I jumped up and down clutching my breasts in both hands. When I landed, looking puffed and dishevelled, the dress had not slipped down. It would be fine for dancing. I stood for a moment staring at myself. It was hot in the dressing room and my face was pink and shiny. I scowled, imagining having to sit through the entire ceremony sweating and chafing and creaking when I moved.

I could hear Sandra now, rattling away on the other side of the curtain. Her words were muffled by the layer of cloth but I could hear the false chime of her laugh and the titter of the saleswoman, who had propped Sandra up on a stool and was making the final adjustments to her dress. Poor woman, I thought, down on her knees with pins in her mouth, wading through oceans of chiffon while having to listen to Sandra's life story.

I took a step towards the curtain and peeled it back a little. Sandra's back and legs were lost in a cascade of white. It billowed over the back of the stool and spilled onto the floor in a pearly gush. Sandra's shoulders were bare and creamy under the lights, and she floated in the centre of the mirrored, hexagonal room like a dancer nestled in the heart of a music box. Her black hair shone and I could see her face in the opposite mirror as she watched her dress coming together. The saleswoman was scurrying around, ducking down to the floor to bundle in a loose sheath of lace then straightening up quickly and pinning a seam on the bustle. I wondered how it would feel to stand there, being plucked and trussed and readied. I knew how everyone said it felt, how it was described in films and books. I looked at Sandra's face in the mirror. She had stopped talking now. The saleswoman straightened up, panting with an air of triumph, and looked in the mirror too, eyes gleaming. Sandra's face though had suddenly taken on a blank expression, as though she had been hollowed out or stripped of something, and now stood there empty, staring like a doll.

Sandra paid for the dresses with one of John's credit cards. Her own dress was staying behind for alterations. My own and the other bridesmaids were being swaddled in crepe and bagged up. I leaned beside Sandra at the till, tapping my nails on the marble surface, and listening to the never ending drone of her chatter with the shop assistant. The woman smiled primly and seemed utterly oblivious to the enormous sum of money that was being handed over. Out in the street once more, now weighed down with bags, Sandra held out the receipt and frowned, muttering to herself as she added up the numbers.

She folded it brusquely back into her purse and snapped her bag shut saying, 'I'll just try John again.'

I folded my arms and leaned against a parking metre to wait. The sun had broken out between the clouds and I turned my face up and let it warm me. Sandra returned looking deflated. John was at lunch. She slid her phone back into her bag and chewed her lip.

'We can go home,' I said, 'If you want.'

Sandra shook her head, 'Don't be silly. Lots to do.'

We stopped at a small bistro for lunch. Sandra said she would put the bill on John's card so I ordered two courses; a rich lobster bisque followed by chicken linguine, then topped it off with a large slice of raspberry lemon pie. Sandra sipped a fruit smoothie. She was on a pre-wedding diet and had sworn off solid food. I looked up every now and then, thinking that I had caught her gazing longingly at my plate, but she always glanced off again just at that moment, talking in a loud cheerful voice all the way through the meal. I ordered a large coffee with whipped cream after my dessert. Sandra pulled out her phone and set it on the table, scrolling through her messages. I began to notice how tired she looked. Her eyes had rings around them, not just underneath but nudging into the corners, and her usually smooth complexion was rough beneath a coat of foundation.

'Any word from John?' I asked.

'No,' she chirped, 'Shall we go?'

I never liked John, I thought, as we wandered between the shelves in Waterstones. Sandra had wandered off ahead and was staring at a shelf lined with albums covered in butterflies. I never liked the colours associated with weddings either, I thought, picking up a packet of pink and gold envelopes. They were all too vague and pastel. I glanced down the aisle at Sandra and tried to imagine her on the big day, festooned in lace; a mound of tulle on top of her head. I tried to imagine John standing opposite her, clammy in his suit and stuttering through his vows. Another picture floated into my mind and eclipsed this brief vision. I remembered the last Christmas party at John and Sandra's house; the bite of cranberry vodka at the back of my throat and John very drunk on lager and champagne. The living room had been stifling. Sandra was celebrating the new wood fire by banking it up with logs. I had chewed the ice from my drink as I sat on the sofa, wedged between John and another man, and felt, with all the hairs rising on the back of my neck, the weight of John's hand on my thigh.

I dropped the envelopes back into their slot and closed the distance with Sandra, coming up behind her just as she plucked an album down from the shelf.

'This is the one,' she grinned, as we made our way to the checkout, 'I can just picture it now. I'm getting excited.'

She beamed at the shop assistant as she set

I glanced over my shoulder at the woman as we went. She smiled after us, nodding, then noticed a man approaching, who was digging in his pockets for change. She turned and shuffled towards him; a dense wobbling shape in her mantle of shawls.

her books down before her. The girl smiled and caught Sandra's eye.

'I was just saying to my friend,' Sandra began, 'I think this is probably the perfect photo album for my wedding. I'm getting married in June.'

The girl nodded politely.

'I was just saying, I'm getting really excited now,' Sandra continued, holding the assistant's gaze as she rang the album through the till.

'It seems like it's coming round so soon. We were just getting my dress fitted and finished off, and ordering the cakes, and I just think, wow. It's great though. My fiancée, John, he's really excited.'

I squirmed as Sandra began to get into her stride. The shop assistant was doing her best to look interested. Sandra had launched into a description of John's job and followed it up with a rundown of their honeymoon plans as she passed over the card. As the woman reached across to take it I saw the corners of her mouth flinch, her eyes sparkling with suppressed giggles. I smiled and fought an urge to laugh.

'Oh,' the shop assistant looked genuinely surprised, 'It's been declined, I'm sorry.'

Sandra blinked up from rummaging through her shopping. She had been about to produce a photo of the venue to show the girl.

'Are you sure?' she asked.

The girl nodded, holding the card out, 'I can try it again if you want?'

'No,' Sandra shook her head.

She turned to me and I saw how lost she looked, eyes wide and smile fallen. She shook herself, seeming to rally.

'I'll just use another one,' she said.

