The FREE literary magazine of the North

Northwords Now

Issue 36, Autumn 2018

JENNIFER MORAG HENDERSON on the work of Man-Booker-shortlisted poet, ROBIN ROBERTSON, MICHAEL MARRA'S Black Isle gigs remembered by DAVID GILBERT, SALLY FRANK & GAIL LOW on losing, living and writing, PAUL F COCKBURN looks at Scottish fan fiction, AMANDA THOMPSON takes an artist's view of old Scots words, BOB PEGG finds poetry in the fells

PLUS Stories both flashy and longer, poems in diverse voices, a short play script, articles, reviews and new Gaelic writing

EDITORIAL

This summer, I had the pleasure of travelling along much of Norway's mighty Sognefjord and meeting many Norwegians in places near and north of it. One of the many striking aspects of this area, obvious drama of mountains, glaciers and seascapes apart, is regional pride in both culture and language.

Western Norway, beyond Bergen, is a national stronghold of a distinctive form of written Norwegian called 'Nynorsk' (new Norwegian). Closer to Old Norse than the language written by most people in the rest of the country, this is based largely on the work of one man, Ivar Aasen, in the mid-1800s. This student of language, playwright and poet travelled widely and created a fusion of dialects that led later to Nynorsk.

That alone is fairly mind boggling – almost as if MacDiarmid's 'synthetic Scots' was now the official, and widely used, language of a chunk of Scotland. But the real pleasure of Nynorsk, for me, is in seeing and hearing how a distinctive variant of a language (largely understood across the whole country) can enrich both contemporary communication and sense of place.

That's part of the reason why *Northwords Now*, in addition to being an important medium for new Gaelic writing, also celebrates diversity of writing in many forms of Scots and English, including in this issue. Roll those words on the tongue, and enjoy. ■

Kenny Taylor, Editor

At the Northwords Now Website soon:
northwordsnow.co.uk
Additional fiction
Podcasts
Some poetry from the current issue

Find us on Facebook
www.facebook.com/groups/northwordsnow/

Contents

3 Scottish fanfic – Paul F Cockburn

4 Dàin le Meg Bateman, Aonghas-Phàdraig Caimbeul, Fearghas MacFhionnlaigh, Aonghas MacNeacail, Deborah Moffat

5 Poems by Mark Ryan Smith, Marc Innis, Matthew Gallivan

6 Poems by Sharon Black, Maxine Rose Munro, Anjali Suzanne Angel

7 The Vanishing Point – Story by Olga Wojtas, Prisoner – short play by Phil Baarda

8 Poems by Sally Evanz, Ian McDonough, Sharon Gunason Pottinger, Linda Menzies Mandy Macdonald

9 A Question of Honour – Story by Ian Tallach
Highland pebble – Frances Ainslie

10 The Neil Gunn Writing Competition

11 The Boy – Story by Jo Gilbert
Going home – Flash story by Trudy Duffy-Wigman

12 Dàin le Maggie Rabatski, Màrtainn Mac an t-Saoir, Caoimhin MacNèill, Dàibhidh Eyre, Eòghan Stiùbhart

13 Poems by Leonie Charlton, Arun Sood, Robin Munro, Juliet Antill, Phil Baarda

14 The Whole Hog – Story by Isobel Rutland

15 Frog Love – Flash story by Sherry Morris, Poems by Lydia Harris

16 Losing, living and writing – Essay by Sally Frank (with Gail Low)

18 Poems by Robin Wilson, Judith Taylor, Hamish Myers, Iain Twiddy, Jim C Wilson

19 Poems by Martin Malone, Eileen West

20 Secrets – Story by Sheena Blackhall, Winter night – Story by Linda Tyler

21 Poets' Paradise – Story by David McVey
Three encounters wi ra Bodhisattva ay compassion in Maryhill – by dubh

22 The Wrong Idea – Story by S.A. MacLeod

23 Poem by Robin Wilson

24 Poems by Evan Cowen, Janis Clark, Merryn Glover, Sheila Lockhart, Kirsteen Bell, Joan Gibson

25 A Scots Dictionary of Nature – Amanda Thompson
Cataracts – Story by Roddie McKenzie

26 Poems by Howard Wright, Peter Godfrey, Susan Elsley, Marie-Bernadette Rollins

27 A long look at The Long Take – Jennifer Morag Henderson on the work of Robin Robertson

28 Reviews

31 Contributors' Biographies,

Northwords Now is a twice yearly literary magazine published by Northwords, a not-for-profit company, registered in February 2005. Company number SC280553.

Board members
Adrian Clark (Chair), Valerie Beattie, Lesley Harrison, Kristin Pedroja, Peter Whiteley

Editor
Kenny Taylor,
editor@northwordsnow.co.uk

Gaelic Editor
Rody Gorman,
editor@northwordsnow.co.uk

Advisory Group
Jon Miller, Peter Urpeth, Pam Beasant

Designer
Gustaf Eriksson
www.gustaferiksson.com

Advertising
editor@northwordsnow.co.uk
www.northwordsnow.co.uk/advertise.asp

Subscriptions
The magazine is FREE and can be picked up at locations across Scotland. See list on P31
The fee for individual 'home-delivery' is £6 for 2 issues, cheques payable to 'Northwords'.

Front cover image: The Last Days of Winter by Beth Robertson Fiddes, mixed media, 92 x 122cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Kilmorack Gallery. www.kilmorackgallery.co.uk

Submissions to the magazine, preferably through our on-line system on the Northwords Now website, are welcome. They can be in Gaelic, English, Scots and any local variants. Please submit no more than three short stories or six poems, in MS Word format (not .pdf). All work must be previously unpublished in print or on-line. Copyright remains with the author. Payment is made for all successful submissions.

Postal submissions of potential review books should be sent to:

The Editor, Northwords Now
Easter Brae
Culbokie
Dingwall
Ross-shire
IV7 8JU

To submit your work online, go to our website: **northwordsnow.co.uk**
The next issue is planned for March 2018. The deadline for submissions is **25th January 2019**. If accepted, you will hear about your submission by **30th March 2019**.

The Board and Editor of Northwords Now acknowledge support from Creative Scotland and Bòrd na Gàidhlig.
ISSN 1750-7928

Scotland's Literary Resurrectionists

Paul F Cockburn examines the habitual 'borrowing' of favourite characters from Scottish fiction

Back in 2012, the Scottish author and screenwriter Ewan Morrison introduced at least a few *Guardian* readers to a literary phenomenon with a pedigree older than most probably had thought: "fan fiction", or "fanfic".

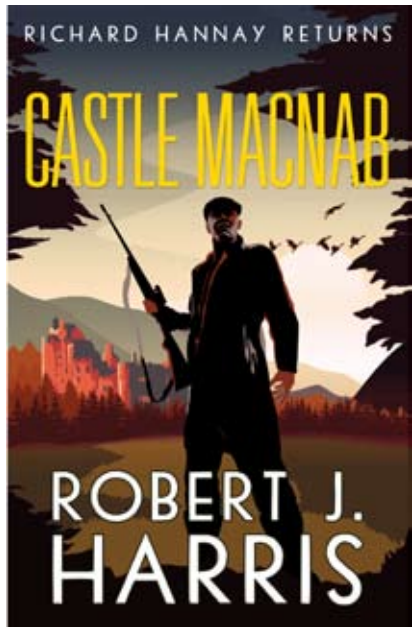
In its simplest form, fanfic is when people write their own stories using characters and scenarios taken from their favourite novels, TV shows, films, or even real life—oh yes, believe it or not, there's actually fanfic out there about pop stars like Justin Bieber and Harry Styles.

The 'hook' on which Morrison hung that particular *Guardian* article was the then-global success of E L James's *Fifty Shades of Grey*, which the author had developed from her early fanfic based on characters from Stephanie Meyer's 'vampires-versus-werewolves' *Twilight Saga*. Since *Fifty Shades* had "hit 31 million sales in 37 countries," he pointed out, "worried voices are asking: is this the beginning of an era in which fanfic overthrows original creation?"

Morrison dismissed such "paradigm-shift apocalypticism", not least because fanfic has a far lengthier history and diversity than you might imagine. Yes, he accepted that it had "multiplied exponentially with the invention of the internet" and, as he pointed out, some professional writers were dead set against it. *Interview with the Vampire* author Anne Rice went as far as writing publicly to her fans, vigorously defending her copyright: "It upsets me terribly to even think about fan fiction with my characters." Yet in contrast, J K Rowling was initially "flattered people wanted to write their own stories" based on her *Harry Potter* novels—just as long as they didn't try to make money from them!

If there is any distinction in fanfic, this is arguably the only one that matters. The vast majority of fanfic is written and distributed with genuinely no financial imperative; the point is for people to express themselves, not make a buck. Their work is freely shared in print and online – on sites such as Commaful, fanfiction.net, and Archive Of Our Own – in what might be charitably called democratic creativity. In contrast, there is a far smaller proportion which is published by proper publishers and found in bookshops which deliberately don't have any shelves labeled as "fanfic". Inevitably, money is involved at every stage of the process.

So we have John Banville continuing the adventures of Raymond Chandler's Phillip Marlowe; Stephen Baxter providing "authorised" sequels for two iconic novels by H G Wells, with *The Time Ships* and *The Massacre of Mankind*; Anthony Horowitz, who is surely the



only writer to officially resurrect both Ian Fleming's James Bond 007 and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes. Closer to home, St Andrews-based Robert J Harris last year brought new life to John Buchan's most famous hero, Richard Hannay.

For the publishers, and often the late authors' literary estates, these new novels are certainly not published just for the fun of it: simply put, there's money to be had in resurrecting literary characters already popular with huge numbers of readers.

Scotland has given the world its fair share of popular authors, so it's little surprise that their work has in turn inspired other writers (and their publishers) to "continue" their tales. Former British Poet Laureate Andrew Motion, for example, was far from the first to attempt a sequel to Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. Meanwhile, the acclaimed children's author Geraldine McCaughrean was genuinely surprised by the vast attention turned in her direction after it was announced that she had been selected to write a sequel to J M Barrie's 1911 novel *Peter Pan*, officially sanctioned by rights-holders Great Ormond Street Hospital.

When it came to writing *Peter Pan in Scarlet* McCaughrean told *The Guardian* in 2006 that she "rummaged through Barrie's pockets a bit", such as putting exploration – Barrie had been a close friend of 'Scott of the Antarctic' – at the heart of her novel. While remaining "true to Barrie's original book", she nevertheless wanted to create something distinctly her own. "What I attempted was a literary counterpart – the matching bookend. Same world, but somewhat reversed."

McCaughrean deliberately entered a competition to write a sequel to *Peter Pan*; in contrast, Robert J Harris was undoubtedly first and foremost a 'fan' of John Buchan. He'd read *The Thirty-Nine Steps* at school, but it was as an adult that he'd discovered further Richard Hannay adventures such as *Greenmantle*. Continuing to read Buchan's self-defined "shockers", Harris also noted other returning characters, not least the lawyer Sir Edward Leithen, the focus of Buchan's final novel *Sick Heart River*, published posthumously in 1941.

Towards the end of that book, Leithen learned of the outbreak of the Second World War, and realised that thoughts of hanging out with friends such as Hannay, Sandy Arbuthnot and Sir Archie Roylance were not going to happen. "If Buchan hadn't died then, I bet he would've written a story out of that," Harris explained. "During and after the First World War, he wrote stories set during that War. If he had lived through the Second, he probably would've written a book about the characters in that conflict as well."

Harris's notion of this "lost" Buchan novel gradually evolved in his head to what kind of novel he would write to fill that space. He was reluctant to take the idea any further, however, as he knew it would require a lot of work with no obvious chance of publication.

Until, by a weird coincidence, his younger son Jamie started an internship at Edinburgh publisher Birlinn, whose back catalogue includes paperback editions of all John Buchan's novels. The idea of a new novel bringing together some of Buchan's most popular characters piqued their interest, which forced Harris to sit down and spend several weeks working out his proposal.

Birlinn's interest in the Harris's book – given the Biblically-inspired title *The Thirty-One Kings* – was obvious; not just in the speed in which it was commissioned, but also the mere nine-month deadline Harris was given to write it!

Harris isn't the only author to have been attracted by Buchan's work. The poet and writer Andrew Greig's second novel, *The Return of John Macnab*, was a deliberate, self-conscious rewriting of Buchan's *John Macnab*. Buchan's somewhat whimsical 1925 novel featured three of his most popular characters (including the aforementioned Sir Edward Leithen) dealing with their individual mid-life crises by betting – under the collective guise of "John Macnab" – that they can poach a salmon or stag from right under the noses of the owners of a succession of Highland Estates.

In some respects, the most obvious interest in Greig's 1996 'sequel' wasn't just that he dropped Buchan's 'great men' and boyish female admirers – focusing instead on a widowed copywriter, an ex-Special Forces soldier with marital problems, and a jaundiced left-wing joiner. It's the fact that they were suddenly operating in a very different Scottish Highlands, where the large private estates are now mainly owned by foreign businessmen and international corporations.

Greig's novel was at the edge of fanfic, not least because he was reading against the original; and his writing style was, at least to some readers, more his own than Buchan's. Nevertheless, it's worth saying that Greig's eventual 2008 sequel, *Romanno Bridge,* not only developed his own characters but arguably hit on an narrative that nevertheless feels remarkably Buchanesque—the frantic search for the 'real' Stone of Destiny, in a novel that's more than just a home-grown riposte to *The Da Vinci Code*.

In turn, John Macnab has inspired Robert J. Harris to pen another Hannay novel. In *Castle Macnab*, to be published by Birlinn in November 2018, Richard Hannay and "the Macnabs" must help avoid European conflict by rescuing an abducted foreign dignitary.

The plot sounds pretty much like a Buchan "shocker", but how does Harris ensure that these books 'feel' reasonably consistent? "It has to be a Buchan story that appeals to Buchan readers, admirers of Buchan who have enjoyed his books," he accepts, if only to ensure good sales. "It's not just imitating; it does something, by bringing together other elements of the Buchan stories. If you're going to write stories that pick up somebody else's work, you could enrich it or be trashing it; with this book it seemed there was another story to be told."

No matter their quality, sequels and prequels of classic books are nevertheless likely to be a gamble; yes, there's the positive hook of a character or name that's known, but there's also the risk of seriously annoying the readers who don't share the new writer's vision of the character. In the end, perhaps the best 'sequels' are those that come from a completely different perspective, but are nevertheless aware of what has gone before?

"One thought of mine is that there is a Scottish tradition of 'The Adventure Story' which comprises Sir Walter Scott, Stevenson, Conan Doyle, Buchan and Alistair MacLean," says Harris. "I see myself contributing to this as a folk musician might contribute to our musical heritage." ■

Poetry

A' leughadh sna làithean saora

Meg Bateman
(July 2018, an Àird Bheag)

Ann an taigh gun dealan
agus buidheach dhen chuairt an-dè,
cleachdaidh sinn solas na maidne
gus leughadh – ceithir cinn òga bhàna
's mo cheann-sa liath
crùbte thar ar leabhraichean.
Tha sinn còmhla ach fa leth,
aig amannan diofraichte,
an àiteachan diofraichte –
Howard's End, Baile Naoimh Pàdraig,
Iapàn …

Aig ar casan, dà chù is cat,
na cluasan a' priobadh ri crònan cuileig,
ris gach duilleig ga tionndadh.

Bean Phàdraig

Aonghas-Phàdraig Caimbeul

Na sgonaichean
teth air a' ghreideil
agus cù a' comhartaich fad' às.

'Ith suas' thuirt i.
'Siuthad a-nis, ith suas.'

An t-Òban

Aonghas-Phàdraig Caimbeul

Thàinig Harold Wilson dhan bhaile,
còt'-uisge geal air agus pìob na dhòrn

ach fhad 's is cuimhne leam
cha do chuir iad *chariot òir*

sìos gu Combie Street
far an robh Iain còir

a' toirt fa-near nan lilidhean
nan uile ghlòir.

Air Tràigh Dhòrnaich

Fearghas MacFhionnlaigh

Ceann slìom ròin
gu h-obann os cionn nan tonn

ach chan ann idir cho fior àrd ri bathais
ìomhaigh mhòir sian-lìomhte Diùc Chataibh

air a' chnoc chian ud mar fhamhair ri faire
le sùilean-cloiche spìocach gun aithreachas.

A-nuas sròn chrom leòmach a' dùr-amharc
ris an tìr seo a mhion-phronn a dhòrn teann,

ri lìonmhorachd nan ìochdaran bochda
air na rinn e dìmeas, gun iochd a nochdadh

ach le crathadh-guaille reasgach gan sgapadh
mar ghainmheach sa ghailleann ga greasad

mar na mìltean de ghràinean nan siaban
a chì mi ag èirigh a-nis mu mo chasan

gan sìor-thogail gun chiall às an àite
gan sìor-leagail gun rian san t-seòl-mhara.

Ach tha spìc-dealanaich mar bhuaic air a' chlaigeann
a nì coinneal-cuimhne dheth là dhe na làithean.

Thèid d' ìomhaigh rìomhach a thalmhachadh fhathast!

air an rathad

Aonghas MacNeacail

air an rathad a ghabh sinn an-dè
cha robh dìg eadar a' chabhsair
agus na raointean farsaing feòir
air am biodh sprèidh a bhaile 'g
ionaltradh - bha crodh ann, ach
cha b' aithne dhuinn a chèile, oir
b' ann a' tadhal a bha mise, air na
faileasan nach robh ag ràdha aon
ghuth mu na làithean a bh' againn
's cha tigeadh aon gheum eòlach
à clach fhuar - nach bu siud mar
a bha mealladh nan cleòc a' toirt
beatha thaibhseil dhan bhruadar
a dh'èirich à deòin gun cumar
beò an fheuraich far an dèanadh
fleasgach is ainnir iomairt thioma
air suirghe luideil inntreadh, mar
gun robh iad arranta, cinnteach,
ach bha sinne, nise, màirnealach
mall, buailteach sealltainn cùl na
sgeòil, feuch nach eil an dìg ann
mar a b' àbhaist, ach cuibhrigte
le plaide fighte feòir

Soitheach nan Daoine

Deborah Moffatt

chualas nuallan na gaoithe 's onfhadh na mara,
sloisreadh garbh nan tonn air slige na luinge,
placadaich nan seòl 's bragadaich nan sgòd

Grùla 's Brunnal,
's dà chnoc Scarrail,

ann an dubhar an tuill cha robh ach rànaich 's rànail,
osnaich is acain, guidheachan 's mionnachadh,
èigheachd fhiadhaich 's crònanaich dhòlasach

Làg nam Bò,
Àirigh MhicLeòid,

fàileadh na mara, sàl 's deòir, fallas 's mùn,
fàileadh an eagail, a' ghalair 's a' bhàis,
fàileadh nam beò, fàileadh nam marbh

Beinn Thota Gormshuil
nam fear sgiamhach,

thuirteadh gun robh an long a' dol
gu Carolina a Tuath, tìr nan coille
nach teirig gu bràth

M' ionam 's mo chiall
Beinn Dubhagraich

ach tha mi a-nochd ann an Àird Ulaidh, tìr ghlas
nan achaidhean rèidh, 's far am bi mi fhìn
's ann a bhios mo chiall.

Poetry

Clues to unsolved cases
Mark Ryan Smith

That night they watched

the slow burn

of the unused outbuilding,

residents reported
a gentle pulse
of blue light.

On the hanging jackets
she smells smoke, finds
a tideline of sootstains
in the porcelain sink.

On July 15th
residents reported
the mass breakdown
of domestic appliances.

Every morning for a month
the thick smell of low tide.

The story goes
he had a talent
for the zodiac,

that he was kind of heart
but touched in some way.

A jagged glass muffled
in a bunched red shirt.

On September 13th
residents reported
a terrible taste
in the water,

and that the only thing
to rely on was the mail
never coming on time.

Dynamite day
Mark Ryan Smith

When the bomb goes off
the game stops
like a spot-the-ball.

Smoke rises
from the latest wound
in the quarry's wall

and one of the boys
scores an easy goal.
'Hey! That doesn't count.'

'Like fuck it doesn't,'
and the game
kicks back into life.

Up in the quarry
JCBs nose
the blast's spill,

while the smoke
is dragged through
thirty years –

a cut-and-paste package,
ready-made, for New York,
Baghdad or Tel Aviv.

If he'd done the right thing
Marc Innis

went to meet his mates,
we wouldn't be having
this debate. Don't believe
they're relieved that he's still
living, they louns ay fetched
a fair auld premium.

That quine he walked hame,
her name it wis Jean,
worked in the sheds,
straight shooting machine,
never easy letting her go
afore her Ma got back
fae the bingo.

A canny chiel though
kains rep goes afore
yer heid's roun the door,
that first impression ay crucial.
So, he wis happit, cooried doon,
in his ain huis
when news came through.

Yer brothers are gone,
ye've mair sisters noo,
than any mortal man
could handle. I'll tell ye
straight loun, a god
would struggle.

So, he's walking roun far boats
were built, he was built there too,
harbour of fathers. Limpets and whelks
made shite line bait, yer hert grew set
on rope, creels, nets, afore ye kaint owt,
ye were speaking correct.

Maistly still do as foam sails new,
falls like snow on streets they'll
never stroll. Chapped hands
cupped, 3 coins for a sup,
as if he grew up
in the florist window.