I wandered away a few paces and flicked through some novels that were stacked in mounds on the bestsellers table. I could hear Sandra explaining to the woman that sometimes John forgot which cards had been used to pay the bills. She kept telling him to set limits for her when she went out shopping but he always insisted, spend as much as you want. She held the woman's gaze and stood there talking long after the transaction had was complete. The shop assistant hovered awkwardly, looking desperate to get away. As I watched I had the strange sensation of a seeing double image, as though the version of Sandra I saw there, before me, was reflected through somebody else. I stared at her by the till, her long skirt rippling in the breeze from the front door, her eyes dark and wide as she spoke, weighed down on all sides by the bags that clung to her body in a great colourful mound.

'I'll just try John one more time,' she said, as we pushed our way out through the doors and back into the street.

'I'll take some of the bags,' I said, feeling guilty.

'Thank you,' Sandra looked genuinely grateful as she loaded the bags onto my arms.

I leaned against the wall of the shop and watched Sandra pace as she spoke into her phone. I saw her jaw set, waiting for a response, saw her fist clench as she folded one arm about her waist. Her eyes looked huge and empty, as though she was not seeing the street before her but looking across some dark internal landscape, and this time I really, genuinely hoped that John would answer. ■

Poetry

The Bully's Aim

Karin Slater

He pulls a face and
throws
  the stone
as far as he can.

He is trying to
hit
the ferry

trying with all his might
to reach its coal rear end.

But what if he did
punch
  a hole
and then again
out
  the other side.

What face would he pull?
Would he think he had won?
Or turn his back and
shout
  I DIDN'T MEAN IT

for hurting something
bigger
than him.

The Backroads

Howard Wright

Skyline nicked and stripped by every weather
known to woman. And then some.
A flinty river, wind-chipped, air-scalloped,

wriggles back through the origins of its name
to a splash of gables on bushy hillsides
that get no nearer,
a destination that means you and your friends

are lost again, and the grey star
will drain all colour
from the backroads when dawn has bitten
into the telegraph poles and dipping bends,

the ankles of schoolgirls weaving through
your mirrors to the shores of the lough
hinged open like a catcher's mitt.

Cento

(After Sappho, Fragment 58)

Josephine Brogan

Oh, but once, once, we were
like young deer,
  wild deer
in the wild wood,

like the hare, pumped up
to the tips of his ears,
  leaping
    the furrows,

or the lark,
oblivious, hunting
  the sun,
bursting with joy.

Oh, young we were, young
beyond all - but on the horizon,
  the bugle-call,
  clearsounding.

Were my knowing then, my knowing
now, what bliss in the drift of
  the wildwood,
what wild in the wooing.

Requiescat for Angus Dunn

Rhoda Michael

Grief visits me, lurks
behind the curtains of the window,
finds me in the corners of the room,
on the treads of the turning staircase.

No more playing then,
No more laughing,
No more sliding down the banisters.
No more verses tripping off the tongue.

I call but he doesn't answer.
He turns but he doesn't see.
What remains is a memory of gladness,
Just a quiver in the air.

Telling Tales
by Jane Yeadon
Black and White Publishing
Review by Cynthia Rogerson

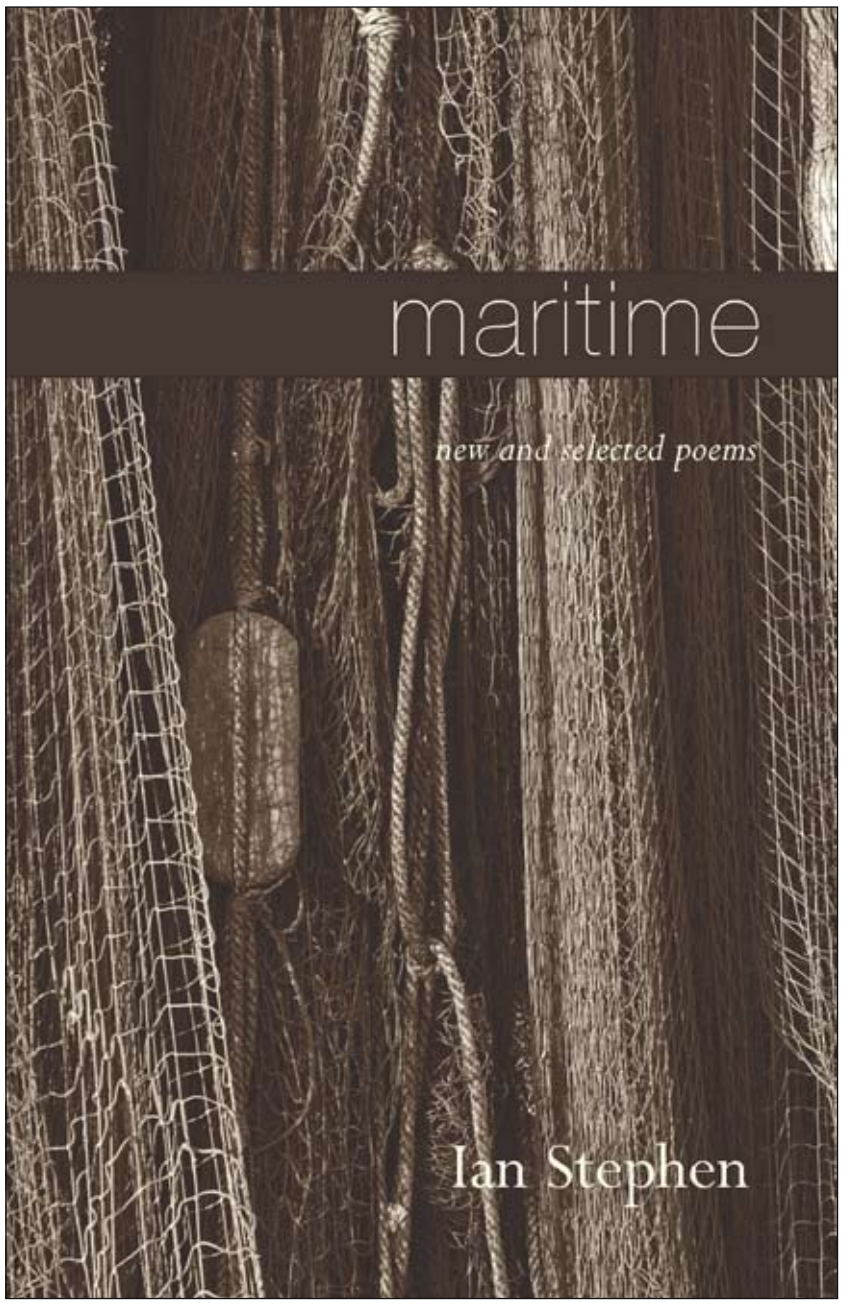
This is a memoir of growing up on a Highland farm in the 1950s. It doesn't claim to be a prequel to Yeadon's three popular mid-wife books, but it is – so fans of those books will be delighted at this chance to fill in some of the missing blanks.