The doctor's advice
Marc Innis

picked up online,
where all pick-ups
occur these days.

If ye canny sleep ye
should dee summin.
Easy enough

if my brain still worked.
Took me 5 minutes
to find my shirt.

Went doon late on,
long rain keeping
all muppets in the huis.

Having the choice,
I'd be less of a man,
mair of a luxury mousse.

Wrong again,
I heard all hints, a
garbled threat of violence.

How brave they all were
from a safe distance.

Calm tae a point,
I broke baith joints.
Clach hit the coast
2 nil.

Heart Rot
Matthew Gallivan

The fungal decay of wood
at the centre of the trunk.

From a raddled elm
the blackbird reaches down
to pull the seams, stitched
into the bull carcass;

sweet-white maggots
chirping rain and laying
eggs in the quiet heart:
pale flesh for rattling beaks

hidden in the rump
of the tree

Poetry

Every year
Sharon Black

the same white morning lightflash
blanketing the Sound,

the same three skiffs with outboard motors
tugging on their orange buoys,

the same pink granite walls keeping in
the fishing stories, lambing stories,

the peat-cutting, land-draining, rebuilding stories,
stories of subsidy cuts,

depleted fish stocks, land rights,
of sons and brothers lost at sea;

keeping out
Atlantic wind and rain and six long winter months,

the stories of how idyllic
life on these islands must be.

Sheela-na-gig
Sharon Black

She looks out wearing light
across the south end of the island. The chapel
is scaffolded, interlocking poles

rising thirty feet high beyond the wall.
The opening on which she sits –
legs spread, labia

pulled wide –
is an arch of basalt and red granite,
weathered and freckled with light. A steel pole

has been thrust through.
Fencing on the other side divides the view
into twelve square frames: blue sky, two sheep

on a sill above the bay, a skein of geese
arrowing north beyond the abbey's
heavy coat of grey.

A Seat at Cailleach Farm
Sharon Black

(i)

She lumbers over marsh and machair –
coat tails flapping, stick feeling the way.

Ewes huddle by a five-bar gate.
An empty bucket rattles on a post.

The farmer's truck is absent.
The pier is empty, the dirt track too.

Only the gulls bear witness as they curve
above the fields, the pebbled yard

with its wooden bench, a brass plaque
engraved *Cailleach*.

(ii)

Don't cover me in winter
while the barn owl's still roosting,

the white heart of its face
dipped to its chest. Let me

be adrift in a bog of flag irises,
sun in my throat

and earth in my voice. Let me
take it all in, in huge gulps

then in sips. Let me lift the soft bright wings
of darkness to my lips.

(iii)

She walks and walks, her basket
spilling boulders that roll

to the sea, boulders big enough

to land a boat on, build a home.

On they tumble: basalt walkways,
cliffs of gneiss and tuff, granite columns

landing upright in the fields. From time to time
she takes a chisel

and tames a fallen rock in the image
of a hare, gannet, weasel, otter, eel.

At the bay, she tips the remnants of her cargo
into the Atlantic: stepping stones

that will be named for islands
when the animals break free.

Note: In Gaelic mythology, the Cailleach ('old woman') is a creator deity as well as a destructive Storm Hag.

Soothmoother
Maxine Rose Munro

(Originally an innocent term for incomers in a time when such were few, it has come to be seen as derogatory)

From where we stood back then,
the whole damn globe was south.
It felt good to be able to label near
everything with one word, three
syllables. A simple partitioning
of here/not here - worlds lay
at our feet, none above us.
Bedrock northern facts told
us who we were, tempered
in gales of cold
isolation.
When it was things
shifted
I don't know,
ground once solid became slippery
underfoot we fell scrabbled for
purchase on perfidious rubble
and when it stopped there we were -
wide open plains. Outwith insularity.
We had lost our way and I found
myself wondering if where we
had stood was everything
we thought it had been.

Evening Draws On at Tote
Anjali Suzanne Angel

The new house sits on the rise of the moor,
alone,
a face unknown among neighbors.

A crofthouse chimney prevails over crumbled stones,
surviving windows compete
for a sunset view.

Taking its cue from the Highland landlord,
the burn at dusk dominates the croftland
with silver.

Headlights through darkened alder and rowan
break reflections on the startled loch.

Under evening stars,
visitors' sheets hang heavy and wet,
no wind today on the isle.

A cow's bellow paints question marks in the night.

The Vanishing Point

Short Story by Olga Wojtas

See Naples and die was one thing; see Naples and vanish was quite another.

There were barricades up now on the Via Partenope in the east, preventing anyone walking the Castel dell'Ovo where half the disappearances had occurred. The Riviera di Chiaia was also blocked at the west end, where the others had gone missing. The chief was in a frenzy, he knew his job was on the line, and he had officers engaged in a fingertip search of both areas.

Laurito, not only a policeman but also a keen amateur photographer, had an embryonic theory, but it wasn't one he was prepared to share. The chief wasn't known for indulging flights of fancy. But Laurito couldn't stop thinking about vanishing points. He went home and buttonholed his son, who got consistently high marks in maths.

"If you solve a problem for me, I'll get you that computer game you want. See these two points here? What point links them?"

His son did the necessary calculations and located the top floor of an old palazzo. Laurito headed over there and stopped at the neighbourhood bar for an espresso zuccherato and some background information.

"His name's Sir William Hamilton," said the middle-aged waitress. "He's an English milor, but he gets upset if you call him that."

"Trying to be a man of the people, is he?"

"No, he's a milor, all right. He gets upset if you call him English. He's married but you never see her. Keeps her locked up for fear of her running off with one of our handsome lads." She eyed Laurito critically. "He'll probably let you in."

The milor let him in, and Laurito was relieved to find he spoke Italian. "Dreadful business, officer, all these people simply disappearing off the face of the earth. I haven't the faintest idea what I can do to help, but if you think there's something ... "

"I'd like to look out of your windows," said Laurito.

"Be my guest." Sir William took him into a small kitchen with a window overlooking the bay. Laurito peered out. He could see straight down from the Via Partenope to the barricades but his view to the right was blocked.

"Could I see next door?" he asked.

"Certainly." Sir William led him into a bedroom, which Laurito noted was entirely masculine, with no sign of a woman's presence. He went to the window, but still couldn't get a clear view to the right.

"Sorry, I need to go to the next door room."

Sir William's expression changed. "My wife is next door. She's unwell. Not to put too fine a point on it, she's dying."

Laurito, taken aback, murmured something he hoped was appropriate.

"That's why we're here," Sir William went on. "I wanted to get her away from the dreadful Scottish climate. The light here makes her feel better, so at least her last days will have been eased."

"Of course I don't want to disturb her," said Laurito. "But would it be at all possible for me to go in briefly to have a look?"

Sir William sighed. "You've got a job to do. I understand."

He opened the door. "Darling?" he called softly. "You've got a visitor. He's come to see the beautiful view from your window."

"How lovely," came a faint voice. "Do bring him in. My beautiful view."

Laurito felt his breath suspend as though he had fallen into the bay itself. The walls were entirely covered in mirrors, reflecting a dazzling scene that was simultaneously more real and less real than the one beyond the wall of glass. By the window, lying on a day bed, was a pale woman swaddled in a satin quilt.

Laurito, still disconcerted by the dual image, made his way to the huge window. "Forgive the intrusion – I won't be a moment," he said, feeling he shouldn't look at the dying woman.

"My beautiful view," she repeated.

Laurito looked out. This was it. When he stood just here, he saw the two vanishing points. At both barricades, there was activity. Police cars were arriving, sirens on, lights flashing, officers jumping out and standing in irresolute little groups. He was aware of other noises, like voices, as though they were in the room with him.

"The neighbours below," said Sir William. "They play their television much too loud, but my wife says she enjoys it – it's company."

Laurito could almost imagine that he heard the voices calling, calling names: Paola, Vincenzo, Giovanni.

"Thank you," he said. "I'm sorry to have intruded."

"Got what you came for?" asked Sir William as he showed him out.

"You've been very helpful," said Laurito. He knocked on the door of the flat below, but there was no answer. The woman in the bar said it was unoccupied. Laurito decided it was time for a search warrant.

"Oh, God, do you think he knows?" asked Sir William's wife.

"He can't possibly know," said Sir William, hauling a tripod and camera from underneath the day bed. "But he's a smart biscotto. I'm sure he suspects something."

"Oh, William, are you certain this will work?"

"Not certain, my darling, but hopeful. Ever hopeful. Let us have faith."

Sir William set up the camera and watched Laurito walk across the piazza, then go into a street where he was hidden from view. Sir William counted carefully. He focused the camera and pressed the shutter.

"Tell me!" said his wife.

Sir William brought her the camera and showed her the image on the screen. "There. Success. So now we can capture them at any vanishing point, whether we can see it or not. Isn't technology marvellous?"

He laid down the camera and held her in his arms. "All that blood, my darling. You're going to be better in no time."

And another faint voice was added to those behind the mirror, Laurito calling out for his wife and son. ■

Prisoner

A Short Play by Phil Baarda

A dark cell-like room.
Two chairs.

Jak Two chairs.
They make do as a bed.

He arranges and lays down on them.

Or sometimes a writing desk.

He arranges them, and sits, writing.

At times, when I'm being fanciful,
they're a boat,

He arranges them as such.

or a train.

He arranges them.

Or a deckchair. And parasol.

He arranges them.

Go-kart.

He arranges them.

Occasionally I might arrange them like
they're in opposite corners of a boxing ring,

He arranges them.

and then I might fight with myself.

Once I made myself a house, and hid inside it
for many hours,

He arranges them.

Another time, I built a hospital and mended
myself after I'd beaten myself up in the ring.
A hot air balloon. How cool would that be?
I could, fly away.

The door opens.

Officer It's time..

Jak Now?

Officer Now, prisoner 82914367A.

Jak stands on one of the chairs.

The officer throws him a rope.

Jak fashions a noose and puts it round his neck.

The officer throws the other end around a high beam.

Jak Do I kick the chair?
How?
Can't you kick it away?

Officer No.
You know I can't.

Jak You can't?

Officer Sorry.

Jak tries to kick the chair he's standing on, but can't. He tries several times, unsuccessfully.

Jak Howbaout I make it into a horse instead?

Poetry

Time in Tatters
Sally Evanz

sounds of orchestra in a northern garden
silent piano where the record player turned,
cigar, blind man in the country orchard,
a small wasps' nest and pear tree huge and frail,

thirsty wait for the lush red pears on grass
ranks of may trees in dusky blossom,
the beck ran south of all, the dead cow,
tents in the glade and the magpie tree,

Japanese anemones, pumice stone walls,
girls playing tennis then winter aconites so many
old maid studies fairies, permission
to walk round seeking her not so recent youth,

sacred wood and the pig man, the one-armed gardener
the lady standing in the middle of the lawn
wouldn't you like to go and live in town
this empty photograph of a framework

tennis girl died last month met her granddaughter
someone else remembered the pig man's wife
just the tallest trees no orchard cigar smoke
time attainable in tatters only is

Canada
Ian McDonough

Five hours in from Prestwick to Detroit
we peered down on Labrador's wastes,
a randomness recalling nothing
you could match against memories,
sparking fear from deep within your spine.

Canada rushed beneath us, a light
each fifty miles or so, like stars
at the farthest edges of our universe,
stretched by frightful expansion.

Solitude was a boulder in my mouth:
around me the sleeping breath
of fellow passengers waxed and waned.
Dozing beside me
you whispered from your dream...
Each of us is on a lifeboat, drifting.

John o' Groats Sunday, May Day
Sharon Gunason Pottinger

The police cordon tape flaps lightly in the breeze
cheerful blue and white as if to say
Bear with us for a moment and all will be fine again
No one believes it. Even before we know it is a body
a woman's body found on the wrong side
of the sea-stone divide here on the edge of the world.

The police, the coast guard, even the ferry man focus
on the work at hand, neutral expressions, avoiding the eyes
of those of us who stumbled into this woman's death.
The ferry man hurries to the boat, schedule to keep he says
his eyes say *I've seen this before and hoped never*
to see it again. Tonight he'll hold his wife a bit closer
a bit longer and she'll know not to ask why.

Diving Belle
Linda Menzies

Immaculate in her dignity, she drowses in beige,
jolted from a half-formed dream by a distant car horn.
Her bones grind as weighted years shift on a cushion.

The dream lingers as she plunges into memories
of Portobello pool, where her young body dives
through salinated mist, twisting in a parabola of energy.
The wrinkled surface corrugates, releasing silver coins,
opaque pearls; the girl emerges seal-sleek, exulted,
breasting towards the lapped steps and chrome rail.

A suicide blonde – dyed by her own hand – sits poolside.
On guard, she knits briskly, red lipsticked mouth counting.
Her chair creaks vault-loud as wool speckles, damply.

The girl springs from the weathered board, the move
suddenly clumsy, as she fumbles the swallow dive.
Her head bangs the board, but she surfaces, groggy.

The lifeguard clicks her needles without pausing,
Calls out: "Dinnae dae that, hen, you'll brak' the board!"

The dream empties: the old woman gazes
beyond the blossom flaring from perfect trees,
and smiles at the memory of the young woman
Who once held silver aloft.

Bennachie from a train, October
Mandy Macdonald

cloud washes the Mither Tap
wraps her in her own weather

withered, seed-exploded willowherb,
army of feather dusters by the railwayside

a hawk hangs over the stubble-shaven fields
their rolled gleanings tidied for the sun's inspection

trees shrug off their summer clothes
gold and green fall, and are wind-rustled away

autumn cleans the land

A Question of Honour

Short Story by Ian Tallach

It goes without saying – technology has changed our lives beyond what anyone imagined just ten years ago.

So why say it?

Just to make sure we're all on the same page. Well, the same screen, if you like. Language lags behind, as always. Language languishes. Ha! The old ones are the best. Is that an old one? Probably. There's nothing new these days. Except technology.

I've got to tell you something. But, first you have to know – I'm not a luddite! Let all reactionaries step aside. Defeatists, gainsayers, regressive elements – be gone! And let the future in. The future is now … now. It used to be so distant: futuristic, if you like, but that's all in the past, that kind of thinking. What I mean is, let us all be grateful for the revolution … of convenience. Together. We can do this thing together. Count me in!

But, I *do* need to tell you about the party last Thursday night, at our place. Mainly colleagues, straight from work, fresh from the office, not yet fully disengaged from whatever they'd been doing. Everyone still at their interface, the flicker of computer screens behind their eyes. Well, I'd forgotten we'd invited this old-timer. He's our neighbour. Always talking to us in the lift. We couldn't really *not* invite him. Eustace is his name. D'you know anyone called Eustace?! Thought not. The man is 85 or thereabouts.

Anyway, he makes an entrance at exactly the right time - he and his wheelchair. The guests have almost all arrived but no-one's talking. Interaction put on hold while ties are loosened, drinks are poured and nervous eyes take in the room. Some sip their wine but hold it in their mouths; the silence is so thick, that even swallowing might draw too much attention. I swear it's *that* bad! If we had a camera on the ceiling – a go-pro, maybe – filming this would be of interest to psychologists. Psycho*patholo*gists, more like. Ha! Not funny, really. Bridge, my partner, and I are serving drinks. At least we've got something to do, but I'm embarrassed beyond words. This is *our* party. *Our* fault. And I can't even speak!

So, Eustace has no place to wheel his chair but to the middle of the room; the peripheries are all used up. He brings with him a smell of pipe-tobacco. Pairs of eyes that had been darting furtively about now find a place to rest: a focal point. And seeing this, he laughs … throws back his head and laughs. A long, sonorous, wheezy, chuckle! All 90 pounds of him, bent over in that wheelchair, helpless as a baby, gasping for another breath. He coughs. But when he finally inhales, he looks around and, I can only guess, he sees a sort of desperate expectation in their faces. A hope … for levity, a safety valve … a social laxative. Something like that.

I hand him a glass of merlot, which he guzzles. He wipes the stain from his lips with the back of his hand. 'Girls and boys,' he says, clearly enjoying himself. (Why not, I say. Company directors, area managers and systems analysts all put in their place! Brilliant!) And there's something about his casual tone, a sort of gentle mockery, like Dylan in his prime, that makes it feel like he's addressing us from somewhere else. A younger, freer time, I guess, when things were more spontaneous. Roles are reversed now. *He's* young: we're old. Now *we're* the ones who're standing stiffly to attention, in obeyance to some stultifying protocol. 'Virtual tradition', maybe you could call it. Ha! You've got to laugh.

Then he says something cringeworthy, but funny too - 'Double-u, double-u, double-u! Who-the-*hell* chose the only letter with three syllables? Obviously, someone who didn't speak! In any event, I was in the library, trying to send an e-mail. *Trying*, being the operative word.' A titter passes round the room, like some dousing from a sprinkler, nipped in the bud before it can get out of hand.

'I'm sorry, folks,' he hangs his head. 'I'm interrupting. You youngsters have a party. Don't mind me.'

There's an awkward pause. Eyes shift in my direction. The blush is rising up my face. I stammer out -'N … no. You're not interrupting anything. The floor is yours.'

He chuckles again. The atmosphere is still up-tight, but something lifts. 'Well, alright,' he clears his throat. 'The librarian – lovely girl – you folks would say she was 'a hottie', but *I* won't; last thing I want is people saying 'dirty old man' behind my back!' There's another round of suppressed laughter like a tiny wave collapsing on a pebble beach. Then he continues. 'Anyway, this librarian comes over. She looks like she's about to whisper, but she doesn't. Just like all the others in that bloody place, she practically *shouts*. It's embarrassing! Not so long ago you'd hear a pin-drop in the library. There was a kind of etiquette; people came there to read, *not* have a party! There was a sort of unspoken unspoken-ness: almost something sacred about being surrounded by knowledge.'

'Why did you call her over?' I ask, trying out my voice to see it's still there.

'Because of honour!' he smiles with his eyes and lifts a trembling forefinger to point at no-one-in-particular. 'Well, to be exact, how to *spell* it. Honour. It was underlined in red, in my e-mail. That's why I called her over. Well, she says I need to click 'review' and then check 'spelling and grammar.' And it tells me to spell it h-o-n-o-r! Well, I suppose you can guess the rest – she said someone must have set spellcheck to the American version. Ah! Relief. I wasn't losing my marbles! I could spell it h-o-n-o-u-r if I liked. As for the Yanks: each to their own. Life's too short to get curmudgeonly.'

I handed him another glass of wine.

'Well' he slurs, after guzzling that one too. 'Next thing I know I'm on this thing called Wiki … ehm …'

'Wikipedia?' Jane, normally the boldest of team managers, is reduced to mumbling behind the back of her hand.

'Thankyou! Wikipedia, exactly! It tells me, just in case we need *another* definition, that honour is 'the idea of a bond between a person and society.' Sounds pretty abstract. I looked at the pictures. There were two: one of a nobleman in the 18th century, defending his honour – pistols at dawn and all that. And the other depicts a Japanese Samurai about to commit seppuku: ritual disembowelment. Heaven help us! I can almost hear you all conclude that honour is a *bad* thing. Throw it out! It's holding us back. Chose the opposite – *dis*honour! Either way, it's just an abstract noun.' He pauses for effect. 'Like love. Yes, love's a bit archaic too. People do the *cruellest* things for love!' He's gritting his false teeth by now and forcing out the words. 'Life would be so much more convenient without the things we can't define: qualities, concepts, abstractions. Well … true.' He looks around the room. 'BUT, trouble is, we might just be defined BY them. So, boys and girls – this is my parting shot – *love* each other. *Honour* each other. Don't ever forget! This is the stuff of life! When you're my age, you'll see. But looking back it's all too late. I wish I'd *loved* more, *honoured* other people more. Yes. It has to do with other people. It's *all* to do with other people.'

At this, he collapses in a fit of coughs and splutters. And we're thinking this could really be his parting shot. It certainly *did* sound valedictory. And at that moment, Jane chokes on her pinot noir. She grits her teeth, but this only ensures the purple mist is evenly distributed to every corner of the room! We all explode with laughter. Eustace slaps his thigh, fighting for breath and almost going blue. He rallies, though, and smiles, accepts another wine, downs it and tells us he must go. 'But, thank you all!' he says. I wheel him to his flat across the landing, followed by a round of cheers, applause and hoots.

He might as well have *been* Bob Dylan.■

Highland Pebble

By Frances Ainslie

I found a pebble in my pocket, peach-skin soft. It's a polished cabochon pebble smoothed by endless tides. Splintered from rock and abandoned by a loch-side. It's only a daft wee pebble, a keepsake, a memory, a talisman. Washed pale as a winter moon and moulded by a mermaid's thumb. A pebble that glints with mica flecks in sunlight. Its journey told in scars of silver. A simple pebble, that took two million years to fit snug in a bairn's hand; to fit perfectly in a pocket.■

The Neil Gunn Writing Competition – a fine wide sweep

By Kenny Taylor

The Philosopher sat on a half-buried boulder which was warm with the sun. He was well up now towards the ridge that gave on the moor and he commanded a fine wide sweep of country. The liberation of the hills was upon him, of the wide stretch of valley land that went away towards the town, of the sky that ran with the high horizons of the earth, a summer-blue sky alive yet half-dreamy with white clouds, distant horizons with the blue arch flattening beyond them into unimaginable remoteness.

It's 75 years since those words, describing Tom, the philosopher-hero of Neil Gunn's 'The Serpent' first appeared in print. I think of them at times when I visit the viewpoint memorial to the writer, a monolith surrounded by carved stones and inscribed words up on the Heights of Brae to the northwest of Dingwall. This was the area where Neil Gunn and his wife Daisy lived for twelve years; where he wrote more than half his 20 novels. His preference was to write in the morning and walk in the afternoon, taking a route that often crossed the ground where the monument now stands.

I sometimes wonder if the idea for the title of his novel 'Wild Geese Overhead' came to him on one of those walks, as the grey geese swirled down to the fields and bays of the Moray Firth below.

It's decades since the idea for the monument first sprang to the minds of Ann Yule and her late husband, Kerr Yule. The notion formed during a walk on the Heights. From that concept, the Neil Gunn Memorial Trust was formed, leading to an official opening at the viewpoint on 31st October, 1987. Lucky the folk who were there on that day, to join Sorley MacLean and Jessie Kesson for the unveiling. Lucky the writers who have been inspired by what is now the Neil Gunn Trust since then, both in their own work, entered for the biennial competition, and in occasional overviews in lectures of the great novelist's writing and of concepts suggested by his work.

More than a decade ago, Christine Russell wrote a feature in Northwords Now Issue 7 to celebrate the first twenty-one years of the Neil Gunn Trust. In that, she quoted some of Neil Gunn's words, extracted from his personal diary of 1940 and used in a commemorative programme produced for the opening of the memorial viewpoint. Reading them in the context of current politics, those words are as true now in a wider context as they were nearly 80 years ago:

Behind all the calculations of the intellect, behind the megalomania of a leader, behind the religion of an economic system, there is that individual, the individual who suffers, who dies, who loves. When we forget that individual, when we forget to pay tribute, above all things, to the living core and flame of the individual life, at that moment we are heading for the organisation of death.

The first Neil Gunn Writing Competition (won by Bess Ross, later of 'A Bit of Crack and Car Culture' fame and more) was launched the year after the unveiling of the monument. The current one, now open for entries of new prose and poetry and the 15th in the series, was launched at an event in Eden Court Theatre this September. This followed a 'lecture', shaped as an amalgam of readings, musings and recollections, by the life-affirming Scottish makar, Jackie Kay, herself a lead judge of a previous competition.

Fifteen competitions over thirty years – and counting – is an impressive track record and a growing legacy. Ann Yule has been involved from the outset, trustee Charlotte Macarthur for the last seven competitions. "What keeps us all going," says Charlotte, "is a common belief in the importance of encouraging writers of all ages and stages and providing an opportunity for them to have their writing read by expert judges. Neil Gunn himself went out of his way to encourage and support other writers and we hope our competition follows his example. We have plenty of evidence from entrants over the years that winning a prize has been a significant step in their development as writers."

That is undoubtedly true for the now internationally acclaimed author, Michel Faber. Speaking as lead judge of prose entries at the prize ceremony for the 14th competition last year, Michel explained why he had travelled more than 600 miles, from the south of England to Dingwall, to be there:

"The Neil Gunn prize has been quite significant in my personal history. My wife Eva won it in 1995, not long after we emigrated to Scotland, with her short story 'Family Business'. I won it in 1997 with 'Half A Million Pounds And A Miracle'. The Neil Gunn award, along with several other awards I won around that same time, helped to launch my subsequent career as an internationally published writer. My wife had no such ambitions for a literary career; she was happy being a secondary school teacher. She could get around to writing more stories when she had more time, maybe after she retired."

Sadly, that was not to be. Eva died in 2014. Now Michel hopes to work on unfinished short stories she left behind, to bring them "to a state where people can read them."

Legacy. Also still a crucial aspect of the writing competition, which includes the use of quotations from Neil Gunn's work to provide themes for each of its sections. "We do this for the schools sections, which are open to pupils attending Highland Council schools, as well as the adult poetry and short story sections, which are open to writers worldwide," says Charlotte.

"We hope this acts a reminder to entrants of Neil Gunn's legacy. We've been delighted this year to have help in achieving this aim from James Cook and Jenny Wilson, who've been working with Highland schools to raise attainment in literacy. Jenny has put together some lesson plans and also written a great introduction to Neil Gunn for pupils.

"You can find all these resources by visiting James Cook's blog at www.highlandliteracy.com"

The trustees are also delighted, she says, that the lead judge for the current competition is distinguished columnist and broadcaster, Ruth Wishart.

From the previous competition, Michel Faber's words still resound for the present one: "If you have a story to tell, or a deep feeling to express in poetry, then tell that story and express that feeling.

"Neil Gunn himself believed in encouraging unpublished and upcoming writers. Some of you have the potential to embark on a career as writers; others may simply have one thing which is trapped in your brain, which is waiting for you to find the right words to give it an existence outside of you. So, in the days and months and years to come, I hope you will find those words." ■

The Boy

Short Story by Jo Gilbert

It made a car crash out of my best friend, stretched her flat stomach like a balloon, she cursed and swigged Gaviscon like a wino from a brown paper bag for 8 months.

When it finally came out after days of false alarms, it tore her from hole to hole, 38 stitches in all and when I saw her, she looked like a cock-eyed Victorian asylum patient, all mad curls and shell-shocked. Congratulations, it's a boy.

I'm glad it was sleeping the first time I saw it otherwise I might have accused: what the fuck did you do to my friend? I was only there to see her anyway, but didn't say, just nodded and smiled before turning away from the wrinkled alien version of its Dad in the Moses basket.

The thing was awake next time and I didn't coo like the others, I don't have a maternal bone in my body and I was thirty years old and I'd never even held a baby.

Do you want to hold him?

No.

Here.

You would have thought she'd handed me a ten-pound slug by the look on my face and I saw the baby's face contort like mine oh fuck no its gonna start greetin. I'm nae good with babies I stated and politely handed back the living machine that did nothing but eat poop puke and cry.

As much as I tried to avoid what I called The Boy, my friend had him now and no time to herself, so The Boy went everywhere we did. I tried to be a friend and I passed things politely from the giant bag that held everything a baby would ever need and more and I took my turn at pushing the pram and feeding the thing but managed to avoid the nappies for a long time and thank God for that because that arse was stinking – how can something so small create such evil?

I had no intentions of forgiving The Boy for hurting my friend. I kept my distance, but she had other ideas. Rabid early morning calls went something like this:

Where are all the people who said they'd help me when I had this baby? You were one of them I don't care if you're ill, get down here! I haven't had a fag since 5.30 this morning, where are you? The wee man has been calling for you.

Talk about a punch in the guts. Calling? For me? Why would be my first question. I made up terrible stories, refused to speak to him in baby language, told him he smells all the time and called him things like bap heid, tattie heid, muffin boy and anything else apart from his real name. I wasn't aware that babies could 'like' people. He couldn't even say my name properly. It was like a ch-ch noise and then he'd clench his whole body like he was getting an electric shock. Apparently, that's what he did when he was excited.

You would have thought she'd handed me a ten-pound slug by the look on my face

Can you take him a couple of afternoons a week?

She was demented and needed to go back to work.

You know I know fuck all about kids.

Oh please. I don't want to farm him out to people he doesn't know.

The first time I took The Boy out on my own, I was handed four hundred pounds in cash. To change it into pesetas for her holiday.

I trust you, she said.

The magnitude of that statement hit me like an artic lorry. In my former life as a full time professional dosser, nobody and I mean nobody, not even my own Mother would have trusted me to go to the shop with 50p for a pint of milk. I'd never have come back with it. This woman knew everything about me, my past and here she was, handing me four hundred quid of her own money and her child. I still can't name the feeling, but it kept me going in some of my darkest times.

He was kinda cute for a rugrat. People would comment on it all the time. He's not mine, I'd qualify before anyone had a chance to think it. The Boy was never a whiney kid or a high-pitched squealer, aye, you know - that scream - the one that could smash glass and explode brains at the same time.

We, I mean me and The Boy just giggled and capered, giggled and capered, giggled and capered. It was usually me being told off for taking things too far. I tickled him mercilessly and I liked making him laugh. We began to bond, the friend wrecker and me, despite my distance he did not want to leave my side fucking hell I couldn't even pee. I'll just be a minute I shout as I make a run for it and I've hardly sat down for two seconds before his fat little sausage fingers appear under the bathroom door I'm having pee I shout, and The Boy replies with a muffled jooojooo as he tries to slide his face through the wood. Now, The Boy is making me laugh and I feel a weird flutter in my chest.

Muffin Boy would fall asleep, holding my hand from the snug car seat and my friend would get all teary eyed and think it was adorable. He'd rub my scars with such gentle concern, looking up with a frown sore bits jojo and I'd smile, all better now and walk away. What am I supposed to say? How do you explain self-harm to a toddler?

I learned children go through stages, phases and odd behaviours, ones that aren't as weird as my own mummy would have me believe. Bap-head went through an 'oh, I'll just break my heart any time someone I love' leaves phase. Fuck's sake, can you get him off me I plead. Mummy peels him off my leg. I'm coming back soon! I could not bear that snotty face of genuine heartbreak, awkward pat on the shoulder okay then bye love you and I scuttled away. I could still hear him screaming from around the corner. Waaah, jooojooo. I never wanted a human to have that much power over me. I wondered how my friend bears it.

My little best friend helped me defrost, become a real human. The Boy and I grew up together and he taught me how to laugh and play. He doesn't have any hang-ups or bullshit, he just loves, unconditionally. This wee soul has taught me more about love than any other person on this planet.

Now, he's not so wee. Twelve going on fifty and I call him by his name, but occasionally still The Boy because we think it's funny. I told my Mum, I want to go back to uni and be a writer and I got waves of fear and panic oh my God you can't do that what will happen if and a raft of assorted barriers as to why I couldn't. I ran it past my brother, who is a logical Vulcan, often scolding me for being into all that 'tree hugging hippie shite'. He's my voice of reason sometimes though and I got supportive, yet practical advice well how will you afford it etcetera waffle waffle. I told my best friend and she was like yeah go for it, jack in your job you hate and do it and The Boy's face lit up and said are you going to write a book and I said aye and without a flicker of doubt he said straight away can you dedicate it to me? He believed. So, I believed him, and here we are.

For Seamus, because he asked first. ■

Going Home

Flash Story by Trudy Duffy – Wigman

Daddy says the bus is going all the way to Inverness, through the hills and through the mountains.

'Can me and you go to Inverness, Daddy?'

'Maybe one day, son. But not in the winter. See, it is already getting dark. It will be pitch black by the time you come into Perth. That is far enough for today.'

The Big Blue bus is coming. It stops at the bus stop. There is a funny yellow man on the side of the bus.

'Daddy, that man is also going to Inverness, isn't he?'

The door swings open. Two ladies step out and then a man who is as old as Gramps, though he doesn't walk with a stick. Then Mummy sticks her head through the door and waves.

'Alright, young man,' says Daddy, 'in you go.' And he lifts me up the first step. My rucksack is in the way. My new jammies are in there, the ones Daddy bought me yesterday. He's kept the old ones, for the next time I am coming. Rupert is also in my rucksack. Rupert is a bear and he and I are always together.

Mummy helps me up the next two steps. The steps are really high. I say hello to the bus driver. He says hello too. Mummy has a window seat for me. I sit down and Mummy gives me a drink of water. The door of the bus closes and I haven't said goodbye to Daddy. He is outside the window and waves at me. I wave back. Mummy looks ahead. She doesn't look happy.

The Big Blue bus drives away from the bus stop with me and Mummy and Rupert in it. We are only going to Perth but the bus is going all the way to Inverness. ■

Dàin

Sgoil nan Seanmhairean, Phangane

Maggie Rabatski

'S milis leath' an tràth
nuair a thilgeas i dhith
aodach luaithreach na banntraich;

sruth-aoibhneis a' sileadh tro cuislean
nuair a shuaineas i uimpe
sàri àlainn na sgoile,

dath pinc dàna na h-ibhis
a' dearbhadh nach boin i do dhuine
seach dhi fhèin.

Nach iad seanairean a' bhaile a chlisgeas —
cà 'n deach a' chailleach a chrùb seachad
gun fhiosta na h-èideadh thaibhseil?

cà 'n deach a' mhàldachd
bha cho tarraingeach
an latha thugar thairis i gu pòsadh
gun i na dusan bliadhna dh'aois?

Cha chrom i ceann riutha tuilleadh.
Tha i 'g ionnsachadh mar a leughas i
an Leabhar Naomh air a son fhèin.

Cha mheas i ach am fear uasal
a dh'aithnich gun robh gliocas domhain nan seanmhairean
truaillte le nàire neo-litearachd,

Is thug e dhaibh cothrom sgoile
nach d'fhuair iad nan òige,
agus an trusgan pinc òirdheirc
gus an dathadh air ais thuca fhèin.

Mas ruig i gàrradh na sgoile
tha gnothaich aice sa bhanc'.
Bheir am bancair uaibhreach an t-òrdan
'Cuir làrach d' òrdaig an siud. An siud!'
Ach 's ann a sgrìobhas i h-ainm
gach litir cruinn coileanta,
is tuigidh e teas dearg na nàire
a' losgadh tro chuislean fhèin.

A Cheart Chuairt

Màrtainn Mac an t-Saoir

'S ann a' ruith na ceart chuairt a tha sinn
ged a dh'fhaodamaid a ruith na b' fheàrr:
dh'fhaodte an t-astar a thomhas le barrachd faicill
gun uimhir a chiont air ar n-anail.

Dh'fhaodadh aire na bu mhotha
à bith againn air na h-iongantasan timcheall oirnn:
saoghal gun tìm seach na h-uairean goirid rin gearradh no an call no am mealladh le aois.

Dh' fhaodamaid colainn nach robh cho coimheach a chosg
àireamh na b' fhìrinniche a phrìneadh air ar broilleach – le taghadh mu a bhrìgh – agus
nochdadh san aon sunnd ge b' e an t-sìde gus glaodhaich dhan fheadhainn a bhios ri call,
a tha a' toirt droinneadh air an fheadhainn a bhios ri buinnig, gun faighneachd ciamar no
mun latha air am bi an ath chuairt.

Cafaidh

Caoimhin MacNèill

anns an ùine a thug e dhuinn
cofaidh ceart
a dheasachadh
nach deach am bogha-froise
dùbailte
a-mach a bith

An Latha

Caoimhin MacNèill

an latha ag uinneagachadh
mo mhial-chù a' cliseadh
sradag a' chianalais nam bhroilleach

Fuachd umha m' fhallais

Dàibhidh Eyre

Nam sheasamh air bonn a' ghlinne
sna h-Ailpeannan. Ann an lios
tha flùraichean ruadha,
purpaidh, buidhe, geala
agus achadh
làn fhàileadh na costaige.

Bòidhchead.
Aoibhneas.
Sìth.

Ach choimhead mi an-àird gu Mont Pourri,
a chaidh a bhuannachadh le sreapadairean
san naoidheamh linn deug,
agus chuala mi na clagan troma
a bha timcheall mhuinealan nam bò -

agus bha mi air ais mìle bliadhna
aig bonn na h-eighe mòire,
's i a' gearradh a' ghlinne bhon talamh,
agus cuideam an t-saoghail fhuair, ghil sin
a' laighe orm gun mhaitheanas.

Agus bha mi gun chomas gluasad -
reòthte agus dall -

's mi a' faireachdainn
fhuachd umha m' fhallais
nam shùilean
agus air cùl m' amhaich fhèin.

Canada VI – Thall 's a-Bhos

Eòghan Stiùbhart

Tha na cuantan air an traoghadh
Chan fhàs na ròsan tuilleadh
Tha an lios làn de phreasan loma

Tha an uair sin gu dòigheil
nam shuidhe ris a' chonasg bhuidhe
's cuimhne leam do bhòidhchead

Canada VII – Brataichean

Duilleag dhearg air talamh geal
Gealach is Rionnag is Crann na Fala
Leòmhann agus Craobh an Daraich
Trì-dhathach le Reul na Mara

Canada VIII - Coyote

Chuala mi coyote a' comhartaich
anns a' choille gu cleasmhor
a' feuchainn ri foill fhaighinn orm
agus m' fheòil fhuasgladh far mo chnàmhan

Canada IX – Dithis Fhuamhairean

Nuair a thàinig am fuamhaire
gu tìr
bha fear eile a' feitheamh ris

Fionn Mac Cumhaill agus Glosscap
ag amharc air a chèile
agus a' tuigsinn
gur e na daoine beaga suarach
a chuireadh gu bàs iad
air a' cheann thall

Canada X – In Our Hearts We Behold The Hebrides

Thig air ais cuide rium
dha na beanntan
's dha na làithean ùra

Poetry

Rhapsody
Phil Baarda

Armpit's a good one.
So's groin. How about
facetious? Pretty good.
There's also jurisdiction.
Scummy? Frisk? Zit?
All crackers, not half.
Try these: socket, gruel,
pulchritude. Ah, pulchritude.
A beautiful word.

DNA On Iona
Leonie Charlton

Black and tan border collie
broad-backed as the Suffolk tup by the hostel
pads by on time-loosened pasterns

he holds my gaze, I see them then
those lean ancestors, still coming by, going by
in his wool-flecked eye.

Ten Minutes of Weather Away
Leonie Charlton

In your writing shed an off-white wooden sill
dimpled with fly shit and burnt matches
balances a window pane, a jar, an eagle

feather as wide as your fist
that a man from twenty-four years ago
gave you just the other day

early sunshine takes all that in

through spiders' webs which
seem crystalline with time, yet
if you brush them with the back of your hand they'll disappear

you know that because you did it just the other day
on that other wooden sill, in that bothy
ten minutes of weather away from here)

and they resolved to nothing, absolutely nothing

around a cassette tape -
Bob Dylan's *Freewheelin*
that hadn't been played in decades.

This morning, out beyond the feather and fly-shit
you see something akin to cloud-shadow
move across Ben Cruachan, graceful as a Goldie

and you have the human-most luxury
of wondering
how time might dissolve on the tongue.

Wheesht, mo ghràidh
Arun Sood

In the morning Gaga lit a fire
after crumpling Sunday Post pages
into flammable orbs and placing
them beneath the kindling and peat

Her swollen hands clasped tight
the tinder that grated against the
Bluebell matchbox from which
I had read football trivia to my uncle

Fire catching, she ambled to the kitchen
to boil milk for breakfast after washing
dram glasses and brushing crumbs
from the bacon pieces and biscuits

The drinkers, wheesht *mo ghràidh*, lay asleep.

Peatfire (Proustian)
Arun Sood

stacking
kindling
placing
peat
blowing
ember

your hands, in mine

.

Suicide Mango
Juliet Antill

September, and soft plump pendulums
dangle from mama-mango

each gilded orb marking time
in the hungry breeze.

A sharp gust loosens
the maternal bond

and a single fruit falls,
skims fearlessly the steep

green awning;
it lands on concrete

rupturing its flawless skin
scattering the sunlight of its flesh.

Newcomers
Robin Munro

Seven swans fly from beyond
winter drifting low,
seven wild and singing swans
drifting as the snow.

We will share in darker days
lifted by their sheen,
we will breathe their kindred air
wilder, northern, keen.

Eviction
Robin Munro

Summers of sharing,
swallows and our kind,
homes behind the Solway winds
around an old farm yard.

Appreciation.
Property has value added
without ivy, nest sites, crevices
and me.

And swallows?

Tell them as they cross
increasing deserts,
pass a day as *hirondelles*,
to seek a northern remembered steading,
tell them Farmer Brown requires
a better return than theirs

The Whole Hog

Short Story by Isobel Rutland

The sun swung around the gazebo, sizzlin his bald patch. Turnin it the same shade as his face that was hot fae the smoke waftin up fae the pig.

The bloody pig. Literally, the bloody pig.

Kevin stabbed it wi a skewer, as far as the nib would go. He held his breath, praying the juices would run clear, seeing stars as he bent to clock the steady drip drippin of bleed in the tray.

It was the heat; that was all.

He righted himself but kept his head bowed as he prodded at the charred meat, feart to glance up in case a hungry queue began forming, all slavering for a slice. Did they nae understand a beast that size would take hours to cook?

There was a mix up wi the dates and instead of the hog arriving yesterday evening, as planned, it had been trotting about the park. Mistakes happen when your boss is best pal's wi the fermer. He'd rocked up wi his trailer at noon, crackin a joke. What happened to Miss Piggy when she lost her voice? – She became disgruntled. Kevin hadn't laughed, out of principle. As far as he could make out the only Muppet was himsel for even attempting the roast in such a short time. He turned the spit up, high as it would go.

That's when he spotted him wi his shirtsleeves rolled up so aabody could get an eyeful of the flash Rolex he was wearing. It was his boss, Plook. Though Kevin wouldna dare call him that to his face. It was what he was kent as at school.

He came stormin out of the gazebo wi an armful of rustic buns, almost trippin on a crate of craft beer. Kevin's throat was parched. He could be doing wi a cold one. He hadna thought like that in a lang time. He darena even peep at the booze piled high in that wee tent. He'd nae idea where aabody was going to hide if the rain came on, because there wasna room in there. Fat, dark clouds were already gathering up the Dee. There was no way Plook would let them shelter in his fancy new-build, nae wi grassy shoes on.