There is an art to good life writing, and Yeadon has it. She is able to detach from her own life enough to present it without sentimentality or self-consciousness, knowing instinctively which moments to frame and which to omit. Her memories are not told; instead, they are largely shown in lively dialogue and short quick-paced chapters. The prose is unpretentious, yet the language is lyrical to the point of poetry.

Telling Tales is an apt title, for this is a book of confidences, narrated in a natural and confidential tone. One feels as if Yeadon is whispering in one's ear. An honest account of a life of hardship that is not recognised as such, but simply got on with. Her father is tragically absent, her sister is annoying, and her mother is always ploughing ahead with plans in a kind of frenzy of determination.

There is drama in this book – but it is not melodrama, and at no point does it ask for pity, for Yeadon's chief gift is light-heartedness. Humour abounds, and she applies this not just to her own life, but to the life of the rural highlands in the 1950s. Hence, this is an important record of social and agricultural history. As a child, she loved the natural world, and it is apparent the adult Yeadon still does, for she describes it with exquisite ease.

Park this book near the first aid kit. It is a tonic for jadedness. ■



Maritime: New and Selected Poems
Ian Stephen
Saraband
Review by Richie McCaffery

I have quietly followed and admired Ian Stephen's poetry for a number of years now, but with the arrival of the beautifully produced *Maritime: New and Selected Poems,* I feel like I should raise me voice. For me, Stephen's work is inseverably connected to the sea and this latest volume collects much of his work on pelagic themes, from his first collection in 1983 through to the present day. The effect of having some of the choicer poems from all of Stephen's books brought together like this is to highlight the sheer precision, scrupulousness and craftsmanship of his work. These are sea-worthy, hard-wearing poems but they are not in any way impermeable and watertight to the reader; in fact they seem to accept that people are fluid entities, prone to behaving like shoals of fish or the tides, flowing and ebbing away:

> Corner-stones, scree
> and sunk lintels,
> close to the cliff.
>
> […]
>
> Some congregation
> either went adrift
> or further afield.
> *from 'Baptist church (abandoned)'*

Or take Stephen's memory of a reading by a presumably drunken W. S. Graham (another poet who worked for a time as a coastguard and knew his stuff about boats and sailing):

> He lost his plot
> but swayed on.
> I couldn't grasp a theme
> but I got his drift.
> *from 'A night-fishing'*

Already, in the snippets I've used above, you see that Stephen likes to use language accurately – there seems to be a right word for everything in his vocabulary and that inspires trust in the poems, the poet and the vision behind them. In the poem 'Thrush by water' the speaker listens to a thrush breaking shells on the edge of the water and hears no 'discord', 'no jarring changes / come to sound'. 'Sound' here resonates because of its double meaning – both sonic and littoral and it shows you very early on that Stephen is a poet who knows exactly what he is doing. At other points he talks of 'katabatic' and 'anabatic' winds which, although they have a specific meteorological meaning here, also bring to my mind the vast Ancient Greek journeys from sea to inland and vice versa. Stephen plays up the tension or interstices between 'dry land' and the sea very well throughout this book. At one point there is talk of two lovers being 'off the page' and in 'Mooring' the speaker is almost wary at being on terra firma:

> […] we're not
> moored to anything I've seen
> sink or rise on a tested line.
> We'll hold together tonight.

This also shows that these poems are not simply about the mechanics of boats and sailing – they take in a spectrum of emotions, underscored by the fact that his poetry is also often one of collaboration with visual and musical artists. Stephen is as much a gifted love or lyric poet as he is an elegist. I noticed the collection is dedicated to both the late Angus Dunn and late Sandy Hutchison. While I am not too familiar with Dunn's work, I certainly detected here the big-heartedness that is a key characteristic of Hutchison's poetry. Stephen, like Hutchison, plays with light and the elements in startling ways. In 'Clyde coast' we see the image of a man on the 'twice-missed Rothesay ferry' combing 'the hair of a woman' and the speaker declares: 'They stand in borrowed light. / They shine'. The poem 'Albertac' compares the flash of a camera to 'the gut of herring', coming up with the exquisite conclusion: 'So light is like milt'.

I'm aware I've neglected to mention at any length the sailing and boating that occupies most of these poems, but that is far from a dilettantish hobby for Stephen and more an essential way of life. It can clearly offer leisurely escape but we see at all turns his respect for the sea and awareness of its dangers:

> This is a place
> where you know that
> everything we know
> can snap.
> *from 'Long Seas'*

Castles in the Mist: The Victorian transformation of the Highlands
by Robin Noble
Saraband.
Review by Jim Miller

During the latter decades of the Victorian era, readers of local papers in the Highlands were often treated in the autumn months to long lists of the toffs who had come north, like migratory birds, for the season. Dressed in tartan and tweed, equipped with guns and fishing tackle, supported by a small army of servants, the influx moved into the big houses to enjoy a vogue for what was dubbed sport, a euphemism for slaughtering wildlife.

The cover of Robin Noble's book, with its image of a stag in front of a misty Glamis Castle, and its subtitle 'The Victorian transformation of the Highlands' suggest that we may be in for a social history, an amusing or angry venture into the world of John Buchan's John MacNab. We are not.

Noble himself states, modestly, that his text is not an academic treatise but 'far more an introduction to a big topic with wide ramifications.' The reader soon discovers that more than that is on offer. With an easy grace, it displays on the part of its author a lifetime's thought about the Highland environment.

As a boy, Noble got to know the Glenleraig area in Assynt where his family had a holiday cottage ('none of us did any shooting'). Taking us on a walk through the territory, he reminds us that two hundred years ago it was home to a community of some ninety folk before they were cleared to make room for one shepherd. On the walk we pass a souterrain, sign of long human habitation, and learn that now the sheep too are gone. Noble seems to saying that nothing is permanent except perhaps the land itself.