Plook's real name was Warwick Nicol, who enjoyed the last laugh when his pimples dried up and his business took off. He was what folk admired, a self-made man. He started wi the local chippy and, ower forty years, built it up into a successful restaurant chain, flogging nuggets and burgers to families like Kevin's. Plook's wife, Lara, was a bit on the plump side, but that was only to be expected wi aa the chips. Kevin managed the Peterhead outlet, where business was brisk, something he should've felt proud of, but wasn't.

'Lara needs these. I'll be back in a minute.'

Kevin breathed easier as Plook disappeared behind a glossy laurel hedge. The popping of corks and fowk laughing floated on the breeze. Kevin and the spit were plonked down wind, so the smoke wouldn't bother guests. Naebody worried that the smoke might bother Kevin.

'So this if far you're hiding. Is it nae ready yet, Kev? Harris and Flora think their throats hiv been cut.'

Stevie, the eldest of his two brothers, looked at hame on Plook's well-kept lawn, wi his pressed shorts and a t-shirt Kevin assumed was on-trend.

His brothers both started as roughnecks offshore. Hard, heavy grafting shovin pipes clartit in mud, working their way steadily to good jobs wi plump pension schemes. They bought big hooses, splashed out on four by fours - things he'd never afford managing a glorified chippy.

'There's salad and jacket potatoes,' he offered.

'Jacket potatoes. Hark at you! Could you nae just say a baked tattie?'

'Far are they?'

'Who?'

'Harris and Flora.'

'We'd to leave them in the car. Permata wasna happy but Plook was feart they'd dig up his bulbs.'

'Dinna call him that.'

'Fit?'

'You ken, fit. I'll lose my job if he hears.'

'So that's aa you have to offer – a bit o lettuce and a tattie?'

'I saw Warwick wi some rustic buns.'

Stevie laughed so that the beer he was sipping shot from his nose, onto the shirt that might cost more than Kevin earned in a week.

'Text me when it's done.' Stevie nodded at the roast.

'I'll have doggie bags ready. So when did you come hame?'

'I'm hame for good.'

'Fit d'ya mean?'

'The rig's been stacked.'

'Bit you'll find something else, wi your experience?'

'Market's flooded. I'm nae like you wi transferable skills, which reminds me there's something I need to ask you…'

Kevin's heart sank, he kent what was comin. He'd been avoiding Stevie for weeks. He'd be wantin back the grand he'd lent at Christmas. Five kids with three step-kids disna come cheap, Kevin had nae option but to ask for a len.

'Ken fit, it can wait til your finished.' Stevie nodded at the hog.

'It micht be a while…' Kevin prodded the crispy skin that crinkled at his touch.

'I may as well get another then, since Plook's payin.'

Stevie wandered off in search of anither beer.

Harris and Flora were a poodle crossed wi something fancy, Kevin could never remember what. They were cute enough hounds, but Stevie and the lovely Permata, he met her oot in Jakarta, were struggling to have kids. Kevin once joked that they were welcome to one of his, then worried Permata might take him seriously. She didna aywis get his jokes. There were times when he wished it had been him with the low sperm count. But no, his tadpoles were stronger than that swimmer that won all the medals – Phelps.

He flung a damp tea towel ower his heid, adjusting it so it covered both his baldy bit and the back o his neck. It maybe wasna the look Plook expected of his chef, but Kevin was buggered if he was going to let hissel burn ony further. He worked the handle, spinning the hog round.

When his mates took metalwork and woodwork at school, he'd gone oot on a limb takin Home Economics. His dad wisna that happy about it, but his mam snapped jist to leave him be. It was a time of collecting things; stick fae his pals; recipes from Mrs Wimple which he hid under his mattress, for things like cheese sauce and brandy snaps filled wi cream. When he left school early to go to catering college, his mam made him stand at the back door so she could tak his photo. He'd felt a real man, aa decked oot in his whites. He could see himsel cooking in top kitchens. Who knew far catering would tak him?

But aa he'd done since was slog for a pittance; crappy jobs working his arse off for other fowk.

Aabody kent the money was good offshore. His brothers egged him on to apply for a job as camp boss, but Kevin was feart o heights and the thought of heading out ower the sea in a tin can wi only rotors keeping him up would've had him shittin himself. He'd been upfront about it wi Aileen, his first wife, that he couldna go and, give her her due, she never forced him. Things micht a been aright wi Aileen, if he hadna buggered things up wi his drinkin. But his second wife, Tanya, she was a different besom entirely. She wanted to keep up wi her pals, spending fifty quid on a pot of cream to clart on her face. The sex with Tanya was brilliant though. He should have seen that she'd scarper wi somebody younger who'd shower her wi Ugg boots and handbags.

Raindrops the size of pebbles plipped on the hog makin it hiss. That's aa he needed. It looked like jist a passing shower. He wondered if he should lob aff a bit, go into the house and stick it in the oven. Naebody would ken. But Plook was a stickler for detail. Lara demanded a hog roast.

Fit had he been thinking? Oh aye, Natalie. Lucky number three.

He would've been happy to stop at four bairns, three wi Aileen, a drunken mishap wi Tanya - but then Natalie trapped him. He should've kent better at the age of forty-five, but she was only thirty and loved babies. He sometimes wondered what she saw in him. But her previous boyfriend battered her, maybe it was just that Kevin didna use his fists.

Just then Plook reappeared wi a spring in his step.

'How's the hog coming along then, Kevin?' he peered at it, as though that would help.

'Anither couple of hours, at least.'

Plook's face grew darker than the mass of clouds sitting richt above their heids now.

'Get that off!' He flapped at Kevin's unorthodox headgear.

Kevin glared.

'There's nae law against it.'

'You look daft! We need to get this lot fed afore the rain comes on. Lara'll blad her good shoes if this ground goes saft.'

'I canna help it. I canna serve raw meat.'

'But this has been planned for weeks. I expected better fae you, Kevin.'

Kevin clutched the skewer tight, feart to move. If he lost the rag now, he didna ken far he micht poke it.

There was ringing in his ears as he calmly removed the tea towel and handed it along with the skewer, blunt end first, to Plook then walked awa.

'Hing on,' Plook roared. 'If you walk awa now, Kevin, you've nae job come Monday morning.'

Kevin kept walkin as cold splats smacked his dome. He should've kept the tea towel. Problem was Plooks's pad was oot in the country and he'd given Kevin a lift wi the rustic rolls. Now Kevin had nae wye hame. He kept walkin til he came to a port-a-loo, round the side of the hoose, out of sicht of the party. One bog for sixty fowk, fit was Plook thinkin? He tried the handle, edged in sideways, squeezed past the tiny hand basin and shut the door.

***

Stevie rapped on the hard plastic.

'Come on Kevin. It's lashin out here and there's only one toilet. You're causin a queue.'

Kevin's cheeks were weet. A horrible gasping escaped fae his throat. Shit, the walls were so thin he was feart to fart in een of these, aabody would hear. Aabody outside would ken he was bawlin like a baby.

He scrubbed at his een with the heels of his hands.

Fit a bloody mess he made o things!

'Come on, Kev.' Stevie's voice was unusually gentle.

Kevin hauled up his boxers, belted his jeans and opened the door. He darena look up at the string of fowk waitin.

Stevie grabbed his arm.

'Come back to the car.'

They set off at a fair trot round the

back of the hoose to Plook's driveway, where there was a special parking area marked out with fluorescent cones. His boss thocht o aathin. Aathin except how many bogs were needed and how lang it took to cook a pig.

'Get in,' Stevie shouted above the din of the rain.

'Bit your interior. I'm soakin'

'Get in!'

Kevin slid on the ice-white leather, his trainers squelching in the foot well, as the rain on the roof competed with Harris and Flora's barking.

'Enough!' Stevie ordered.

Harris and Flora grew silent. Kevin wished his bairns would behave so well.

'So fits this aa about?' Stevie turned in the driver's seat, staring at him.

Kevin looked out the windscreen at Plook's nine hole pitch and putt. Fa else had that in their garden? The wee flags were droopin limp.

'I just cock up aathin.' Kevin clenched his fists tight to stop greetin again.

'That's nae true, Kev. You shouldna say things like that. You've got five toppers o kids and Natalie's different fae your first two.'

Kevin winced at the mention of Natalie's name. How was he gan to tell her he'd lost his job?

'She deserves better. She wants to start an aromatherapy business but aathin she maks at Aldis goes on the bairns.'

'Things can change…'

'Plook telt me nae to bather comin in on Monday morning.'

'I wasna speaking about that. Mine I wanted to ask you somethin?'

'If it's about your grand…' Kevin started.

Stevie waved him aside.

'No, it's more exciting than that.' He settled in his chair, as if about to tell a story. Stevie aye liked to be the centre o attention.

'Working offshore isna aa it's cracked up to be,' he began. 'Awa fae hame aa the time, hearing Permata greetin doon the phone when her periods start… onywy, now I've got my redundancy I dinna want to go back. I want to try something different.'

Kevin micht have known this would be about Stevie.

'Thing is,' Stevie prattled on. 'I think it would be good for Permata to have something to focus on, other than lookin efter Harris and Flora. You ken how she loves to cook, nasi goring, gado-gado, aa that tasty Asian cuisine? Well there's a gap in the market…'

'Now's nae the right time to open a restaurant,' Kevin jumped in, before Stevie got ony stupid ideas. 'Nae we the way the oil is.' He'd nae patience for Stevie's plans. He just wanted to go hame. He felt a bit shivery. He wasna sure if he micht be suffering fae a touch of shock.

'I'm nae speakin about a restaurant. Permata wants to make upmarket ready-meals for Waitrose and Markies. That's far you come in.'

Stevie was starting to give him a sare heid. Maybe Natalie was right. Maybe his blood pressure was wrang.

'Fit have I got to dee wi Waitrose and Markies?'

Stevie shook his heid.

'You ken how to run a kitchen, to scale up Permata's recipes, aathin aboot health and hygiene. Fit you say, are you in?'

'Fit you on aboot?'

'Do you fancy being our business partner? Permata, you and me – thirty odd percent each.'

Kevin couldna believe what his brother was offerin, a stake in a business when he, Kevin, had nithin to put in.

'I dinna ken fit to say, Stevie.'

'Say aye.'

Guests were leaving now, their Porsches and Range Rovers splashing through puddles, mud sticking to their sides as it chucked it doon.

He cracked opened the car door and stepped out onto the tarmac, spreadin his hands wide like a man on a cross, blinkin up at the rain.

Flora, or was it Harris, started barkin again.

Stevie lent across the passenger seat.

'Fit are you deein? Aabody's lookin.'

Kevin laughed.

'Get a grip!' Stevie reached for the passenger door, slammin it shut.

Rain cooled Kevin's cheeks as he parted his lips so it coated his tongue. It tasted sweet and good. ■

Frog Love

By Sherry Morris

When she was still a little girl, adults asked her what she wanted to be.

'A frog,' she always replied. If someone asked why, she'd lie, say she liked jumping and swimming, wanted a tongue that could lick eyes and catch flies.

She didn't say she'd memorised The Frog Prince by heart.

At school, she drew green-eyed princesses kissing blue-eyed frogs.

'How sweet,' her teacher said. 'Already looking for your prince.'

She'd frown, outraged heart thumping in protest, but she kept her mouth shut.

Leaning in, looking closer, it was the teacher's turn to frown.

'Sweetie, you're Toni with an 'i', not a 'y'.

She knew who she was.

Her best friend, Amy, stared at the pictures, then her, disdain and disgust overflowing from those green eyes, leaving her clinging to the tear-soaked pages of her tale.

Sitting alone on the dock on summer evenings, listening to the throaty croaks of frog love, she'd mouth her truth: to be the frog turned prince, forever receiving the sweetness of a girl's kiss. Living happily ever after. Somewhere it must be true.

All around her fireflies blinked their acceptance, their light assured. ■

Poems by Lydia Harris

Disposal of the Body as Individual Act

…what we find on archaeological sites- …must be only the most durable parts… This makes it all the more wonderful to find traces of 'individual acts'. Hazel Moore (Ease Archaeology, Westray, 2018)

March 27th 2005

You lower the vessel into a supermarket bag. The vessel is plastic but made to look coppery, to suggest an urn, ceremonial. You fill a thermos with coffee, pour an inch of Single Elmlea into a bottle, park the car at Newbiggin, set out on foot towards the sea, a ditch full of gorse to your left, a dyke to your right, no beasts in the field. You feel a little awkward when you reach the cliff top, that grassy stretch between the dyke and the edge. Fulmars roost on the ledges. You loosen the vessel's lid and fling the pink-grey ash high over the turf as if it was seed and you and the small Sunday wind were a dance, your bodies fluid, boneless. The ash drifts, vanishes into the brome, barley and fescue. No trace left by the time you sit and pour coffee into a mug, add a dash of Elmlea. He would like this part. This little picnic. The sun doesn't blink. You don't cry. That afternoon you walk to Noltland where Hazel has uncovered a bone comb, beads and the post holes of a pallisade, close to where women tended corpses. Individual acts. Sheep horns, scallop shells and flint flakes placed on ochre.

Day Trip to Foresterhills

(after Karlis Verdins)

She took to the air, flew above the flex of Hoy's spine. Later, on land , when she was lost, a gentleman showed her the lift, said, 'Hey, imagine you're in Lidl, start at veg., pass meat and eggs, spin your wheels across the clean tiles and, Voila! She's on the couch and Dr Shakel's hair quivers
close to her cheek as he highlights the x-ray, as he pushes a probe up her nostril. She straightens the vine on her bag, sets her shoulders to the Cytologist's room while the tendrils twist like needles. Drill, drill. Back in the city, she buys three bendy notebooks at The Flying Tiger. When she lifts off, like washing on a line, she breathes a huge breath over Scapa Flow, sweet-smelling and smooth. She'd like to record the woman in 'Visit Aberdeen' who said, 'Sorted', another woman on the 747 Award-Winning Bus, who told her about Wallace and rindless goats' cheese. And lastly, the woman behind her in the queue who had difficult blood.

Losing, living and writing

By SALLY FRANK (with GAIL LOW)

Emerald green, Kildunan blue

The alarm goes off at 1:45am and we blunder about in the dark doing all those necessary things that precede leave-taking: sorting out rubbish, adjusting the central heating and carrying all the absolutely essential, hitherto completely overlooked, items of luggage into an assortment of carrier bags to take to the car. At this point, Tim and I are both really ratty but he has the edge, having been up and down the path three or four times already this morning, not to mention the twenty or more trips last night. At last, we are on our way. The roads are empty; only one car going the other way. We board the six o'clock CalMac MV Clansman at Oban for Coll and Tiree and, as with all our ferry journeys, I sleep, read, knit and eat bacon rolls. We arrive in Tiree at 9.05am.

It is wonderful to be back, despite the fact that it is freezing cold and the 40mph wind expected tomorrow is building slowly. Archie and Peggy, elderly crofting neighbours, drop by to say hello. Archie keeps his hat on, though he is eventually persuaded to sit down after I set a chair for him in the doorway of the kitchen. He can't remove his wellies or his over-trousers without a lot of fankle. On the few occasions that he has done so, the over-trousers roll down into twin pools over the tops of his boots, and he sits apparently legless but with a pair of toe-caps sticking out.

Most mornings, we have a routine: a Co-op shop, a bit of cleaning and tidying. We go to Susan's house in Scarnish for tea on Saturday and they come to us later in the week. Today the weather is fantastic and Tiree is magical: blue sky that extends forever, melding with the sea, and hardly any breeze. There are perfect days here and we've just had five of them on the trot now, with the wind switching from south to north. A cloudless blue sky with clear sunshiny light. At 10:40pm, the dusk is only starting. It's pale pink and purple, and full of bird calls: corncrakes crexing, peewits and oystercatchers, and juddering snipe.

⋆

Friday, the weather is grey and cold. I am struggling with the medication as usual, either stiff or dizzy, sometimes both stiff and dizzy.

⋆

Dark, grey-black...

At fifty one, I was formally diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. What precipitated a visit to the doctor was a strange difficulty with my left hand. I couldn't change gear when driving – found it difficult to get the gear stick into place. We changed to an automatic car but we also made an appointment to see a neurologist. Eighteen months on the waiting list; after various tests on my arm and shoulder, I finally met the consultant. He did some further tests: I had to walk along a line, push against his hand and other funny little tasks like touching my thumb and forefinger together, on both hands, as fast as possible. He looked at my medical notes and then said, "Write down your name and address". I wrote as instructed, and as I wrote, the letters became smaller and smaller. The consultant looked up from his desk and said, "You've got Parkinson's". He added, "Micrographia. That's one of the major symptoms of Parkinson's." "But Parkinson's is something that only old people get," I said. He replied, "No, it's not. You're at the youngest end of the normal distribution age of onset. So you're not unusual." And that was it.

May 10th 2001, I left the hospital in a state of complete shock.

⋆

Parkinson's disease is a chronic (long-term) neurological condition. It is progressive and symptoms worsen over time. It is named after Dr James Parkinson, who first described the condition in 1817. People with Parkinson's disease experience a loss of nerve cells in the part of their brains responsible for controlling voluntary movements. This part of the brain, a small cluster of cells deep in the centre of the brain within an area called the basal ganglia, is the 'substantia nigra'. The nerve cells in the substantia nigra usually produce a chemical called dopamine which helps transmit messages from the brain to the rest of the body via the central nervous system… As these cells are lost, people with Parkinson's disease experience a loss of dopamine; the messages controlling movement stop being transmitted efficiently.

⋆

The disease progresses slowly. After the diagnosis had sunk in, I felt I had to pack in as much as I could before everything came to a head. I retired early. Ironically, getting Parkinson's enabled us to buy Kildunan, our home on Tiree. At first, things were no different. I drove up and down to Oban on my own, charged around the house. I had an abnormal amount of energy. Even when I slept fitfully (I don't sleep at all well now), I had lots of energy. Kildunan became an urgent project. I had to get everything ready before I wound down completely. I remember the summer evenings' bike rides, bird song, night-time noises, the cows walking about the fields, the corncrakes... hearing all the birds. I still love the stillness and being on my own, though this is now sometimes tinged with fear.

⋆

and orange

The art of losing isn't hard to master;
so many things seem filled with the intent
to be lost that their loss is no disaster

I take the drug, L-Dopa, which converts to dopamine by my body. But L-Dopa, like serotonin, is also a mood regulator. When I'm short of L-Dopa and crash, movement isn't possible. These are my "off" periods and I go from feeling on an even keel about everything to shutting down in absolute despair. There's a concrete barrier between me and my body, between me wanting to get up and not being able to, looking at my foot and willing it to move, but not being able to make it do so. My body is just leaden. I can't always speak, or I don't speak properly. Sometimes people treat me as if I'm mentally disabled or stupid. I was once told by the therapist to put my hands up to indicate to company around me that I want to speak – like in schoolroom – but opportunities don't always happen. Sometimes, I hold all sorts of sentences in my head, and want desperately to say them but the openings never come and so I am silent and the conversation around me moves on. Every little thing is simply exhausting. Often I am angry and frustrated. In my "on" periods, when the drug kicks in, I can do little things for myself. Friends and carers are well meaning; "I'll do that for you", they say, taking the Tupperware from my hands to unclip it, but it matters to me that I do what I can when I can. Even so, it takes so much longer just to do the smallest task. In my "on" periods (which can vary greatly), I rock back and forth, back and forth. These movements are not involuntary, Tourette-like tics but they are very reassuring to do. They remind me that I can control my movements. I have a wheelchair now. I thought it might be liberating, not having to depend on others, but it hasn't been that way. The wheelchair is more difficult to drive than I thought, and having to pull up your trousers in an undignified manner doesn't help. Besides, the paintwork on door frames has suffered.

Medication gives me a small window of freedom from immobility; I can get out of bed and feel relatively normal. Other times, I can lie in bed and know that I'm not going to be able to move. I need to have things all within arm's reach. It's almost as if I need a personal slave to do my fetching and carrying for me.

⋆

Parkinson's disease is a progressive, degenerative neurological condition that affects the control of body movements. It causes trembling in the hands, arms, legs, jaw, and face; rigidity or stiffness of the limbs or trunk; slowness of body movements; and unstable posture and difficulty in walking. Early symptoms are subtle and occur gradually.

It happens when the neurons (nerve cells) that normally produce dopamine in the brain gradually die. The death of these cells leads to abnormally low levels of dopamine.… Parkinson's disease is a chronic, progressive illness, and no drug can prevent the progression of the disease.

⋆

Lose something every day. Accept the fluster
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

Before Parkinson's, my life was completely different. I had a part-time job as an Educational Psychologist. I also managed a team. Initially, we were involved in dealing with children with difficulties and assessing them early for a school placement. Quite often, we had to battle against medics who were also advising parents about their child's potential and progress. And that could be quite disheartening. Yet the work was, at times, also very rewarding.

I loved dancing, and used to teach Swingnastics classes. It came about because I went to an exercise-to-music class one day (this was the seventies and a new phenomenon). I found it great fun and decided to start a class. I always used to feel wonderful after these exercise classes. Sometimes I would leave work thinking that I was too tired to teach Swingnastics but I would go home on a high. Music and movement... and dancing. It was great – that fitness enabled me to walk with Tim on over more demanding terrain.