The book is a fascinating blend of history and natural history, an account of a landscape and how it came to be the way it is. There are several walks - in Assynt, Strathspey, Torridon and Coigach, and on Skye – where we enjoy

Noble's thoughtful, informed companionship. There are also passages devoted to the consequences of the period of the 'big hoose', passages written without a conventional political or environmentalist agenda and all the more refreshing for that.

About Victorian tree planting, for example, he does not share the current view of the strict 'native breed only' school of afforestation. He recognises, I am glad to say, that even the much-maligned sycamore has its place, although not perhaps the sitka spruce in its dense plantations. Even the rhododendron and the salmonberry, introduced by the toffs and now an invasive pest in many places, have their virtues.

The sporting culture put an emphasis on certain species and the size of the 'bag'. Gamekeepers naturally felt obliged to stick with their bosses' bidding and anything that competed with or threatened the favoured few – grouse, salmon, trout, deer, and so on – was labelled vermin and marked down for eradication. These attitudes prevail in some quarters.

The size of the 'bag' across the Highland estates – the numbers of animals killed each season – was frequently of astonishing proportions. This is a tribute of sorts to the productivity of the Highlands, despite the harsh climate and poor soils, and points to a much higher biodiversity in past centuries. Noble appeals for more research into 'historical ecology' and cites the work in this field of Professor T.C. Smout.

The writer has something to say about many controversial topics – muirburn, acid rain, timber production, re-wilding, overgrazing by deer – but with them all he displays an open-minded approach rather than a narrow ideological mindset. ■

Beneath the Ice
By Kenneth Steven
Saraband
Review by Stephen Keeler

Hammerfest is a thirty-hour bus journey north from Oslo. Fans of Bill Bryson will remember it as 'agreeable enough in a thank-you-God-for-not-making-me-live-here sort of way', and if you thought Bryson always overdoes it for effect, Kenneth Steven describes it today simply as 'nothing more than the stink of dead fish.' It is a place 'a few degrees north of sanity', a place where everyone is dying of whisky and tobacco, and where darker abuses lie just beneath the ice. So much for the Norwegian model.

But Steven is a man with a passion, an 'over-enthusiasm', for all things Sami. If passion alone keeps you page-turning, you're in for a rewarding, charming, humane and occasionally poetic read, if not quite a cogently argued thesis of prejudice and persecution. But even some of Steven's Sami friends are wary of such passion.

The Sami are described on the book's cover as 'the indigenous people of the Scandinavian Arctic. A proud, resilient people in an unforgiving yet majestic northern wildscape (sic), the Sami have carved out an existence rich in tradition, where the old ways of reindeer herding, shamanic belief and the veneration of bears have not yet been forgotten.' These, it must be noted, are not Steven's words. It would be unfair and too easy a target to deconstruct here the blurb-writer's appeal to bookshop browsers. But there is something disquieting about so casual a use of 'proud', 'resilient', 'unforgiving' and 'tradition' which points to the central paradox of such theses, a paradox familiar enough much nearer home.

In choosing to define a group as a minority – and that is at least as much a matter of perception as it is of mathematics – and subsequently deciding that this minority group is threatened or at risk of willed extinction and therefore must be protected, that is to say discriminated for (as opposed to against), it is a short step to declarations and categorisations of purity – cultural, sociological, religious, racial. Once defined, your persecuted minority can easily take on a sanctity which itself becomes self-defining, prejudiced, fossilised, isolationist and ultimately threatening.

It is not a paradox Steven addresses head-on in this series of eleven short essays which sketch the role of the state (Danish, Swedish and former-Soviet as well as Norwegian): church fault lines and divisions which will be familiar enough to many Scottish readers, aand legislation to Norwegianise (Fornorsking) the Sami against their use of Sami language and dialects and joiks (characteristic sung poems of sounds rather than words)

Steven gives us something (but tantalisingly little) of the shamanism which can whip up storms out of the sky; a short essay on Herman Lundborg's Swedish Institute for Eugenics (he speculates on whether there might have been a Scottish Lundborg in the nineteenth century), and a lengthy report on the protest campaign against the Alta dam project of the 1970s and 80s which first took Steven to Hammerfest and beyond

There is a strident eco-essay on Greenland which sits uneasily in this book and where Steven's otherwise agreeable temperament gives way to – that word again – passion, but a one-dimensional passion which doesn't appear to allow much scope for disagreement, or even debate. There is, too, a strong sense of 'the whole silliness of borders' and the suggestion of a pertinent debate we might have had on questions of ownership of land and the right to demarcate nations.

As a brief introduction to the Sami, *Beneath the Ice* is a good enough beginning. It presents some recent history and sets out principal issues without exploring any in depth. Ultimately, however, it becomes a perhaps unintentional apology for separatism at a time when the centre looks increasingly like it might not hold. ■

60 Degrees North – Around the World in Search of Home
By Malachy Tallack
Polygon Books
Review by Mandy Haggith

From the opening phrase of this book, 'I can remember the day: silver-skied and heavy with rain...', we are clearly in the hands of a confident writer. Mallachy Tallack is from Shetland, and the book relates his boreal circumnavigation, westwards along the line of latitude at sixty degrees north, through Greenland, Canada, Alaska, Russia, Finland, Sweden, Norway and back home.

The writing is as well-knitted as you would expect from a Shetlander, deftly stitched with strong, if somewhat paradoxical images. Looking out from a Mainland shore, 'the Atlantic lay like a desert', the peninsula south of him extending 'like a finger' with air 'as solid as a clenched fist', while 'a skylark hung frantically above, held aloft by the lightness of his song.'

Yet this is much more than picture painting; from the start, there are deep ruminations on our relationships to places. 'For just as we inhabit the landscape, the landscape inhabits us, in thought, in myth and in memory; and somehow the openness of the land invites us to become attached, or else attaches itself to us.' As the author travels he starts drawing distinctions, breaking apart assumptions, putting himself and his relationship with the land into perspective.

In Greenland he ruminates on the different adaptations of hunters and farmers and our sometimes hypocritical views of them. In Canada he sees that far from a simple circle around the planet, the sixtieth parallel reveals much variety. He finds an uplifting and strong sense of community in Fort Smith, and concludes that 'the parallel is entirely undefining. It allows for a plurality of norths to exist.' 'Placefulness', a deep engagement with a location and its inhabitants, is contrasted with the Alaskan wilderness tourists who set off in groups, 'seeking their own absence'. When he pads off down to a lake, fishing, terrified of the big carnivores, he realises that in that vast forest he is 'as stupid as bear in a bookshop.' For page after page, I am smitten with this voyager and his wry turns of phrase.

Unfortunately in Russia, he rather loses his way. His chapter on Kamchatka, in the Russian Far East, is a record of a much earlier visit, misplaced in time by several years. This is followed by a chapter on St Petersberg in which his insightful contemplations on place seem to have evaporated and are replaced by guidebook history. Yet I can't begrudge the man his confusion. Who, after all, can make sense of such a dysfunctional nation?

On the journey home through Scandinavia, passages of personal memoir become increasingly dislocated from the place the author is travelling through, yet there are also many beautifully written scenes – a wonderful evocation of slushy Bergen, for example – and then there is the ending, which I shall not spoil.

Perhaps we should all undertake such a journey, following whatever line or parallel offers hope or discovery. Meanwhile, or instead, Mallachy Tallack's spin around the top of the world is well worth a vicarious follow. ■

Queerbashing
by Tim Morrison
ThunderPoint Publishing Ltd
Review by Alison Napier

Growing up and coming out as gay is at best complex, even now in these allegedly halcyon days of equal marriage and homophobic Christian B&B prosecutions. Being gay in the far northern reaches of Scotland is particularly hazardous and in the fabulously unsubtly titled *Queerbashing*, Tim Morrison offers up a brutally honest account of McGillivray's optimistic expedition through school, university, acquisition and subsequent loss of faith, relocation to the Deep South, the eponymous violent assault and his bruised return home to the Orkney Islands.

The novel is not an easy read (in a good way) as the writing is often dense and at times as impenetrable and tangled as a brambles thicket on a highland hike. But the prose is also beautiful, and frequently funny, as in this chatting up scene in a London bar. 'Gee, you are Scottish? I have Scottish ancestry!' Todd or Marc – spelled with a 'c' - would enthuse as the bait took and the process of reeling in began. 'Yes,' McGillivray replied, 'From the Islands in the North. I was born in the Western Isles and grew up on the Mainland of Orkney. I have dual nationality.'

Aiming for a triple, he leaves London and heads North to Yorkshire where the principal events take place, both good and horrific. The clue is in the title. The politics of poverty and fear are forensically examined and are found deeply wanting.

I ought to declare an interest here. I grew up gay in the Scottish Highlands, fled, and later returned in a calmer frame of mind. The descriptions of a first tentative visit to Aberdeen University's gaysoc, and of Daisy's (Aberdeen's only gay 'nightclub' in the early 1980s) are so accurate I found myself humming 'It's Raining Men' and craving a pint of tepid black and tan. The vast and liberating significance of Boomtown Books on King Street is similarly acknowledged. This sadly long-gone sanctuary provided for many of us the first terrifying glimpse of the words 'Gay' and 'Lesbian' in a shop window that were not hidden in a brown paper bag or spat as an insult.

That peculiarly Scottish brand of hypocritical Christianity that can be imposed by its purveyors on island inhabitants is skewered and roasted, and made all the more credible by being critiqued by an insider, as both the main character McGillivray and author Morrison studied Divinity in Aberdeen. They also both went on to work in social care and this raises intriguing questions about the Rizla-thin divide between fiction, fact and autobiography, and indeed 'What is a Novel'.

Others may wish to engage with this minor dilemma but Morrison can define his work as he chooses. Whatever it is, it is a glorious outpouring of prose as precise as the last slant of winter solstice sun at Maeshowe and as furious as the crashing waves against the sea cliffs of Hoy. Violence is shockingly described and friendships are beautifully evoked.

The final twenty or so pages take us to the Ring of Brodgar at Stenness and here I fear the prose soared into a whole new and not necessarily better stratosphere. My double pattie supper slid from my lap as if laced with a hallucinogenic drug found only in the ditches of the Northern Isles, inducing dreamscapes and purple hazes worthy of a Jimi Hendrix lyric or a Ginsberg Howl. Perhaps a flourish too far, but nothing that ultimately detracts from this very fine 'novel' ■

Poetry Reviews
Second Wind, new poems Douglas Dunn, Vicki Feather, Diana Hendry, Saltire Society Scotland/Scottish Poetry Library
Paragraphs at the End of the World, Graham Fulton, Penniless Press
Airstream, poems, Audrey Henderson, Homebound Publications
Against the Light, Stewart Conn, Mariscat Press
At the Well of Love, poems Tom Pow, Mariscat Press
This Changes Things, Claire Askew, Bloodaxe Books
An Ember from the Fire, Jane Bonnyman, poetry Salzburg
Redomones and Eye to the Future, Alan MacGillivray, Kennedy & Boyd
Mountains and Rivers, Brian Lawrie, Malfranteaux
Who by Water, Kate Ashton, Shearsman Books
Staunin Ma Lane, Chinese verse in Scots and English, translated by Brian Holton, Shearsman
A Night of Islands, Selected Poems, Angus Martin
Reviews by Ian Stephen

A pack of contrasting collections, all sent to *Northwords Now*, reveals a wide range of styles in contemporary poetry, all linked somehow to Scotland. The contents dance on a pendulum from expressive free verse, none more energetic than that of Graham Fulton, to the well-made formality adopted by some younger poets as well as veterans of the trade, but perhaps most prominent as a device in new work from Douglas Dunn. Glossy or matt, serifs or no in the typography, it's all a matter of taste in the end and it has to be the same in one reviewer's selection of what can be usefully discussed in limited space. Let's start by celebrating the commitment of the poets who continue to make a thing from their individual stock of language and the publishers who demonstrate their belief in its worth. I regret not being able to share more fully from the bundle of books which have come with me on my recent travels.