One summer holiday, before the illness, both of Tim and I walked down the north rim of the Grand Canyon with friends, Graham and Pat. We were so naïve and inexperienced. We had permits to camp for three nights. We assumed there would be a range of shops where we could buy

provisions but there weren't, so we ended up just buying enough pot noodles to last us three days. We then had to be been reminded to carry water by the Park ranger. We parked up somewhere near the entry point – the only car in the car park at five o'clock in the morning – and off we set, four friends. The men in the group had big bags of water, which they carried on their backs to stash half-way down so we might have a water supply on return. Off we set, down the canyon. Hiking down you're actually moving through geological history, walking down through layers of beautiful rock, through different landscapes and different geologies, all with such beautiful names: Kaibab limestone, Bright Angel shale, the Red Wall, Surprise Alley. When we got to our first designated camping space, it was breathtaking. We turned a corner, and there was Thunder River – a huge waterfall bursting from a cave in a vertical drop. There were cottonwood trees with the tiniest leaves fluttering in the breeze. It was such a lovely place. We hadn't seen a single soul on our journey down.

On the second day of our walk back, there was a major thunderstorm which lit up the whole canyon with lightning. There we were, the four of us, standing on this ledge with a tarp over our heads, looking down on the Grand Canyon in the rain, thunder and lightning. All the terror and beauty, and the enormity of the place. Pat and Tim were sandwiched between me and Graham. We looked at each other and smiled broadly.

I hold onto these images in my mind before falling asleep. Graham died recently of cancer. The surgeon said he was the fittest man he'd ever done surgery on.

⋆

Then practice losing farther, losing faster:
places, and names, and where it was you meant
to travel. None of these will bring disaster.

These last few years, I've been losing many things I cared about. I keep making a list of all the things I've lost since I had Parkinson's to give to the consultant in order to get him to take me seriously.

1. Being able to knit
2. Being able to exercise
3. Being able to read a book with sustained concentration
4. Writing
5. Dancing to music
6. Having a good sleep
7. Having a sex life
8. Having a social life
9. My self-confidence
10. My independence

⋆

Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture
I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident

When I was still working, I remember one young mother who had a very disabled child, multiply handicapped, blind and deaf. She was in her mid-to-late twenties, very attractive, and always immaculately dressed. She didn't work. There was little family support and she cared for this small child all on her own. Most people thought that there was no hope for the child but she continued to try to stimulate him. She had so few material resources but she just battled on. I admired her fortitude and tenacity, her dogged desire to encourage her child's development. She became quite knowledgeable about his condition. But she needed help of a personal kind too. Social services really needed to take on board her issues as well as the child's. Her life was really quite small but I never saw her upset.

I don't have to crash to get angry and frustrated. I can feel very, very sorry for myself.

the art of losing's not too hard to master
though it may look like (Write it!) like disaster.

⋆

Writing it

WHO IS WRITING this "I"? In one of our earlier conversations, I said to Sally, "You should write about having Parkinson's; between the medics and the carers, I can see how you are feeling more and more diminished. Parkinson's - both the illness or the medical language of diagnosis or treatment - doesn't define all of you." She tells me that she doesn't have the energy or the sustained motor-coordination to write a long piece. We talk about what we'd like to see in the essay, arrange a time for an interview and then record it. I collect past emails, interview transcripts and, later, lay them all flat on my dining room table to take stock: a mosaic of paper that I am to gather up into a vivid life. There seems to be no other way to narrate except in first person, preserving as much of her melancholy and frustrations as well as her wry sense of humour.

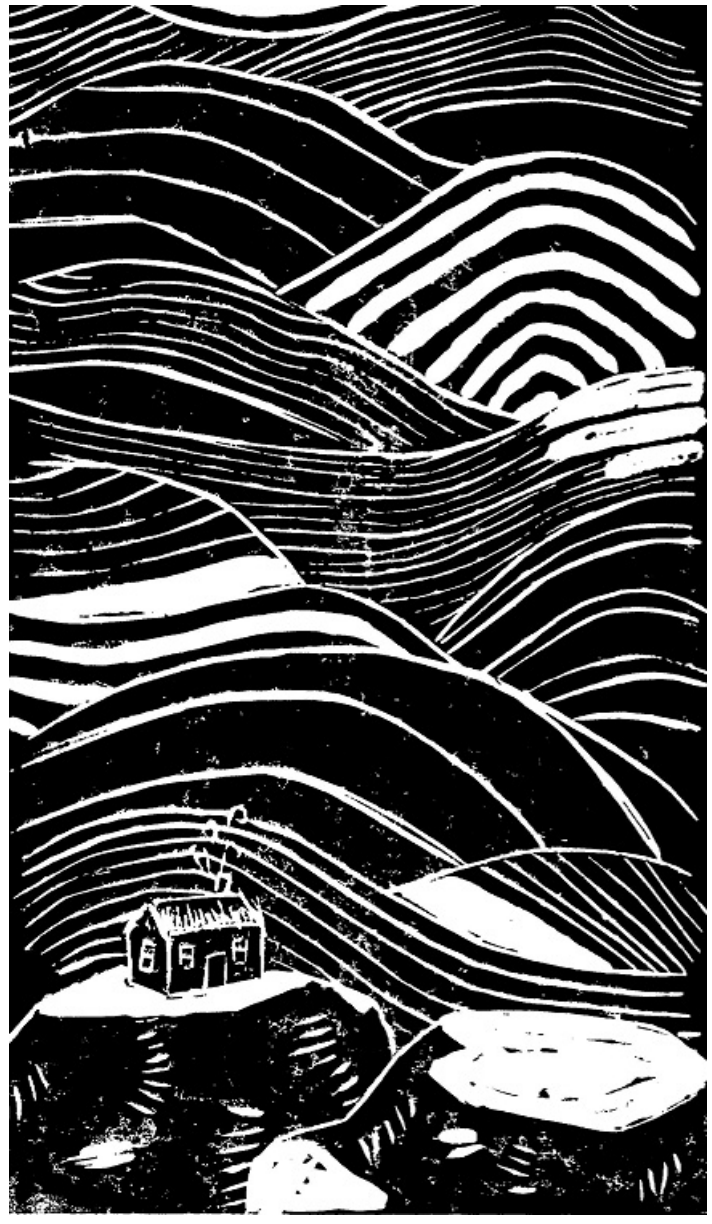
Then I start to write, joining up texts, inhabiting her "I", knowing all the time I am not her, but trying to work with the grain and timbre of those words and experiences. When I email an early draft to her, I write, "I've tried to preserve your words and the emotions as much as I could, but have also compressed, shaped and quilted together to make the writing more seamless." In her reply she seems bewildered and, perhaps, also cross. "Did I think this?", she says. I apologise, but am secretly also affronted. "But this is you!", I want to shout, "everything I've written you have more or less said." Between more or less is, of course, an abyss. The art of losing – Sally's generous gift of ceding control of words, is, of course, my gain.

How can I make a shoe fit for Sally to don and strike her way across the page? Stitching together fragments of Sally's previous emails, Elizabeth Bishop's moving poem, "One Art", our conversations and discussions about the medical discourses on Parkinson's, editing and then showing the work to her, have made for awkward and testing times. And yet they have also been clarifying in all sorts of ways. I don't have Parkinson's, though I can, of course, imagine. Yet pretending as if I could, leads to an ethical and aesthetic quagmire born of inequities: an able-bodied person writing 'as' someone who is suffering from all the debilitating symptoms of Parkinson's, assembling, selecting and shaping a voice that isn't always hers to affect.

This kind of bearing witness reduces the one you speak 'in place of' to… silence. Gayatri Spivak warned us of this a couple of decades ago. And acknowledging these problems won't make any of the difficulties go away either; yet surely the risk must be worth to witness the trauma, emotional intelligence, the fortitude and core stillness in a friend I admire… who feels that she is, at times, simply lumpen flesh. This "I" should neither seem transparent nor act as a smokescreen, but must be a witness, an interlocutor, and must make space for readers. Despite our frank exchanges, it is only recently that I have picked up the courage to ask the questions I had evaded previously in our friendly, everyday exchanges. Even now I do it obliquely…

If having Parkinson's can be described a colour, what would it be? It's dark – black, dark grey-black, tinged with orange. Orange because it is a fiery extreme and elicits those feelings of rage, frustration and despair in me. *And on days that you find life bearable…?* I think it's emerald green, Kildunan blue. Every now and then I get so very angry and frustrated. But it's not always possible to attach that to a feeling about Parkinson's – the illness is a part of me now. When I was first diagnosed, I refused the obvious "What have I done to deserve this?" or "Why me?" question. The answer is always, "Why not me?" And that helped. The doctors don't know. We don't know. The pills I take give me a small window of movement.

But what happens when that window closes? At some point, I'll find out. They tell me that however many pills you take, you can't avoid the immobile stage. And sometime in the future, there'll be no more windows. *Is it dark – black for the future?* I have a wonderful Parkinson's nurse called Catherine. Besides Tim, she's been the one who has kept me going. She sees the fear. Yet without giving any false hope or promises, she's reassuring. I'm not religious but I hold onto the sentiment expressed in one of my favourite poems, "the leaping greenly spirits of trees/ and a blue true dream of sky... everything which is natural which is infinite which is yes". I may not be able to do that much longer in the future but I am alive today. ■



Sian MacFarlane

Acknowledgements:

With thanks to Kirsty Gunn and Lindsay Macgregor for their helpful suggestions on the original manuscript, and to Sian MacFarlane for use of her linocut, "Tiree Storm".

Poetry

Torridon
Robin Wilson

the wilderness says something
and you are busy listening -
the pitch is sharp with birdcalls
the tone is a monster growl

underfoot the flint slides
until you must move or fall –
so you strive above it all

there should be communion
with moor and lichen rock
but nothing feels like pleasure -
you are an off-day witness
not the imagined conqueror

is this the best view?
is this the best glen?
where's the GPS?
where's the outcrop
no one has stood upon?

suddenly light flares out
behind the boulder storm -
this could transcend
all previous distractions

you take a photograph
to define an epiphany
to prove your measurement
of memory and wonder

then press to send
but there is no signal
no signal for how you feel

Ancestry
Hamish Myers

I saw you coming from the West-
The burning ash of Atlantic coasts
Blew through hunted Gauls and Basques
And lit up Cork and Drogheda
With the red man of the myths and legends.

Then sailing North to Borve and Bosta
In the space behind the storm.
You took a farm of green and blue
And played out quiet games of chess
As you were buried in the sand.

Now tonight I read again
Your stories in my headlights.
Round Stoer to Forss and Kirkwall
The Autumn storms you felt the same
Shape questions over Orkney shrines-

Do you believe in ghosts
Or just the tremors of the past?

Rooms by the sea
(after a painting by Edward Hopper)
Judith Taylor

You know by the light
somehow
when the sea's near.

Landbound, how you mistake
that silver shifting
and you seek it

unwary how, if you build your house
in reach of the sea, that freedom
it speaks to you will be all its own

never yours.
Though you case your stone foundations
even in caulker's tar

still
that tide will come.

The Rig
Iain Twiddy

If people can live on an oil rig
drilled in to the middle of the sea –
like a rickety metal spider,

braced and craned, cranked, straining-platformed,
like landing gear on a distant planet,
or a pond-skater sunk to its knees

in mud, the tides tugging at the feet,
wind the only solid thing in sight
jerking like vultures at a carcass –

if men can work there, leeching the earth,
the sea as deep as the air above,
like walking outside without trousers;

if men can sleep suspended above
the bed, the cold their only blanket,
when one deep lurch could bring the whole thing

matchsticking down, one spark flood the sky
with a ravenous cataclysm
as the oil spurts like an artery,

then surely I can dig in a bit
longer here, with less of an anchor,
until the reason begins to flow clear.

The Room With No View
Jim C Wilson

This room's a cube, too small for me to stand
in, too small for me to lie in – and grey –
not dull, not bright, just basic neutral grey,
and if I were to sleep (curled up) when I awoke
I would not know how long I'd been asleep,
if it had been two hours or it had been
two days (or twenty years) and so I would
not know what day it was (or year) and what
is more I would not know if it were day
or night, this room's grey walls being windowless
(and doorless too, I should have said) and when
I think of food I can't be sure about
how hungry I should be, not knowing when
it was I last had food and do I need a wash
and where's my keys and dog, and do my friends
not know about all this and how I came
to be in this small room, this too small room
where I've been writing this for, well, I've been
writing this for thirty hours or thirty years
although these days or nights one can't be sure
of anything, the length, the heights, the depths.

Beyond The Dunes
Jim C Wilson

Beyond the dunes the sea is grey and deep;
it's edging up the beach, like liquid lead –
cold, almost, as sleet. So I will keep
to my path, eyes near-shut, fixed straight ahead.
Then home once more, I have a compulsion
to dive deep down into myself – and write;
but, as the daylight dies, I emulsion
a wall, until I see nothing but white.
Winter winds are moving in the roof space;
I hear them sigh. A second wall shines white
as darkness spreads. Soon, all will be in place,
I think. Now all the house is gripped by night.
Beyond the dunes the sea is deep and black.
Across my finished paintwork runs a crack.

Mappa Mundi
Robin Wilson

lichen fizzing over a granite boulder
like the distant lights of a metropolis
and I could be Easy Jetting homeward
above the flat glare of amber suburbs
towards the harder glare of women

or I could be a traveller with no family
nothing to turn into the iron wind for -
aimless on a soggy autumn deer-track
hesitating in front of a blistered rock
with the world's map covering its skin

Sumburgh, 1952

Martin Malone

I

Advertisement

Good ones acquire the mettle for confinement
and the solitude of the wild shore. He will be
a handyman to a high standard and, through
study of the sea, he'll come to grasp its power.

A man of parts with a knack for engines,
at stations with radar or radio beacons
he'll have a flair for telecommunications.
A useful cook and good companion, he

won't make a fortune but will be at peace
with himself and the world. Main chores
are long hours in the watches of the night.
Not for everyone, this keeping of the light.

II

The Inspectors

Drop by here once a year,
so, everything is polished
and everyone well-dressed.
Spick-and-span is normal
– no more than our duty –
and we've enough men
to keep things gleaming.
Come when you want,
inspect what you will
fuss over this and that,
your visit holds no fear
for the likes of us.

III

The Lightkeeper's Daughter

We climb the stone wall
and edge down the slope
to watch puffins for hours,

snuggling into the cliff's nook,
me in Dad's coat out of the wind,
drinking tea from his thermos.

The way they flutter in to land,
like black and orange confetti,
is my door into summer.

Once, when we look down,
there's a huge shark cruising
at the foot of the bluff.

I remember thinking to myself
it's the biggest thing I've ever seen.
Daddy laughs and pulls me close.

IV

The Lightkeeper's Wife

There's always a good breeze up here to dry the washing out
and stuff to do with the hens or the vegetable patch.

Both bairns were born up at the Head, so it is all they've known,
they love this posting, play round about the light and pet the goat.

And the local folk look up to Bob, like he was the minister,
doctor or a teacher. We'll be sorry when the time comes.

The Sixty-One

Eileen West

One came in shyly and shook my hand without a smile.
Without the look or language of an oilman.
What he'd seen had made him fragile.
One of the sixty-one.

A wife stared at me with a reproachful eye.
Am I the enemy? Do you think I'm someone?
He, nervous, fiddling with an unfamiliar tie.
Another of the sixty-one.

To some we were the enemy: "the Company".
All full-blown and high-flown and on our throne
of money-saving villainy while they toil in agony.
What is left of the 288: the sixty-one.

One watched his mate as a fireball fall to the black water.
It plays in his head still and for always like a horror re-run.
Sleep has been denied him since the slaughter.
He wishes he was not one of the sixty-one.

Some carried openly their scars: crutches, one in a wheelchair.
But none could hide the scarring of their minds: worn like a hand-me-down.
With shame and hurt of unfairness: an ongoing mental warfare.
Those who think they survived: the sixty-one.

For one, it was all about production, the pipes and a valve,
A Geordie with the jargon: notebooks full of denial when he was done.
All a sort of insanity, his conscience to salve
because he became one of the sixty-one.

More broke down reliving the 8th July.
Tears dissolved the strokes of my Pitman
as they sobbed in their effort to reply.
Guilty at being one of the sixty-one.

One felt he was there for blame,
detecting in his interview a certain undertone,
My pages peppered with "sue" and "claim"
He hurt, that one of the sixty-one.

Only one came escorted with an entourage,
New counsellor, new love and new lawyer riding shotgun.
Grandstanding performance betraying too much reportage.
The one famous one of the sixty-one.

Harrowing but an honour to be the stenographer
Recording the words and wounds of each father or son
who survived their worst night. THEIR Piper Alpha.
All sixty-one of the sixty-one.

Secrets

Short Story by Sheena Blackhall

It wis a plottin hett day in July. Mrs Wabster's washin wis hingin on the line luikin wabbit, an her dother Jessie wis powkin a snailie oot in the gairden wi a twig, ettlin tae makk it cock oot its hornies. Ower the dyke cam the soun o baas bein stottit agin a garage yet, tae the soun o bairn chantin:

Caa caa the ropey,
Yer maa's awa tae the shoppie,
Tae buy a cake o soapie,
Tae wash yer little dockie'

'Ma, can I play ootbye wi Sally?' speired the wee quinie.

'Aa richt, bit nae farrer nur the Lanie,' cam the repon

Her dother didnae need twa tellins, an ran oot tae meet up wi her frien Sally. Sally Mackintosh wis adoptit, an nae lang syne her fowk hid adoptit ag ain, a loonie aboot three month auld.

'Wid ye like tae see ma new brither?' speired Sally. 'He's jist ooto his bath.'

Jessie follaed her frien up tae the Mackintosh hoose an intae the kitchiet. The new bairnie wis lying bare nyaakit on a bath tool on tap o the kitchie table. He wis crawin an curmurrin like a cushie doo.

Mrs Mackintosh wis boo dower the littlin, surroundit bi creams an poothers.

'Watch this,' she telt the twa quinies.

She tuik a licht haud o the loonie's wee todger an staiked it tae its pynt wi her jewelled, nail-varnished fingers. The todger bedd straicht up like the Eiffel Touer.

'I cam wirk magic wi ma fingers,' she lauched. 'Ae day ye'll larn thon tae.'

Jessie an Sally warna muckle interestit in todgers, tho it wis the first time Jessie hid seen ane, an it wis a thochtie bumbazin that she didnae hae ane. She thocht that mebbe she'd growe ane ae day, like the snail's hornies.

They gaed back intae the Lanie an their baa-stottin:

I had a little monkey,
Its name wis Jocky Broon,
I pit it in the bath tub,
Tae see if it wid droon.
It drunk up aa the watter,
It ett a cake o soap,
It deed the next mornin,
Wi a bubble in its throat.
In cam the doctor,
In cam the nurse,
In cam the leddy
Wi the big black purse.
Oot gaed the doctor,
Oot gaed the nurse,
Oot gaed the leddy
Wi the big blackpurse.

Nae lang eftir, they wir jyned bi Mary Archibald, a quinie new flittit intae the Lanie, a year aulder than thirsels. Mary's fowk hid bidden in an orra airt o the toun till a hyne-aff kinsman hid deed withoot family an left his his gear an hoose tae their thirsels. Jessie an Sally likit Mary weel eneuch, she wisnae ower roch an she wisna din raisin, an shared her jacks an scraps wi them, an whyles sweeties. Jessie telt Mary aboot the todger, an Mary said she'd heard aboot sic things frae a skweel frien at her auld hame. An syne she telt them fit the auld skweel frien hid telt her, bit they warna tae tell onyither body, cause it wis a secret.

The three dowpit doon on tap o a granite dyke, an Mary began. Weel, the skweel frien's name wis Ina. Aabody likit Ina, she wis gweed hairtit an blythe, bit her claes guffed o swyte an dried pish an her heid wis hudderie an flechie. The dominies at the skweel likit Ina as weel. They tuik peety on the wee sowel. Whyles at denner time, they washed her in the staff room lavvie, an cuttit her hair an caimbed the beasties oot wi a beastie caimb. An they'd bring in secunt haun claes an sheen fur Ina, an fed her whyles wi brukken biscuits an toast. The queer thing wis, aince a month Ina wis flush. She'd cam tae skweel wi her pooches stappit wi siller an treat aa her class mates tae lucky tatties, aniseed baas, liquorice strips an coo candy. It wis a mystery richt eneuch. Then ae day, Ina invited Mary hae fur tea.

Her hoose wis the boddom storey o a tenement. The gairden wis waist heich wi docken leaves, an a sotter o dug keech. The yett wis chippit peint. Inbye, Ina's faimily war cooried roon a newspaper table cloot, happit wi chips an haddies.

Ina's wee brither wis staunin in fyled hippens an twa inch o snotters hingin frae his snoot. Ina's ma wis gley-eed, pirn taed, hallyrackit bit friendly eneuch.

'Cam awa in quinie. Ye'll be Mary. Stick in till ye stick oot. Ma brither Tam's hame frae sea this wikk. He wirks on a trawler. Ina, takk yer uncle ben his tea.'

Ina gaithered up a haunfu o chips in a paper cone an skippit aff intae the neist chaumer. She wis gaen a wee whylie. Fin she cam oot, she cried tae Mary:

'Uncle Tam wints tae see ye Mary. Cam ben wi me.'

Fin Mary gaed intae uncle Tam's room, he wis sprauchled oot on his bed. He wis mither nyaakit, barrin a mingin semmit guffin o swyte, booze, an fush. Aneth he wore naethin ava. Mary hid niver seen a nyaakit mannie afore.