Responses to ageing form a thread through most of these diverse books but the theme is explicit in *Second Wind* – new poems from three poets commissioned by the Saltire Society in association with the Scottish Poetry Library. Just when you think the exercise of proven craft will be lulling there is Douglas Dunn's direct, near-brutal, depiction of objects which were hidden within the glove compartment of a car owned by a person who will never drive again. It reminded me of an image from a very early Dunn collection, *Terry Street* where a man is seen pulling a lawnmower along a pavement. The poet wishes grass for him. Also in *Second Wind* Vicki Feaver uses her tricks of prosody but remains anarchic. A mower in her hands will decapitate the flowers. Her work is as painterly as one of its subjects, the work of Wilhelmina Barnes-Graham but remains as energetic as the brush strokes of the painter at the age of ninety. I thought also of meeting Margaret Mellis and appreciating her most recent work most, in the long span of a retrospective exhibition. The last word in the anthology is Diana Hendry's wry *Praise Poem* which could easily have been written in prose format, depending more on the writer's ability to step outside and look at what she's doing, than the format it adopts.

Expressionism prevails in Graham Fulton's stunning sequence of prose-poems, interspersed with strong b/w photos which are a travelogue in themselves. Its Central Belt beat and the pace seems impossible to sustain but bloody hell, it never flags and the locations and visions are so varied that you feel none could be left out. It's a big question, whether there must be some origination, some new ground broken, in any art or whether the raku pot will always ask to be held in your hand if it is made with a sensitive touch. I'd say the only book in this bag which invites comparison with Fulton's work comes to us from a Scot who has lived much of her life in another literary culture. Audrey Henderson grew up on the edge of Edinburgh but lives in Boston. *Airstream* takes its title from the streamlined aluminium shape of trail-able homes. (The same icon was used to great effect by in an installation by Mike Nelson in *Toronto's The Power Plant* in 2014). Audrey Henderson's own road-movie can also move through time and over water as when she imagines herself as one of the flock of a St Kilda preacher. Her use of imagery is a key element of the work, whether it takes a slim, long form in verse or becomes a series of prose-poems. Lichens are closely observed. I thought of Paul Strand's close up photographs of South Uist landscape elements alternating with his portraits and was not surprised to come across an explicit reference to Cartier Bresson. The book is a result of the Connecticut publisher's competition scheme and is a very handsome production.

Two recent productions by Edinburgh based Mariscat, show the care in production by a designer in love with typography (the poet and editor Gerry Cambridge) and are collections by established Scottish poets. Stewart Conn is known as a successful playwright and radio-producer as well as a poet and Tom Pow's recent range of work has included travel-based nonfiction and teenage fiction. Both slim and simple collections somehow give you the impression of holding a substantial book in your hand. Just when you think it's inevitable that experienced poets will be content to contain their thoughts and visions within crafted structures, bare emotion hits you directly. Perhaps, in both books it's the courage to write simply, to hold back the craft at times, which produces the strongest effect. Stewart Conn puts down the fractures of a mug clutched by a falling person and the hard story happens between the lines, like much good drama. It's the pertinent detail which hits your heart, rather than rhetoric or eloquence in itself:

'... no-one seemed concerned lest we might/be making a break for the number eight bus.'

Tom Pow also tells his story by implication after its bare bones are quietly put in place. He is about to travel to Lagos to play his part in an international exchange (Commonwealth Poets United) but 'A feather of blood seeped, unannounced,...' into the brain of his wife. The poet spends much space in describing the 'fudge-coloured' and 'glove puppet' like body of a stranded baby gull before making the comparison of a helpless look in the human eye, within a few sketched lines. This small book explores a range of different forms though its tone is consistent.

Alan MacGillivray's *Redonomes* is, by contrast, a restless exploration of both form and tone. It's hard to get a handle on what's going on but you're dazzled by the zest. The poems are often in a satirical tradition, using verse forms you'd associate with that intention but then there's a jump to a completely different tradition or allusion. There could hardly be a greater contrast in the language and the look of the book with Brian Lawrie's methodical tracing of the Dee, from source to sea, in a compact volume well illustrated with Mick McKie's photographs.

You might expect that the young blood with the new voices would would test the forms and venture further but, from two strong examples, it does not seem as simple as that. Claire Askew comes to Bloodaxe Books, from a spirited line of arresting performance poetry. It's not just the long rhythms but the startling image like a butcher's knife cutting cake. Refrains with variations are used to strong effect but it's not just trickery with language. Amongst the surprising choices of word you get very simple portraits - the grandfather who helped make spitfires airworthy. Then there is a lyric on destroying fire - the poorest thing in the world in traditional riddles, because only ash is left. Jane Bonnyman also publishes her first collection in the restrained and more academic style of *Poetry Salzburg*. This is appropriate to the subject matter as well as the style, which is held-back storytelling. She is fascinated by the relationship between RLS and Fanny Van de Grift. The Pacific enters her evocation as strongly as the once-Bohemian Hotel Chevillon by the bridge at Grez sur Loing.

I'd like to complete this subjective reaction to books received with one more contrast. Shearsman's 2016 list includes two retrospective collections by Scottish poets who have been immersed in translation for much of their lives. Arguably this field can give the greatest understanding of the vast range of possibilities for those of us who make with language. Kate Ashton's original poems read like representations of another voice. Her personal reactions to landscape, seascape and people are converted into a general observation. The risk is that they thus become remote but as always the language itself is the substance of the game and this poet can demonstrate musicality as well as powers of close observation. Ironically Brian Holton's lively poems are all translations from a lifetime's immersion in different languages but, in this case, all from the Chinese. Perhaps it's because of his command of Scots and its canny suitability to the material but these versions of ancient verses are fresher than the average daisy. The format of the book is well chosen to carry original poem, Scots version and a standard English version which makes a glossary unnecessary. How can such a scholarly project have the tone o a chiel i the selfsame howff?

Maybe Holton can talk to ghosts. If so, he has that in common with a poet who has just published a powerful selection of his life's work to date. Thus it is surely fitting to attempt to discuss this one on its own terms.

Angus Martin is known to those of us who view the Scottish fishing boat as a significant aspect of our historical culture and manufacturing history as the author of a seminal work on the Ring Net Fishery. To others he is the postman-poet who has chosen to remain within his community of the long peninsula of Mull of Kintytre. I have followed his work from its first appearance in mainly Scottish periodicals to its early gathering in *The Larch Plantation* published in the simple well-set editions produced by the printer and publisher Callum Macdonald (Midlothian). 'Always Boats and Men' has stayed with me since encountering it in his *Song of the Quern* (Scottish Cultural Press). Thus I notice it is placed first in this selected poems and so suggests that the book is not a conventional chronological 'best of' but a newly wrought book in its own right - one poem made out of many. It seems to me that this poet has simply made the choice to remain within a community and landscape and family that is home because that is essential to his work as well as to his life.

It's not difficult to identify the skills in narration and prosody, in standard English and in a representation of spoken Argyll Scots. It's more difficult to explain how this often bare and simple verse has such intense power. I'm not alone in asking this and would like to refer the reader to an excellent previous analysis of this book by Richie McCaffery: londongrip.co.uk/2016/03/london-grip-poetry-review-martin/

After the interest and pleasure of entering these conversations with people, dead and alive, and with the natural world, I also have to ask how this quiet-voiced poet can hold you through a whole book. Many have skills in prosody though I'd say Angus Martin's choice to live and work in his home community has allowed him to trust his own sensibility which is surely why the work has such resonance. He knowingly takes the huge risk of monotone elegy. It's more like animated conversation with ghosts who talk as well as walk. But there's more to it than that. The final section 'From a Kintyre Nature Diary' demonstrates something like Graham Fulton's ability to observe the most mundane-seeming things with visionary intensity but there's also a hop, skip and jump of thought that seems more like the shift from observation to comment in Brian Holton's living translations. Who else would imagine a scart's (shag or cormorant) brain transposed into his own? The wind is a particular animal and islands prefer their own company.

Elsewhere in this harmonic construction, this poet can admit the sea can say much about wood but is no real judge of the stuff 'knowing only the broken ends of trees.' On the facing page a meditation on grass is informed by the aside that this writer can hear its voice. I believe him.

Shoestring Press's production, with another Gerry Cambridge design, adds to the pleasure of this volume. I'd ask readers to look out for a forthcoming title from this publisher. The Tasmanian, Pete Hay is known to several in Scotland from conferences comparing island matters. He is a poet with the most robust of voices and his kinship with Angus Martin will be clear to those who encounter both poets and thinkers. ■

CONTRIBUTORS' BIOGRAPHIES

Chris Agee is Editor of *Irish Pages* (www.irishpages.org). His third collection, *Next to Nothing*, was shortlisted for the 2009 Ted Hughes Award for New Work in Poetry.

James Andrew has had two books of poetry published and a third is due to be published by Dionysia Press.

Jean Atkin's first collection *Not Lost Since Last Time* is published by Oversteps Books. Her recent work has been published in magazines including *Envoi, The Clearing, The North, Earthlines,* and also commissioned by and performed on Radio 4. www.jeanatkin.com

Gabrielle Barnby lives in Orkney and works in a variety of genres including short stories and poetry. Her first novel will be released by ThunderPoint next year.

Henry Bell is a writer and editor from Bristol, working on poetry and theatre. He lives on the Southside of Glasgow and edits *Gutter Magazine*.

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Paul Brownsey lectured in philosophy at Glasgow University. His book, *His Steadfast Love and Other Stories*, was reviewed in *Northwords Now* 31.

Douglas Bruton won the Neil Gunn Prize 2015, The William Soutar Prize 2014 and HISSAC 2008. He was recently published by *Aesthetica Magazine.*

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

Catherine Eunson has been fairly busy in Benbecula for twenty years this year with family, various arts jobs and community projects. She also writes music.

Jane Fuller lives in the Mull of Galloway on a rugged cliff top overlooking the sea. The spectacular Scottish landscape informs and inspires her writing.

Peter Gilmour was born 1941 in Glasgow where he still lives. He has had a pamphlet of poems published by Happenstance Press and two novels published by Vagabond Voices.

Merryn Glover was born in Kathmandu. Her fiction and drama have been broadcast on Radio Scotland and Radio 4. *A House Called Askival* is her first novel. Having returned to live and work in Nepal for four years she now lives in the Highlands of Scotland.

Lily Greenall is a writer from the Isle of Lewis. She is currently studying a PhD in Creative Writing at the University of Aberdeen.

George Gunn's last book of poems was *A Northerly Land*. A prose book about Caithness, *The Province of the Cat* was published in 2015 and his play *Badbea Waterloo*, was given a moved reading at the Tron.

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

Edith Harper is influenced by her north-east upbringing, particularly in use of language, and finds that nature inspires much of her poetry.

Jennifer Morag Henderson is from Inverness. Her book *Josephine Tey: A Life* (Sandstone Press) was listed by *the Observer* in the best biographies of 2015.

Nick Holdstock's first novel, *The Casualties*, came out last year. He's also the author of *China's Forgotten People.* He lives in Edinburgh.

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Tariq Latif's most recent collection is *The Punjabi Weddings* (Arc). His pamphlet *Smithereens* also by Arc was short listed for the Callum MacDonald Memorial award. He is currently looking for a publisher for his fourth full collection.

Joan Lennon is a Canadian Scot, living and writing in the Kingdom of Fife, with a fine view of the silvery Tay.

Ingrid Leonard comes from Orkney, which inspires much of her poetry. She is studying for an MA in Writing Poetry from the University of Newcastle.

Pàdraig MacAoidh – À Leòdhas. Na fhear-teagaisg aig Oilthigh Chille Rìmhinn. Cruinneachadh ùr bho Acair am-bliadhna.

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

Maggie Mackay lives on the east coast of Scotland and is enjoying life as a final year Masters Creative Writing student at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Meg Macleod was born in 1945 in England. She lived in America and Canada for a few years and has a BFA degree in Fine Arts from Univ Of Victoria in Canada. In 1974 Meg came to live in Scotland where she writes, paints and knits.

Angus Martin's most recent collection is *A Night of Islands: Selected Poems*, published by Shoestring Press.

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

Marion McCready lives in Dunoon. Her second full-length poetry collection, *Madame Ecosse,* is due to be published Spring 2017 by Eyewear Publishing.

Rhoda Michael began writing after she retired. She was editor of *Northwords Now* up to 2010.

Jim Miller lives near Inverness and has written several books on the north, including *The Gathering Stream, The Dambuilders, The Foresters,* and *Swords for Hire*.

Donald S. Murray is from Ness in the Isle of Lewis. He now lives in Shetland. His latest book is *Herring Tales* (Bloomsbury).

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

Tom Pow's most recent collection of poems is *At The Well of Love*, published by Mariscat.

Maggie Rabatski has two poetry pamphlet collections, *Down from The Dance/An Dèidh An Dannsa* and *Holding*, both published by New Voices Press.