'Ging up tae him Mary. He wints ye tae touch his todger. Luik, I'll show ye.'

Ina tuik her uncle Tam's todger in her wee haun, an ruggit it up an doon. Mary wis horrified. Uncle Tam's physog wis a hotterel o blackheids. He hid thin blaik stringgly hair an rotten teeth. His todger stood up like stick o rhubarb, reid, wi veins breengin oot.

'Ye'll get pennies like me gin ye dae it,' quo Ina.

Bit Mary didna wint uncle Tam's pennies. She ran aa the wye hame an niver devalued aince. Nae lang eftir thon, she flittit wi her family tae the Lanie. An thon wis aa there wis tae the story.

The three quinies, Sally, Mary an Jessie played ropies till teatime:

I'm awa in the train',
An you're nae comin wi me,
I've got a lad o ma ain,
An ye canna tak him fae me.
He weirs a tartan kilt
He weirs it in the fashion,
An every time he cocks his leg,
Ye see his dirty washin.

Afire ye cud say Whigmaleerie, Mrs Wabster wis oot in the Lanie cryin Jessie in fur her tea.

'I pued some rhubarb sticks fur yer tea,' quo she. Rhubarb crumble an custard… thon's yer favourite!'

Bit Jessie cudnae face the rhubard. She settled fur sugar on bried instead. ■

Winter Night

Flash Story by Linda Tyler

The young woman steps off the bus, its last passenger, and into the winter night. The driver calls goodnight, take care. Concern flickers in the man's eyes; perhaps he has a daughter of her age. The door closes with a sigh and she watches the bus move slowly along the Great Northern Road, until its comforting glow disappears.

A full moon emerges from behind the clouds, the light bathing a snow-covered landscape. Alabaster pavements and sleeping buildings stretch silently ahead. In the distance a dimly-lit hotel appears to ride a white-capped sea like some ghostly ocean liner.

She knows that all her life she will remember this night.

The cold pinches her face and she shivers; she must complete her journey. Sliding gloved hands into pockets, her fingers touch the firm surface of her purse; she brought nothing else, wanted nothing else, when she slipped from her parents' house.

Her footsteps are as soft as velvet as she turns and crosses the bridge in the blue-tinged moonlight. Snow begins to fall again. Glancing back, she sees her footprints are already disappearing. The way ahead is as fresh as her new identity.

Cold white flakes caress the nape of her neck then slip down her skin. She turns up her coat collar and fights back a wave of panic edging into her fluttering heart. The high stone walls of University Walk press in; birches reach long skeletal branches towards her hurrying figure.

Closer now stands the tower where she is to wait, its crown soaring into the sky. The silvery cobbled path opens into the High Street and she hesitates, standing like a spectre which has strayed into a medieval city.

Clouds cover the moon. The chimes of a clock cut softly through the winter night. She counts the strokes. Twelve o'clock; she is not late. Icy cold, she hugs her coat to her thin body and crosses the shadowy quadrangle.

In the doorway of the Chapel she waits, her heart thudding as the snowflakes swirl.

A dark figure hastens round the corner and into view.

'Catriona.' The man's breath fogs in the frosted air.

She smiles at him. He takes her hand, gently rolls back her woollen glove and kisses the inside of her wrist. She looks down at the melting snowflakes on her warmed skin. ■

Poets' Paradise

Short Story by David McVey

God rarely allowed anyone else into his Holiest of Holies but he made an exception for the Dead Poets. He knew what disgruntled poets could be like.

Every dead poet who had ever lived, anywhere in the world, was crowded into a vast space under tasteful pearly lighting. Giant screens enabled the more distantly seated poets to view the platform party. That year's President stood up to give the welcome.

'I won't keep you long,' he began, 'we have a lot of business to get through and summer's lease, if I may say so, hath all too short a date. Firstly, I want to thank Our Lord for letting us use these premises for our AGM. As you know, our club rooms are now too small for our needs; poets keep dying and joining our ranks, so it is most gracious of Our Lord…'

A mutinous murmuring broke out from a group huddled around the main entrance with their backs to the meeting.

'Who are *they*?' asked the President.

'That's Keats and MacDiarmid and the rest of 'em,' said his Vice-President, Maya Angelou. 'When they got here they were kinda disappointed to find out there was a God and Heaven and all, so they spend their time trying to forget it. But they can't forget it if they're in the Holiest of Holies. They don't wanna come in.'

'Mewling, puking infants,' muttered the President.

'Shall I go and read them some of my Psalms?' said King David, bringing forth a flutter of laughter from the vast audience. When the room was silent again, the President continued. 'We have a special guest who will speak to us later,' and here he gestured towards a small woman seated further along the platform, 'So please give a warm Dead Poets' welcome to Liz Lochhead!'

There was great roar of applause which took a long time to die down. Then, a bald, grey, bearded, dead Scotsman near the front shouted, 'Wait a minute! She's not even dead! First we let women in, now it's the living!'

'Now, now,' said the President, 'this is Paradise, not your grim Poets' Pub! Women are full, equal members in our society.

'Aye,' shouted Robert Burns, 'the mair women the better!'

'I wish I was back down there,' said the grizzled poet to the man on his left.

'I prefer it up here,' said his neighbour. 'I can see, for a start.'

'Och, Milton, it's no all about *you*.'

'Is there nowhere at this meeting a man can get a drink?' shouted a curly-haired Welshman.

'You've been asking that every week since you got here, Thomas,' Milton shouted back, 'You have eternal bliss - what do you want *drink* for?'

The President restored order with a few bangs of his gavel. 'Now, my friends, we have two issues we must address before Ms Lochhead speaks to us. Firstly, the low level of poetry reading here in Paradise and, secondly, our capacity problems. Where can we hold our future meetings as poets keep dying and our numbers continue to swell?'

'I always used to say,' mused John Donne, 'that any man's death diminished me. Now, any poet's death increases us.'

'Our Lord has been most gracious on this occasion,' resumed the President, 'but we need new permanent club rooms. A cockpit, you might say, that can hold the vasty fields of France.'

'What's he on about?' muttered a cool, young but dead performance poet, 'What's France got to do with it?'

There was a little more discussion and then an Accommodation Committee was formed under the chairmanship of Thomas Hardy, who, after all, was an architect. 'Their meetings will be a right bundle o laughs,' whispered Robert Burns to Robert Fergusson.

'And so to the issue of poetry reading,' the President continued. 'In Paradise, our potential readers are, after all, dead…'

'…sailors, home from sea, and hunters home from the hill…' Robert Louis Stevenson whispered to himself.

'…and you might think that their existence couldn't be further enhanced. They have eternal life and eternal bliss. Why would they read poetry?'

'To make them feel miserable?' said Burns. 'Some poems dae that.'

'Yes, Rab, though in any poetry-reading campaign we had better say "Poetry enables us to taste emotions beyond our normal experience" or some flannel like that.'

'Michty, Will - we'll need a marketing copywriter. Nane of *us* would write mince like that.'

'I would,' chirped a little man who had worked all his life on greetings card verses.

By the time the discussion had risen and flourished and begun to die down, they had agreed to institute a Paradise Poetry Day. There would be public readings, free pamphlets and special programmes on Heaven's own TV channel, with additional coverage on the Red Button.

'Bit depressing, isn't it?' said Sylvia Plath, 'If some people aren't reading poetry, can this *really* be Heaven?'

'Nobody reads poetry among the living, now, either,' said Sir Walter Scott. 'Of course, at one time, *everybody* read mine…'

'That was *verse*, Wattie!' chortled Wordsworth. 'What you wrote wasn't proper poetry!'

The poets settled down to hear an inspiring address from their guest speaker, and then the President announced the end of the formal meeting; 'If you'll all proceed to the lesser Holy of Holies, a finger buffet had been prepared. This is a great networking opportunity so make the most of it. And I've arranged for flights of angels to sing thee to thy lunch.'

The poets flowed in a seemingly endless tide towards the exit. Above them flew angels, terrifying in their dazzling bright holiness, praising in stereo surround-sound; ahead of them they smelt the welcoming aroma of mini sausage rolls and vegetarian vol-au-vents. ■

Three encounters wi ra Bodhisattva ay compassion in Maryhill, Glasgow

by Dubh

Endins. Beginnins. Nothin iver beginnin or endin. Continuity contains entropy, stasis contains movement. Nae metter how many times ra knife chops, severs, slices, divides, nothin separates.

⋆ ⋆ ⋆

A get in ra lift oan ra 10th floor. Ra man awready in ther came fae higher up. E could be 35, or 60; ra povurty, diet, smokin an bevvyin in ra Wyndford gie age a different meanin.

E's smokin in ra lift, even though it's against regulations, an fur a second A consider no gettin in ra lift wi him, but A dae.

He's talkin tae is dug. "Ye're ma good girl. Ye'll feel better soon, eh? Good girl."

"Is she ill?" A ask.

"She goat somethin oan er tail oot ther in ra grass." E points tae a hairless, crusty sore. "A goat some cream fae ra vet, an she's gettin bettur."

When wi leave ra buildin, A walk by ra rivur, an e walks wi ra dug oan ra path thit runs parallel, separated fae ra Kelvin Walkway by bushes. Wi cannae see each uthir, but A hear im. "Ye're a good girl, eh? A'll look eftur ye. Ye'll feel bettur soon. C'moan an wu'll huv a wee walk aboot."

⋆ ⋆ ⋆

It snawed in ra Wyndford ra day, but noo it's evenin, an ra snaw has turned tae ice an slush. A walk through it in baby steps, kerryin a heavy bag ay groceries in each haund. Thir's an iron fence, an a young wumman oan the ither side ay it. She's goat three plastic bags; wan hauds a boattle ay Irn-Bru, anither a boattle ay cider, an ra thurd a mix ay food an claes.

"Excuse me," she says. "Wull ye gie me a haund? A cannae get they bags ower ra fence.

"A'm homeless, an A need tae get tae ma tent."

A put ma ain bags doon oan ra slushy grun, an she passes hurs tae me ower ra fence.

Then she climbs, hings, an jumps. Whin she lands she slips, an A catch an steady er.

"Thanks."

"Ye're welcome."

As A walk away, she calls, "Dae ye happin tae huv any sper chinge?"

"A don't think so," A say, puttin wan ay ma bags doon an puttin a haund in ma poackit.

"A know A'm kind ay rippin ra cunt oot ay ye," she says. "A don't mean tae."

"A huvnae goat any," A say. "Sorry."

"Thanks anywiy. Thanks a lot."

"Take care." A pick up ma bags an walk hame.

⋆ ⋆ ⋆

In Tesco, a young man mumbles a question tae ra middle-aged man at ra checkoot. "Dis it coast 50 pence tae pay wi a debit cerd?"

"Naw, no here, pal. It's free." ■

The Wrong Idea

Short Story by S.A. MacLeod

When you think about being seven or eight, you remember the red of your clothes and your sunburn, of gums with missing teeth, and flushed cheeks in the photos of you and your sister. There was white too: the crests of waves, seashells glued to rocks and the shiny tin of the caravan you stayed in. Some days you remember blue. Not just the blue of the sky, or the turquoise of the cans of baked beans, but a magical violet-blue that was there and then gone.

As far as your mother was concerned, there was only one colour.

'Red, that's your favourite, isn't it, Gillian?' she would say, when you'd never expressed such a preference. Then she would dress you in it from head to foot, like a letterbox. It was almost a premonition. You glowed scarlet before she even had a chance to embarrass you.

'Workers of the world unite!' your uncle Jim used to say when your mother, sister and you arrived at his door clad in crimson. Then he would laugh and your Dad would laugh too when your mother told him later. She didn't get it though. She didn't understand and that made her angry.

'Your brother called me a prostitute again!' she shouted, once she got home.

'You've got the wrong end of the stick,' replied your Dad. 'Why on earth would he do that?'

'I know what he's like, that brother of yours. He's always making snide remarks. He's a nasty piece of work.'

'I'm sure he didn't mean ...'

'Can't you even stand up for me? You're always taking his side. I'm sick and tired of you always taking everyone else's side.'

'Look…'

She wouldn't listen. She got angrier and angrier until she went off to bed in a huff.

Your Dad never usually said much when your mother was around. In fact nobody did. She was the unreliable narrator of the world around you, the sports commentator misinterpreting the game of your life. When you think of the sound of being seven or eight, you remember her voice.

And the smell of that time was the Calor gas of your caravan holidays. Your Dad said Calor gas was dangerous and to be careful. The whole caravan could go up in flames at any moment. One match and that would be it. Whoosh! And he laughed, as if he liked the idea.

At night the caravan shook when your mother stomped around and it rocked when she shouted at your Dad. Now and then you imagined the sea had come right up over the beach and you were floating and rocking on the waves.

That summer, it started to rain the day after you came to the caravan and then it poured down for a whole week. The raindrops battered the tin roof all night as if someone was up there dancing. And you thought of all the classes your mother made you go to. All that stepping and jumping, all these red outfits.

When the rain eventually stopped, you woke to the sound of hysteria in your mother's voice. Some people are affected by the moon, but it was the sun with her. She was singing operatically, 'Oh what a beautiful morning!' She had burst into your bunk bed room and sang until you put your head under the pillow.

When the singing stopped, the shouting began.

'Come on! Out of your beds! It's a lovely day and the birds are singing and the rabbits are jumping, let's go to the beach!'

You could hear the seagulls, but it was always a mystery to you where she got the information about the rabbits.

Your Dad was already outside, washing the car with a hose.

'Is Daddy coming to the beach?' You asked.

'Let's get you in the sun and get some colour in your cheeks.'

You tried again. 'Is Daddy coming to the beach?'

'It's about time you got some sun on you.'

You remember walking through the sand dunes in your flip flops carrying your plastic bucket and spade. You loved the feeling of the sand sliding over your toes. Your sister Mairi dropped her spade.

'Mairi!' your mother shouted, 'What d'you think you're doing?'

You picked up Mairi's spade and held her hand as you walked towards the sparkling sea. You wanted to walk and walk right into it.

'Where are you going? Let's stop here.'

Your mother put down the tartan rug and your Dad started opening the navy blue windbreak. There was hardly anyone else on the beach. He hammered the posts into the sand using a big stone. You were ready in your bathing suits, but you had to wait for the command.

'OK, get in the sea. In ye go.'

You ran down the beach. The Highland sea was always freezing, but you wanted to stay near to it. If you went up on the sand dunes, there might be trouble. Your Dad ran towards you in his bathing trunks doing a silly walk, then he sprung into the sea and splashed as you and Mairi screamed. You held hands, the three of you, and jumped over the waves.

By that night your skin had turned red and sore and the next day you had to wear long sleeves to go out. That was when you saw three boys of around your age, climbing a rock and singing a song.

I'm the king of the castle and you're the dirty rascal.

They were sitting up on the only landmark on the beach - a weird solitary rock. One boy jumped up, pushed his friend down and shouted,

No, I'm the king of the castle get down you dirty rascal

You stared at them for a while wondering what they were doing and then one of them noticed you.

'Why are yous wearing long sleeves?' he said. He said words differently from you, had fair hair and sand stuck to his face.

'We got burnt.'

'That was stupid.'

You looked down. Why didn't they get burnt? Why were you stupid?

'Didn't yous have any sun cream?'

You looked at Mairi who was looking at the boy.

'Come on up here, if you like,' he said.

You both ran towards the rock and climbed up beside them. You could see all around: the people on the beach, a dog, the sea and the sky.

You looked at the rock and found one of these white sun-hat shells.

'Look,' you said to Mairi, 'it's a limpet.'

'A what?' she said.

'A limpet. We did it at school.'

'Oh,' she said, 'is it alive?'

'Yes, it lives in its shell. Inside it's got everything. It's got a foot and a tongue and teeth.'

'Tongue and teeth? And… has it got eyes?'

'I don't know.'

'What about ears?'

'The teacher never said, but they don't like it if another shell tries to sit in their space.'

'In their space?'

'Yes, they push it away.'

'But how can they do that? It looks dead, Gillian.'

'No, it's alive.'

'Is it really alive?' Her wide open eyes stared at you.

The blond haired boy touched the limpet.

'Look!' he said and he pulled the shell off the rock. It was grey and gooey underneath.

'You've hurt it now!' said Mairi. 'You've hurt it and it'll die.'

'It's only a shell,' he said.

His friends had jumped off the rock and were walking away. He threw the shell at them.

'Hey!' one of them shouted and picked up a stone to throw back.

You and Mairi jumped off the rock and crouched on the other side. Mairi's eyebrows wriggled and the boys kept shouting. You both looked out at the sea. It was getting choppy in the wind. Underneath each wave it was dark, a kind of hollow where the sun couldn't get to. The light was changing to pink, like the postcards your mother sent to everyone from the caravan. She didn't write much, just: 'Having a lovely time'.

'Do you think Mammy's having a lovely time?' you asked Mairi.

'I don't know.'

The next day the boy from the beach came to your caravan when you were still in bed.

'Wakey wakey!' he shouted and you heard him knock on the metal. Your mother opened the door and spoke to him.

'They're not up yet!' you heard her roar.

You felt the thud of her footsteps and she burst into your room.

'There's a boy to see you.'

'OK!' You slid down the ladder out of your bunk bed. Mairi sat up in hers and her hair got stuck to the bed above.

'Ow,' she said. You pulled it out for her, but some strands were stuck in the wire under the mattress.

'We're just coming!' You shouted to the boy.

'Hurry up!' he said.

You threw off your pyjamas and started getting dressed.

'I'm just putting on my knickers,' you yelled.

'And I'm putting on my vest,' said Mairi.

'Me too!'

'And that's my T-shirt,'

'I'm putting on my shorts,' shouted Mairi.

You came out of the room and headed for the caravan door.

Your mother was blocking your way, a Cyclops in the doorway.

'What do you think you're doing?' she growled.

You looked down. What had you done now?

'Do you think it's OK to shout about your underwear to boys?'

You looked at her face, as red as her clothes.

'It's disgusting. You should know better. You'll give him the wrong idea.'

'What idea?' asked Mairi.

'Don't give me that cheek. You know what I mean!'

'Off out with you. Go out and play with your boy.'

You walked out of the caravan slowly.

'What did she mean?' asked Mairi.

'Knickers and vest are bad words,' you said.

'Like bloody and damn and… big bum…?'

'Shhhh! If we say them… people…if we say them, it's the wrong idea.'

'The wrong idea,' repeated Mairi.

You went to meet the boy. And now you worried that he would be different

because you'd given him 'the wrong idea' whatever that was and it was your fault. You'd done it. And he would know. You weren't sure what it was OK to say and not OK to say, so you didn't say anything, just in case. But he would know. Now you knew that boys know things and that made you feel funny.

'Come on,' he said. 'Let's go to the beach!'

You remember rushing through the sand dunes with the reeds stroking your legs, the wind in your ears. The boy was saying something that you couldn't hear. Mairi was dancing down the beach. What did the boy know? Why were you so bad for saying these words? Mairi did a cartwheel on the beach. Suddenly she was upsides down and then the right way up again. You felt heavy and stuck in the sand. The boy was zig-zagging across the beach, nee-nawing like an ambulance, or maybe it was bee-bawing because he came from down in Glasgow. The sea was sparkling. Fat seagulls were swooping from the sky. Your mother would be in the caravan angry and it was your fault. She would be cleaning in that fast way, that loud way. Or shaking something. Shaking the carpet out or the bedclothes or emptying the bins. At least she didn't have a Hoover here. You thought of her face when she was hoovering. The corners of her mouth turned down and her forehead wrinkled like it was her who was making the noise. Often she seemed to be attached to the machine, possessed by its shaking and vibrating.

The boy was waving now, jumping up and beckoning you to follow him along the beach. He floated like a feather, while the sand sucked you under. He went towards the harbour, ran between the rocks and then disappeared from sight.

'Come on!' you heard him shout, 'over here!'

You caught up with him climbing over the stones and between the pools. Slimy seaweed covered the rocks. The sea air tasted salty. Then he disappeared again.

'Over here!' You heard, but you couldn't see him. This time his voice was echoey.

He had gone and was just a voice. The seagulls were screaming. 'What d' you think you're doing?' your mother was saying in your head.

You followed the voices and found the boy and Mairi in a cave.

'Look!' he said. 'Isn't it brilliant?'

Inside you heard water dripping and there was a damp smell. Whenever you said anything your words moved around the cave and came back, even a whisper, it made you even more worried about saying the wrong thing. Mairi was skipping around. She started shouting.

'Wooh!'

The boy joined in.

'Arse!' he said.

'Shut…up!' said Mairi.

'Shite!' he shouted and the word bounced around 'Shi-i-i-i-te'

'I'm…telling…on…you,' shouted Mairi.

'Who…are…you…going…to…tell?'

'I'm…telling…my…mother… you… said…bad…words.'

'Your…mother's…a…nasty…cow!'

'How…do…you…know?'

'I…heard…her. My…mother's… much…nicer…than…yours.'

'You're…a…liar!'

'Celtic…forever!' said the boy.

'What's…that?'

'Haven't…you…heard…of…Celtic?'

'No…what…is…it?'

'They're...a… fuckin'… football… team!'

'A fuk…king… football… team?

'That's…right'

'How…many…players…in…a… fuk…king…football…team?'

The boy started laughing.

'Jesus… girls… are… stupid!' he shouted.