Olive M. Ritch, an Orcadian poet, has been published in many literary magazines and anthologies, as well as having her work broadcast on Radio 4.

Cynthia Rogerson's 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). She is a Royal Literary Fellow at the University of Dundee.

Kirsteen Scott lives in Edinburgh now but she belongs to Argyll and most of her writing comes from there. Several pieces have been published in *New Writing Scotland*.

Karin Slater is a Creative Writing graduate from the Outer Hebrides with a love of all things poetry.

Rebecca Smith grew up in the middle of nowhere in Cumbria. She now lives in Central Scotland and writes short fiction. She tweets @beckorio

Ian Stephen's most recent novel, *A Book of Death and Fish*, is published by Saraband, as is *Maritime*, his latest collection of poems.

Kenny Taylor lives on the Black Isle, works mostly in non-fiction features and books drawn from nature and science, but also relishes other forms of storytelling.

Marie-Therese Taylor's work has appeared in *Soundwaves, Mixing the Colours The Glasgow Review of Books, Nutshells* and *Nuggets,* and *The Snare's Nest*.

Roseanne Watt is from Shetland. She makes filmpoems, writes poems and is poetry editor of *The Island Review* (theislandreview.com)

Ali Whitelock's memoir, '*poking seaweed with a stick and running away from the smell'* was launched at sydney writers' festival & published by Polygon 2009 & Wakefield Press 2008. Her first poetry collection is almost complete.

Howard Wright was longlisted in the 2015 National Poetry Competition and highly commended in the Torbay Open. Other poems are due to appear in *Stand, The North* and *The Antigonish Review*.

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Books & Beans, *12 Belmont St, Aberdeen*
Lemon Tree, *5 West North St, Aberdeen*
Newton Dee Café, *Newton Dee Village, Bieldside, Aberdeen*
Blackwell's, *Old Aberdeen, Aberdeen*
Aberdeen City Libraries
Woodend Barn, *Burn o'Bennie, Banchory*
Yeadons of Banchory, *20 Dee St, Banchory*
Aberdeenshire Libraries
Hammerton Store, *336 Gt Western Rd, Aberdeen*
Spindrift Studio, *The Marina, Banff*

South

Stirling Libraries
Midlothian and East Lothian Libraries
Kings Bookshop, *Callander, 91 Main St, Callander*
Dundee Contemporary Arts, *52 Nethergate, Dundee*
Clementine, *Gray Street, Broughty Ferry*
Jessie's Kitchen, *Albert Street, Broughty Ferry*
Broughty Ferry Library, *Queen St, Broughty Ferry*
The Byre Theatre, *St Andrews*
The Forest Bookstore, *26 Market Pl, Selkirk*
Kesley's Bookshop, *29 Market St, Haddington, East Lothian*
Prestongrange Museum, *Morrison's Haven, Prestonpans*
Montrose Library, *214 High St, Montrose, Angus*
Su Casa, Lorne Arcade, *115 High St, Ayr*
Moffat Bookshop, *5 Well St, Moffat*
Giraffe Cafe, *51 South St, Perth*
Ewart Library, *Dumfries*
The Tolbooth and Albert Halls, *Stirling*

Edinburgh

The Fruitmarket Gallery, *45 Market Street*
Blackwells Bookshop, *53-9 South Bridge*
Scottish Poetry Library, *5 Crichtons Close*
Elephant House Café, *21 George IV Bridge*
The Village, *16 S. Fort Street*
Filmhouse, *88 Lothian Road*
Peter Green & Co, *Warrender Park Road*
MacNaughtons Bookshop, *3-3a Haddington Place*
St Margaret's House, *151 London Road*
Summerhall, *1 Summerhall*

Glasgow

Centre for Contemporary Arts, *350 Sauchiehall Street*
Òran Mòr, *731 Gt. Western Road*
The Piping Centre, *30 McPhater Street*
Caledonia Books, *483 Gt Western Road*
Tchai Ovna Teahouses, *42 Otago Lane*
Mono, King's Court, *10 King Street*
Gallery of Modern Art, *Royal Exchange Square.*
Tell it Slant, *134 Renfrew St*
WASPS Studio, *The Briggait, 141 The Bridge Gate*
Oxfam Books, *330 Byres Rd*

Invitation to readers to suggest additional locations - contact editor@northwordsnow.co.uk
We will also send packs of 12 or 25 or 50 to individuals who are keen to distribute locally.

Tuath

Thèid leasachadh ùr Gàidhlig air Northwords Now air a bheil Tuath fhoillseachadh aon turas an comhair na bliadhna bho àireamh an earraich 2017 a-mach le taic bho Bhòrd na Gàidhlig agus Alba Chruthachail. Gu ruige seo, le cion àite, thathar air cuideam a chur air bàrdachd mar stuth Gàidhlig anns an iris ach le barrachd farsaingeachd a-nis, thathar an dòchas cur ri seo gu mòr. Ged a bhios àite ann an-còmhnaidh airson na bàrdachd gun teagamh, thathar ag iarraidh riochdan eile sgrìobhaidh a-nis cuideachd. Ma tha ficsean goirid agaibh no earrannan à ficsean nas fhaide nach cuir sibh dhan iris iad? Thèid fàilte a chur cuideachd air tionndaidhean gu Gàidhlig is bhon Ghàidhlig, obair-bhreithneachaidh agus ailt sa Ghàidhlig agus mu ghnothaichean Gàidhealach. 'S e an ceann-latha mu dheireadh gus stuth a chur a-steach gu lìon na h-irise (northwordsnow.co.uk) 27 Faoilleach 2017. Siuthadaibh!

Rody Gorman
Deasaiche Gàidhlig

A new Gaelic supplement to Northwords Now entitled Tuath will appear once annually from the issue in spring 2017 onwards, with support from Bòrd na Gàidhlig and Creative Scotland. Up to now, for reasons of space, the emphasis has been on poetry as Gaelic material in the magazine but with more space now it is hoped to expand this considerably. Whilst we continue to look for and publish new poetry of course, we're looking for other forms of writing as well now. We would very much welcome submissions in the form of short fiction including extracts from longer works, translations to and from Gaelic, reviews and articles in and about Gaelic. The deadline for submissions to the magazine (northwordsnow.co.uk) is 27 January 2017.

Rody Gorman
Gaelic Editor