You stood at the side of the cave watching them and then you looked out at the sea again and your eyes hurt going from the dark to the light. You felt dizzy and walked away from the cave to look at the rocks and the pools around them. And maybe it was the crab that reminded you. The crab was moving sideways along a rock, clambering slowly, and then scuttling away and if you could have been fast like that it might have been alright.

If only you had been fast that time you picked the bluebells. Your mother had been angry and then you saw her watching the telly. There had been nothing on TV at the time because it was the afternoon. Just the test card: that girl with the blackboard and the hairband. That girl you wanted to be when you grew up. Your mother was staring at the test card and her face had no expression on it, but her eyes looked bloodshot. You didn't know if she was waiting for a programme to come on, but usually there wouldn't have been anything before *Watch with Mother* at 4 O'clock.

It was a hot day for spring and you went out to play and when you were on the hill with your friend you saw the bluebells under the trees, that magical violet glow. You thought they looked so lovely. And you wanted to make your mother happy so you started to pick them. You thought of her blank face staring at the telly and you pulled them out with their juicy stems. They were so small that you needed to pick a lot and soon you had a big bunch of them. The stems felt slimy in your hand and already the blue flowers didn't look as good as they did on the ground. You set off home with your bunch of flowers. You went down the steps beside the hill and along the street, said bye to your friend at the entrance to the lane and waved, holding the bluebells like a trophy. When you got near the house you could still hear the music from the telly. The afternoon music that meant there was nothing on. Maybe your mother was still watching the blank screen. You were going to surprise her.

You went in the back door and through the kitchen. Going into the living room you could see the top of her head above the chair.

'Hello Mammy!' There was no reply.

You walked towards her with the bluebells, seeing the side of her stern face staring at the telly. The test card girl was staring back, at least the girl was smiling. You stood beside your mother offering her the bluebells.

'Look, what I've brought you Mammy,' you said, 'Look Mammy!'

'What?' she said turning her face towards you quickly.

'What have you brought me?'

'These,' you said, looking at the bluebells and noticing that they were drooping and had turned darker, kind of purple.

'What did you pick them for?' Her lips were close together and she seemed to snarl.

You looked at her angry face.

'For you,' you said looking at the flowers.

'What would I want with some nasty withered flowers eh? Look at them, half dead.'

She stood up and grabbed them from you.

'Out of my way,' she said and marched off to the kitchen.

You heard the thump of something landing and the flip top of the kitchen bin. You followed her in, scanning the kitchen for the blue of the flowers, but you could only see the pale Formica and the red of the linoleum floor.

You looked up at her.

'Well?' she said, 'What are you staring at? Out of my sight, go on, out of my sight 'til I make the tea.'

And if you could have been fast like the crab, it might have been OK. The crab was scuttling sideways, but you had walked home slowly with the flowers. You had walked in the heat and the bluebells had turned purple and withered. And you couldn't show her how lovely they had been on the hill. You thought you could make her happy, but you weren't fast enough, you were slow like the limpet stuck to the rock, the bluebells had died and it was your fault. You'd said bad words to the boy and it was your fault.

And you stood up and walked away from the crab and the rock pool, away from the cave. Mairi and the boy were still shouting and their voices faded as you got nearer the sea. The seagulls screamed above you. And now you can see yourself, a child of seven or eight, standing there looking at the sea. And you can't remember what you were thinking, but it might have been about the colour blue. ■

Lullaby For A Folk Singer

(for Dave)
Robin Wilson

stories do not sleep
stories never sleep
they find you in the dark
and make your hurt sing

it's the first chord you borrowed
because it belonged to you truly
it's the first chorus you shared
when voices recognised their loss
and lifted up their testimony

it's the scale of the betrayal
it's the time that it took
it's the pettiness of history
it's that we haven't changed a bit

did you walk the birks of Aberfeldy?
did you hear the mavis singing?
did you follow Bonnie Dundee?
did you drink a service to your lassie?
are you my ain kind dearie-o?

it's the Floo'rers o' the Forest
falling as the moon stands still

and all the rogues and wantons
passing round the parting glass
cannot sing us back to blooming

the pride that swelled our chests
when we were young chevaliers
is dismissed by winter's breath
that returns no whisper of youth
or prospect of the world's honour

but you can summon company
when you call we will respond
with love songs of our own

stories do not sleep
stories never sleep
they find us in the dark
and make our hurt sing

Poetry

Evan Cowen

There is
an echo rock
at Loch an Eilean
island Loch, where you cock
an ear and hear (watch!) a hook
that, sung, caught itself (look!) among
and clung the forty tendrilled pine and spun
(pretending, haughty chime) a web and lunged
toward the further shore - a wave in fervour to rebound,
a lathe of sound
now
Drowns
Down

There is an echo rock (where is?) where stood stock still there cupped hands hear your holler fill the wood,
shocked, up. Knock the distance, land erupts
to rally back the syntax you convey
and leaves a voice
without a shape.
Rock echo
Echo
Rock

Waiting with Greyfriars Bobby

Janis Clark

I scanned the photos every day for weeks,
sifted out the mountaineers, the cavemen
or those to avoided when the moon was full.
He looked quite nice. We both liked dogs.

The Grassmarket glowed in midday sun.
Nearby, Wee Bobby waited his arrival.
Mingling with tourists, I waited too,
watched a pigeon bob and coo,
tail feathers splayed to lure a mate.

When the sun cried off behind a cloud,
my watched warned it was getting late.
My first and last time.
Before I left, I patted Bobby's nose
and marvelled at his patience.

Driving Lesson

Merryn Glover

You have the keys
and a handful of lessons
under your belt
while I have empty hands
and the passenger belt
across my heart,
feet together, lips sealed.

Our first time swapped,
you reverse out of the drive,
and accelerate away, leaving
the sunset behind till
it meets us again down the hill
lighting the river,
your concentrated face,
my eyes.

You are changing gear,
navigating new roads
over bridges and round bends
that I say you take too fast.
You say the instructor says
you hesitate too much
and I say
If in doubt go slow
but you say
No.
You are not in doubt.

You practice roundabouts,
indicating entering and leaving.
Then the long road through the forest
as the day ends
in fading colour on the loch
a glow on the white mountains.

Near the slope where we used to go sledging
you do a three-point turn.
The full moon rises behind the trees
and I hear its instruction:

Look left, look right,
Pay attention this night.
He is indicating
He is leaving.

The Reunion

Sheila Lockhart

Brisk breezes sweep the New Town street,
Festival madness in her step
She hesitates, peers through the open door
Still there these thirty years and more?
Thinned hair, pale skin, worn slippers on his feet,
A gust quakes her heart in its foundation,
Spots of cold rain splash her face.
He speaks her name, not forgotten then?
She enters, remembering this place, his embrace.
World of blue hills, green skies, a yellow beach,
Palm tree shading dark figures from an orange sun.
The chill clean air can't penetrate
Such warm confusing lies, beguiling charm,
She stays, not breathing, gasps beneath its weight.

The Chimney Sweeper

Sheila Lockhart

We pause on our midsummer hike,
This wee black moth suggests shade,
A smudge of soot in the shifting sunlight
Beside the Old Military Road.
He rests in shivering grasses
Matt charcoal on a shiny stem,
Wings fringed with a thin dusting of ash.
And now, quick shimmy of taffeta, he's off
To perform a delicate strathspey,
His evening dress, like some black-coated Goth,
Discordantly elegant on the bleak moor.

Were you dancing then, Chimney Sweeper,
When Caulfeild's men smashed stones
To build this road,
And redcoats marched to break the Highlands,
Or when the bonnie prince rode by
To Inverlaidnan House, that's now a ruin?
Did they pause on this track, those violent men,
Spotting the smoky blackness of your wings,
Your small, uncanny shadow on the grass
And, like us, more pensively
Continue on their way?

Suith in

Kirsteen Bell

A fere air souchs throu the birkenshaw
Whisperin its wicht hishie-baa
Weirin its braith in a leafy wharle
An soothin the sair pechin saul

Celebrating a Cypress

Juniperus communis

juniper smoke saining a new year in
an ancient medicine
jenever fortifying dutch courage to win
the dry london processing of savin
with various botanicals therein
berries of juniperus and citrus skin
tonic, ice and lemon the linchpin
the raj sugared bitter quinine with gin
mother's solace, maudlin heroine
heart of the cocktail hour – no sin
now additional aromatics begin
a gin evolution a la Darwin
gin for joying,
gin for ageing
whatever, whenever, GIN.

Joan Gibson

Savour the huam

Artist Amanda Thompson on the roots of her new book

A *Scots Dictionary of Nature* (Saraband) has been a long time in the making. As an artist, much of my work is about the Scottish Highlands, and in 2010, when I made an artist's book called *A Dictionary of Wood*, I was doing research about the remnant Scots pinewood forests of Abernethy, and about Culbin, a Forestry Commission forest in Morayshire. Earlier that year, in a second-hand bookshop in Edinburgh, I had found an old Jamieson's *A Dictionary Of The Scottish Language*, abridged by John Johnstone and published in 1846. The original price of £11 was embossed in gold on the spine, and I bought it for £20. In opening random pages, I'd come across words such as *timmer breeks* (timber trousers), meaning a coffin, and *dedechack: the sound made by a woodworm in houses, so called from its clicking noise, and because vulgarly supposed to be a premonition of death*.

I loved these words and more: they had a resonance and a particular feeling to them that was sometimes poignant and affecting, and sometimes conveyed a prosaic descriptiveness that nonetheless spoke of close connections and an attentiveness to the nuances of the landscape, what it contains, how we move through it, and even specific times of day or year. *Break-back: the harvest moon, so called by the harvest labourers because of the additional work it entails.* There were also words like *huam: the moan of an owl in the warm days of summer,* evocative of that feeling of the haziness of a long, hot summer's day as it spills into evening. This old dictionary made me begin to wonder about lost connections to land and place and perhaps even ways of seeing and being in the world, and I began wondering what else I might find.

Eard-fast means *a stone or boulder fixed firmly in the earth,* or simply, *deep rooted in the earth,* and it's a word that seems to get to the heart of this book. It resonates with ideas of place and belonging, makes me think of deep connections to places and particular landscapes and makes me consider how language can assist or be at the root of such connections.

LAND

adder-bead, -stane n the stone supposed to be formed by adders.
adder-bell, -cap n the dragon-fly.
adhantare n one who haunts a place.

Between 2009 and 2013 I was doing a doctorate and an element of my research related to the gradual changes that happen over time in the forests of Morayshire and Abernethy and how, when one is familiar with a place, one sees many more layers and begins to recognise the subtlest of these changes. I was also interested in how we make sense of and articulate our relationships to the land, both visually and verbally. As I walked with foresters and ecologists, I came across words like *gralloch*, used by a deerstalker to describe the innards of a dead deer (and the verb *to gralloch*, which so viscerally describes the task of removing them). Such words were unfamiliar to me, and yet foresters and ecologists used them with ease and specificity to describe their everyday activities. As I listened and heard these new (to me) words, they informed additional ways of seeing and gave me different understandings of the places where I was walking and of the activities they were carrying out. And there were other phrases too, some quirky, others pithy. An older forester told me about a man who started working for the Forestry Commission but was not very good at his job: he was not "wid material", the forester said.

I decided to systematically go through the Jamieson dictionary looking for words related to wood, and did the same when I subsequently found a Supplement to *Jamieson's Scottish Dictionary*, edited by David Donaldson and published in 1887, and then a copy of *The Scots Dialect Dictionary,* edited by Alexander Warrack and published in 1911. I started making my way through each of these dictionaries, noting words – most of them completely unfamiliar – first in relation to wood, then over the years birds, weather, water, and of course, the land itself. The focus on words relating to walking came at a later date, as I began to think about how we discover places by moving through them; and how places themselves (and what we're doing in them) dictate how we move.

WEATHER

Banff-baillies n white, snowy-looking clouds on the horizon, betokening foul weather.
baumy adj balmy.
beir, bere, bir, bier n, v noise, cry, roar; force, impetuosity, often as denoting the violence of the wind.

Words pull us together across borders and times. I have lovely conversations with a friend from Yorkshire, where we compare Scots and Yorkshire words. I always remember him telling me a story about his elderly father who had fallen down in his garden and couldn't get up. "Help!" he shouted, when he heard the postman at the door, "I'm rigwelted." The postman, also a Yorkshireman, heard his cry and knew to go and help him up, as *rigwelted* describes *a sheep stranded on its back*. I couldn't think of an equivalent word in Scots, and joked that perhaps our sheep just didn't fall down, but when I looked through these old dictionaries, there it was… *Awalt sheep: a sheep that has fallen on its back and cannot recover itself.*

BIRDS

caper-lintie n the whitethroat.
cat-gull n the herring gull.
catyogle n the great horned owl.
chack, check n the wheatear.

I'm not a lexicographer, a linguist, or a historian of the Scottish language, but as an artist I am interested in words and language and how we might describe our world. In mining these dictionaries, I've found words that are rarely heard, no longer in use or perhaps largely forgotten. These "found" words evidence a confluence of local and social histories, allude to changing ways of life and shifting connections, and point to fascinating relationships with nature and the land. ■

Cataracts

Short Story by Roddie McKenzie

Thi alarm gied yi a flehg so yi blooter it intae silence- another day sterts. Yi hae that wee bevridge aff thisideboard before Yi even turn on thilicht. It disnae matter; naebody hame but yersel. Tae auld tae fur this faif; yet tae youthie tae stehrve.

But it wuzna aye like this. When ye first stairted in thi Cleppy Road, before thi bairns, it wiz a joy to get up fir work. A brah crowd o` lassies and aw thi strappin laddies fae thi mills doon thi road drappin` by fur a blether. Noo wi wurkin` roon thi toon, ye dinnae get tae ken wha`s wha in a shop afore yir moved on tae thi next yin. Jist like thi licht passing thro thi windae- in and awa`.

Eh! Cheenged days noo. Thi bairns being heid bummers in thae bioteckae works. Dinnae see thim much- ther eh bizzy. But wi Tommy gone, it wiz back tae work. Cannae jist trail roon thi hoose in yir rovies. So Yi went back tae work wi thi opteecians.

Maist fowk are braw when yir helping them choose thi frames and thi bairns that jist need a wee bittae re-assurance. Yi like that bit o` thijob. Felt part o` a team that wiz keekin oot fur people. Nice tae help them see thi telly, thi Tullay or thi grandbairns again. But she wiz a bizm! A richt nippie sweetie, her an thi designer hanbag. Some o` them that come in here jist wind thersels up. Yi ken thit lenses, arnae megic een. Thae fowk dinna get thi idea that when yer auld yer een jist dinnae work as weel. Thers a limit tae whit lenses kin dae. Mind yi, tell them that an they git pussay and blame YI fur it. Ach, sumtimes it jist gits tae yi and thi day yi snapped at thon stuffed shirt. Yi ken yi wur a bittie ootae order, but fur her tae pit a complaint in aboot yi.. ah mean tae say... . Then...suspentit ! Whits that aboot? Yi asked Cath. She tells yi tae keep thi heid; she`ll see whit she kin dae . Stull, stiddy noo, walk oot proud, dinnae gie them thi satisfaction. Yir een burn, bit yi keep yer dignity, ken whit eh mean?

Nae point in gangin` hame sae early, jist mair time tae kill. Yi gang up tae thi `View tae relax. Thi vino goes down pretty guid. Yi like thi crowd in here, ther usually mair chattie though. Seems everybodys goat thi hump thi day. Yi like this place, especially thi auld songs oan thi juke boax, yi sing alang, they`re a laughing, they enjoy a guid sang an a sesh, so yi dae a few mair. Megic! Thit feeling of being "tap o` thi huhlltoon Ma"- who wuz it that said yon yi ask? Och, Wha kerrs! Yi close yer een tae savour it. When yi open them wherr ur they a`? Ye go roond thi big curved bar and ther they ur.

"Hullo ther.. ony body wid think ye were gi`in` me thi boady swerve," yi shout, an gang ti gie thim a wee hug. But yir feet catch oan thi brass rail and thi wine glass in yir han creshes oantae thi bar. As thi shards clatter across thi bar tae a spinning stop, yi see ther een; oot like prawns, thim drawin` back slowly, like yi were mental an a`. And as thi rose-tintit glesses fa` awa, yi see clearly, an` it izna bonnie. ■

Poetry

Foreshore
Howard Wright

Jellyfish at the high-water mark.
Exploded silicon implants.
Punctured eyeballs; inner workings
of a soft engine, mechanism
of watercolour and albumen,
whiskey heart and brain of milk.

The Seafront
Howard Wright

The worrying croak of swings. Nobody there.
Wrapped up in themselves, taking what's on offer,
people are mistaken in what they might find there:
childhood, small rebellions; a breath of salty air;
something to stay forever that was never really there.
They think twice, half-hoping to travel as far by car,
hearing that nothing had changed down there
since ships moored in what was then the harbour.
Some even say, with justification, nothing was there
in the first place. Chips from a backstreet trailer,
probably, but that's neither here nor there.
Ice cream in the park by the seawall, foul or fair?
A roundabout painfully turns. Nobody there.

The Waterfall
Howard Wright

A pair of rainbows where it paused
and fell again. Looking up, eyes shaded,
you gained a corona while the river fled,
fast and low, over the shelf of basalt
from remnants of the plateau. Ionised
pure colours, lionised unspoilt spectrums
spanned stepping-stones and rock litter
to steep paths leading across and out
of the Amazonian gloom, the deluge
of housing already around our ankles.
When wasps hit the picnic, we beat
and battled and stamped them into the dirt.
For a short time we were in paradise.

In a Hebridean cemetery
Peter Godfrey

We are just stones,
somewhere between boulder and pebble
lodged on a mound of grass,
a twist of ewe's wool on the rusting wire.

Some a slab blotched with black and yellow
or a wafered menhir split in a storm.
The marram grass has grown so high
some of us are hardly noticed.

Iris blades crowd in a ditch below
and on the white tràigh clear waves lap the sand.
Shadow of Husival across the kyle –
a wheatear rides the wind on sapphire sea.

We are the people of Scarp.
We hauled our boats up the shore,
fetched water at the well,
combed the beach for driftwood, and sang.

MacInnes, MacLennan and MacLeod
by runrig furrows and the purple hill
that rang with schoolhouse voices.
Our names kissed others' lips before we went.

Kyleakin ferry remembered
Peter Godfrey

Yellow crest – lion rampant
on a shiny red funnel
seen through mist and slanting rain,
smoke wafting with the wind.

Cars and lorries snug on deck
in a din of steel and rivets
that drifts out half a mile,
slips past its sister vessel.

Far-flung lamps a constellation,
green and red, dim white and blinking
as a searchlight arcs the cosmos,
falls on capstans and dark waves.

Leaving
Susan Elsley

Here is the final cry
Of an old weary heron
Caught in the cleft
Of the split rock

Here is a winsome sparkle
Peaking from the gorm-black sky
On a haar-frost night
By the hill road
Here is the blow-by
Smell of budding pine
Hooching with fiery sparrows
At the slip of day

Here is the butter silk
Of crumpled sea storm fronds
Sneaking up on the bent grass
By the bleached tombola

And here, here is the last sigh,
A soft swither of a glance,
Then a pull on the door of the old place
And the sharp creak of leaving.

Gone
Susan Elsley

Catch her before she's gone
Tell her that it doesn't matter
That the plate cracked
Scattering melting moments,
With a crusty bag of sugar
Standing in for the porcelain daintiness
Of past sharing

Call her and take a skelf of time
To laugh about the dog running puppy-wild
And she got in a fank and you had to
Hold her, her breathing slowing to
A gentle exhale,
Respite against
The chemical clouding

Now it's past, lift your head
And put it soft, weep-down
On the cornflower rug which braced her
As the zephr wind tore her from
Warm sodded earth,
Leaving you salt lipped
With the tang of absence
Now, a shred of evermore.

If You're Out There
Marie-Bernadette Rollins

Don't come complaining to us about war –
you had it coming.

Don't feed the stove with iron and ice if
you want it burning.

Don't appease our wounds with elixirs that
you know won't be numbing.

Don't promise us next May when you know that
you won't be returning.

We've mourned the moon through each feeble night but
this eye can't find sleep.

Don't condemn vices you burden us with
from cradle to tomb.

Don't reproach us for ravishing fields that
you gave us to reap.

If you want us to repent, then tell us
who's praying to whom?

A Long Look at *The Long Take*

Short-listed for the 2018 Man Booker Prize (to be awarded on 16th October), Robin Robertson's novel in verse *The Long Take* (Pan Macmillan) has been described as 'remarkable' and 'showing the flexibility a poet can bring to form and style.' JENNIFER MORAG HENDERSON considers the book and the poet

North-east writer Robin Robertson's new book *The Long Take* has been acclaimed as a unique and genre-defying 'noir narrative', but it is not a dark, dense text: it is full of "daggering light and sun laid out everywhere"; a sharp, bright illuminating read that throws stark black shadows. Robertson is a poet, the winner of all three prestigious Forward Prizes, and *The Long Take* is something special, yet also a logical progression from his five previous poetry collections.

Robertson was brought up in Aberdeen, where his father was a university chaplain. He went on to study English there, and his work often recalls the north of Scotland, particularly the coast. Poems in the 2010 collection *The Wrecking Light* talk about "The fishboxes of Fraserburgh, Aberdeen / Peterhead… nothing but the names / of the places I came from years ago…", while the penultimate poem in the collection, "At Roane Head", winner of the Forward prize for 'Best Single Poem', is well known for its gruesome tale of selkies. However, Robertson's concerns are not purely Scottish, but something more international. He continues around different coastlines, with their liminal mixture of sea and land; at the edge, where things meet. Some poems go to the Mediterranean, others north to Scandinavia. *The Long Take* starts in eastern Canada, but travels "to another coast, a different ocean…", across America "sea to shining sea" – "He'd arrived. Somewhere."

"At Roane Head" is probably Robertson's best-known poem, and, like much of his writing, this is poetry used to tell a story, not poetry as personal confessional. Throughout Robertson's collections he returns to long poems or sequences of poems. There are Celtic folktales and Greek mythology; Acteon sees the goddess Artemis bathing naked and is turned into a stag in 2006 collection Swithering; while in Robertson's first book *A Painted Field*, the biographical "Camera Obscura" told the story of photographer and painter David Octavius Hill, the creator of the huge painting of the main architects of the Disruption of the Church of Scotland. Robertson tells Hill's life story through poems, and poetical diary entries and letters. *The Long Take* takes this story-telling form to book length.

Robin Robertson. Photo by Niall McDiarmid.

The story of *The Long Take* is based around a soldier returning from the Second World War. Scarred by his war experiences and unable to settle back home in Cape Breton, Canada, he travels, first to New York, then west to Los Angeles and San Francisco. "He walks. That is his name and nature." we read at the start, and Walker takes us with him through the seedier side of these cities of 1940s and 50s America.

The Cape Breton setting – and the precise use of language – are reminiscent of Alistair Macleod's wonderful novel *No Great Mischief,* and Robertson studied for his Masters under Macleod's tuition, at the University of Windsor in Ontario, Canada. But whereas *No Great Mischief* was a richly Canadian novel that Scots could see themselves in, *The Long Take's* Canada is sometimes very Scottish: we never hear of the French Acadian side of Cape Breton, or the long Africadian culture and history of Nova Scotia. Walker is a traditional man, silent, believing that the girl he has left behind can never understand the horror that men faced in the war. The Cape Breton scenes are glimpsed mainly in flashback, however, and most of the action takes place in America – and here *The Long Take* goes somewhere different, turning from an old story of contrasting country and city, to a meditation on the changing city itself. Walker leaves the fishermen of Cape Breton, first finding work in the docks where the fish are received, but soon moving on again, to Hollywoodland and the city of the movie industry that is referenced throughout the book.

From the beginning, Walker shares his interest in literature and film, the art forms where he finds respite from his restless thoughts: he encounters filmmaker Robert Siodmak, and stands on street corners as film crews run take after take. He finds work as a newspaperman: "I'm interested in films and jazz. Cities," Walker says to an editor, as he looks for work.

" 'Cities?'
'Yes. American cities.'
'What about American cities?'
'How they fail.' "

Assigned to the City Desk, Walker finds himself following police cars, covering murders.

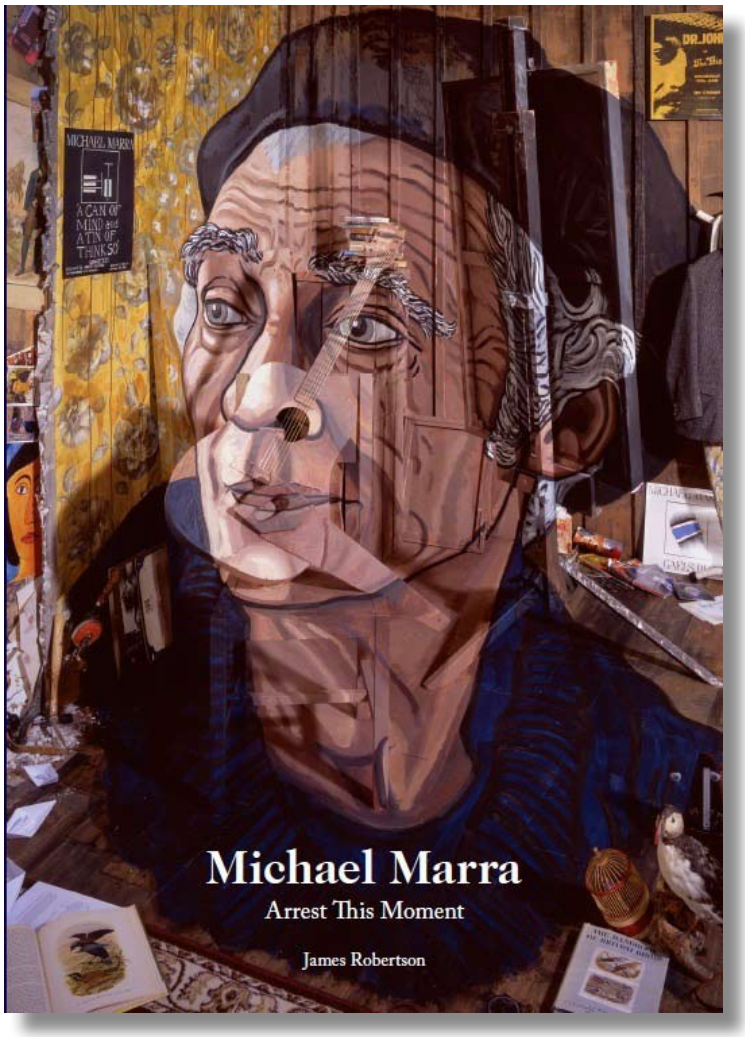
The character of Walker himself recalls another literary reference: Robertson has spoken before of his admiration of Welsh poet David Jones, whose protagonist Dai Greatcoat walked through Jones' "In Parenthesis", a prose poem of the Great War.

The form is not intrusive: poetry seems like the best way to express the disconnected thoughts of the war veteran, his short diary entries and brief conversations with fellow citizens of the city's underbelly, the precise words of his newspaper copy, the elliptical dialogue of film. Robertson has said that he thinks poetry should be read aloud to be savoured, and combinations and descriptions in *The Long Take* reach moments that need to be re-read and tested: directionless and hungover, Walker wakes up: "He found himself misplaced in his bed all night, mislaid…"

Robertson has translated Swedish Nobel prize-winning poet Tomas Tranströmer, and he said of Tranströmer that he "continually returns to symbolism that stands in opposition to the natural world… most specifically, the car, the driver, the mass movement of traffic…" – and this is where *The Long Take* is going as well. Walker lives his unhappy life pounding the streets of his adopted cities, but the bulldozers are moving in and we are coming into the America where the car is king.

As well as his poetry, Robertson has a parallel career in editing. Not just a student of Alistair Macleod, he was also his editor, and he works or has worked with writers including Irvine Welsh, Ocean Vuong, A.L. Kennedy, Sharon Olds, Michael Ondaatje, Alan Warner, Ben Okri, Janice Galloway and James Kelman. Editing and writing are not necessarily compatible, and "Mortification", a collection of essays Robertson edited, looks at the clash between the magic of writing and the business of promoting literature. It should be required reading if not for all aspiring writers, then certainly for all arts administrators who refuse to understand why authors don't like doing talks for free. That said, the roster of names Robertson has worked with includes many whose work has made Scottish literature magical – whilst reaching an international audience that makes writing viable as a business. Writers need a practical streak.

As the wrecking-ball moves in, The Long Take moves to its conclusion. Readers familiar with the tone of Robertson's poetry know from the start that there is little chance of a happy ending. Walker is not going to win, he is only going to find, as the sub-title of the book says, "A Way to Lose More Slowly". The vile Pike, Walker's over-keen colleague at the newspaper, shows that the new world cares little for those who served and are still fighting their demons. The only redemption is for the reader, who can see what art has been made out of the wreckage of the Second World War, the veterans' lives, and the ruin of a dream of a city. ■



Michael Marra: Arrest This Moment
by James Robertson
Big Sky, with project support from Creative Scotland Alba Chruthachail
Review by David Gilbert

Michael Marra, who died in October 2012 at the age of 60, was a gentle, gifted man. An humanitarian who inspired deep affection, he was unique. A one-off. Everybody said so. A multi-talented songwriter, musician, singer, artist, producer, actor-playwright, arranger and essentially, as noted on the book's back cover, a "chronicler of the improbable, celebrant of the underdog".

He was an enigma impossible to pigeonhole; so how do you write a biography that truly reflects such a man and celebrates his life? Perhaps the answer is take an oblique approach: don't take the obvious chronological route. The last thing that Michael Marra was, was obvious. Make it as kaleidoscopic and unconventional as his life was and weave a tapestry from all those colourful threads.

James Robertson has done just that and to great effect. That he loved and understood the man is clear throughout the book, but especially so in the sequence of Kitchen conversations, nine in all, a brilliant device which weaves through the book and pulls the strands together. The first seven of these conversations, and number nine, are with Michael himself, or rather with his spirit. Robertson conjures-up Michael's voice with uncanny accuracy, alive with his typical laconic, bone-dry humour, and allows Michael, wonderfully witty, to have the last word.

Conversation number eight is with Peggy, Michael's wife. This describes their early life together and sheds some light on his legendary pre-gig nerves. It also reveals how demanding it could be supporting the career of such an intense and deeply committed artist and performer and how important this support was.

Everyone who encountered Michael, however briefly, has a tale to tell. So I'll take the liberty of telling two. Inspired by a performance Michael gave in 2003, a few of us formed a promoting group [Resolis Community Arts – still functioning – Ed.] so that we could book him in our own hall on the Black Isle. By coincidence, the hall is only a few miles from the 'Big Sky' office of Dundee-raised Marra enthusiast, Bryan Beattie, who originated this book project. We pledged to try to get Michael back to perform every two years, and achieved that goal several times. This included his very last solo gig in 2012, just a few months before he died.

Chatting with Michael after the sound check that evening, the conversation turned to football, a passion of his (there's a section in the book titled 'Football') and my home team, Norwich City. I don't follow them closely and he soon left me behind with his knowledge of the current Canaries team. In my youth, I was a regular supporter, and the walk to the ground in the Carrow area of the city passed close to the church of St. Julian of Norwich, an important and internationally revered Christian mystic and anchoress of the late 14th and early 15th century. The biography closes with a famous quote from Revelations of Divine Love by her: "All shall be well, / and all shall be well, /and all manner of /thing shall be well." The link may be tenuous, but All Will Be Well is a beautiful love song and one of Michael's finest.

I was privileged to spend a little time with him on other occasions when he performed at Resolis. His first visit was memorable. The plan was to offer him a meal and a bed for the night. He arrived at our cottage, politely refused food, drank copious amounts of coffee and asked if he could lie down somewhere. Expecting him to stay the night, the bed was made ready for him. He was obviously suffering from pre-performance nerves – something which Peggy, in her conversation with James Robertson, confirms just got worse as the years passed. After the gig, which was a big success, he decided to drive home to Dundee and said he would analyze his performance en route! We often joke that we should put a plaque above the bed: 'Michael Marra almost slept here.' I think he would have appreciated that.

Arrest This Moment is essential reading for all Marra aficionados and for those only slightly acquainted with the man or his work. It reveals so much about him and is strewn with wonderful anecdotes, photographs, prints of many of his paintings and quotes from his closest friends and collaborators. Replete with a full discography, both written and visual, and a chronological list of his shows, plays, films etc., it is beautifully produced with great attention to detail. This ranges from the wonderful, kaleidoscopic portrait by Calum Colvin which graces the front cover, to the choice of layout, typeface and paper.

It's difficult to believe that Michael, ever the perfectionist and stickler for every detail, wasn't directing the design from Robertson's kitchen! It does him justice. A joy to read and a book to treasure. ■

Fiends Fell
Tom Pickard
Flood Editions (Chicago 2017)
Ballad of Jamie Allan
Tom Pickard
Flood Editions (Chicago 2004)
Review By Bob Pegg

In summer 2002, Tom Pickard the poet came to live in the annexe of Hartside Top Cafe, an isolated stopping place two thousand feet above sea level in the Cumbrian Pennines, looking out over a landscape that extends, south to north, from the mountains of the Lake District to the Galloway hills. Pickard was fifty-six and down on his luck, retreating from Poland and a broken marriage, and headed towards bankruptcy. He stayed on at the cafe for ten years. *Fiends Fell* concludes with a short, spare lyric sequence called Lark and Merlin, but most of the book is taken up with a journal that chronicles a sliver of that time - from June to the following February - interspersed with verse, mostly minimalist evocations of landscape, weather and birds:

a gold crest of light
caps black mountains

and a raven
on an overhead powerline

slung below cumulus

Up on the escarpment, Pickard keeps busy. He helps-out the lasses in the cafe, serving food from the take-away hatch to bikers, cyclists and day-trippers, cleaning up after everyone has gone home. His five-year-old grandson Ottis visits for a while. He writes. Late in the year an unnamed lover visits, and they party on wine, weed, poppers and sex. Winds are forever present, assaulting, assuaging, whining to be let in; the place has a wind of its own, the Helm Wind. Whenever he can, Pickard is out in their midst - always engaged - up to Black Fell, down to Fiends, taking photographs, making sound recordings, building a shelter where he can enjoy a quiet spliff.

At night, ex-partners, his dead mother, a talking raven, visit Pickard in his dreams. When he's awake, memories constantly suck him back into a vivid past: beatings in the 'backward class' before quitting school at the age of fourteen; discovering that the woman he'd believed to be his aunt was actually his mother; the medieval Morden Tower in Newcastle upon Tyne, the celebrated poetry performance venue he established with his first wife Connie, when he was seventeen. Of the poets who read in the tower - Ginsberg, Creeley, Dorn, Ferlinghetti among them - it's Basil Bunting whose spirit haunts *Fiends Fell*.

Bunting was well into his sixties, living in obscurity and on the brink of poverty, when the young Pickard called on him, looking for contributions to a magazine he was planning to start. Out of the meeting came a mutual flourishing which led to Bunting producing his masterpiece, the long poem Briggflatts, and to Pickard finding a mentor, teacher, and friend. In interviews Pickard has consistently spoken of his debt to Bunting and, specifically, of the pieces of advice the older man gave: cut back, and again cut back your lines; value the music of words above their meaning; most importantly, when the apprentice asked what verse form to use: "Invent your own."

Music is a recurring motif in *Fiends Fell*. Wind strums a powerline like an Aeolian harp. It plays across a chimney

In early March 2018, when there was thick snow on the fells, fire gutted the Hartside Cafe, consuming the annexe where Tom Pickard once worked and slept. A mobile van now caters to the bikers, cyclists and day-trippers who still stop there to break their journeys and marvel at the view. Photo: Bob Pegg

lip "like a sooty flute." In a gale, the inside of the house breathes like the bellows of a concertina. At the end of November, with the cafe about to close for the season, and a wind coming from the north "like flying ice", Pickard tells himself:

> … if I can sort out the heating and debt problems, I believe I can accommodate winter and pick up where I left off with my piper.

The piper is Jamie Allan - musician, thief, serial army deserter, stravaiger, incorrigible snook-cocker - born in Northumberland around 1734, possibly of Gipsy parentage, and died in prison in 1810, while awaiting transportation for horse stealing. In the high cafe, Pickard is working on the libretto for a ballad opera based on Allan's exploits. This preoccupation is hinted at in *Fiends Fell*, which mentions Allan from time to time (as an unreliable guide across the treacherous landscape of the uplands), and contains a cold-blooded sequence about Nell Clark, once a partner of Allan, who was "hung and anatomised" for robbing and murdering 80-year-old Maggie Crozier in a remote borders bastle [a fortified farmhouse characteristic of the area].

The opera was premiered in 2004 at Sage Gateshead, with a score by John Harle. There's a cracking video of a live performance (www.youtube.com/watch?v=LHQe7mHq5Rc). Flood Editions have published a version of the text, which brings together historical testimony, the lyrics of songs (which flourish in performance), and the kind of spare poetry in which *Fiends Fell* excels. One of my favourites would be at home in either book:

> she sat astride me
> in the dark
> and we were drunk
>
> rain on the attic roof
> a random patterning of impact
>
> or was it
> static from her stockings
> lit the room
> an instrument
> I was inside of

Flipstones – New and Selected Poems
by Jim Mackintosh (Tippermuir) 2018
The Language of Lighthouses
by Alison Seller 2018
Review By Kenny Taylor

Over the past four years, the Hugh Miller Writing competition has become an intriguing part of the Scottish literary scene. As befits the 19th century polymath honoured in the name, this interest stems in part from the ways that entries have drawn on science to create art in poetry and prose.

Two of the prize winners from the first High Miller competitions have published collections in the last few months. Their winning poems are included, but beyond those, the books are very different in both scope and tone.

Jim Mackintosh's *Flipstones* is a substantial volume of almost 170 pages, which draws on selections from the writer's five previous collections and adds scores of new poems. Jim has the unusual distinction of being one of Britain's few poets-in-residence for a professional football club: St. Johnstone, in his home city of Perth. Several poems are drawn from his passion for the game. There's both humour and resignation in these, drawn from decades of manning the terraces:

> The history of scunnered includes all of us
> in our shades of team colours, joy, misery
> & everything in between

The selection ranges far beyond the stadium, including through wider Perthshire: "You try to understand it and what happens?/It changes colour, re-shapes itself" and in breadth of language. This is a poet who relishes the power of guid Scots in some of the selections, fairly coaxing the reader to speak the words aloud, as in "sat an suppit the slae-berry brose." The result is a book whose poems can be savoured for their fresh insights into everyday experience.

Alison Seller's slim, hand-stitched volume contains just a few poems, all rooted in her home village of Cromarty. But watching from that doorstep, she can cast her gaze much wider, across 'This Northern land/caught between Atlantic breeze/and Norwegian ice/intersecting heaven and earth."

The collection concludes with 'Deep Absence' (a wonderful title) which links deep time and the death of Hugh Miller's daughter. A small nugget, fresh from the Cromarty shore. ■

The Walrus Mutterer
by Mandy Haggith (Saraband) 2018
Review By Kenny Taylor

Last autumn, author and poet Mandy Haggith wrote in *Northwords Now 34* about how an ancient Greek had been part of the inspiration for her current writing and travels. Pytheas of Massalia was an explorer and scientist, who wrote a book about his journeys far, far, north from the Mediterranean. Fragments that survive include one that suggests he made landfall at the latitude of Clachtoll Broch – an Iron Age structure near Mandy's home in Assynt.

Cue *The Walrus Mutterer,* published this spring as the first in *The Stone Stories* trilogy. Pytheas may have been the initial inspiration, but the book's primary focus is a young woman, Rian, and several other women besides. Taken into slavery from Clachtoll after being staked in a gambling wager, Rian suffers many hardships through the book as she voyages away from Assynt. Not the least of her tormentors and captors is Ussa, a female trader with the heart of a splintered iceberg.

Pytheas features, but despite the plot-shaping implications of some of his actions, seems almost a peripheral character in this first volume. As befits the matriarchal society the book describes, the interplay of powerful women, whether vicious or benign, is to the fore. That, and the strangeness tinged with old magic in the character of the 'mutterer' himself, Manigan.

Beyond the opener, where a cast of characters so large as to be dizzying

seems to issue from the broch, the way the main characters relate to each other and reveal parts of their stories becomes more and more intriguing. As with all good historical fiction, this is a book which takes some facts about the past and then, through its artistry, makes you feel that past as a living presence. Roll on volume two: I'm itching to find out what happens next. ■

Sand and scrim and tarnished gold

Poetry Review By Lydia Harris

Guts Minced with Oatmeal: Ten Late Poems
Alasdair Gray, Fras Publications, 2018
Heliopolis
Hugh McMillan, Luath Press, 2018
Sorceries
Walter Perrie, Fras Publications, 2018
Glisk
Sarah Stewart, Tapsalteerie, 2018
Floating the Woods
Ken Cockburn, Luath Press 2018

Alasdair Gray has been a major figure in Scottish literature and art for many decades. His work spans seven novels which he has written, designed and illustrated, plays, short stories, poetry, drawings, paintings and murals – including the huge ceiling mural at Oran Mor in Glasgow.

"I've always been interested in the beginnings and endings of things," he has said. So his recent collection of ten late poems holds special interest, as a distillation of a life in verse. It opens with gratitude to the poet's parents and ends with an invitation to: "obey that call into fertile nothingness."

The poems are framed with a confessional prologue, ruefully entitled 'Critic Fuel'. The reader begins her voyage through this life, made wonderful by contact "with art, science, magic and history" in conversation with the poet. Gray's tone is candid and self-deprecating, as he promises his readers a "nourishing oatmeal of greater writers' ideas." This joyous delight in and debt to the work of others is one of the pleasures of the collection. 'End Notes' continues the dialogue started in 'Critic Fuel'. Friendly accounts of the genesis of each poem, they enrich one's reading and feel like poems in their own right.

Humanitad, a poem of almost two hundred lines described by Gray as a 'wee epic', surveys the history of humankind in septets at an even iambic pace. Without breaking step, Gray offers his analysis - moral, political and economic - of the development of the human condition. As hunter-gatherers, we "made bone needles, coracles of skin." The "forging of iron blades" led to an "impoverished majority," to "gaining wealth by lending wealth," to "world wars that have not ended yet." Gray's civilised and unorthodox polemic exposes flaws in all political systems, asserts belief in liberty, fraternity and equality. The last stanza blossoms into fruitful uncertainties through the words of Morgan, Lowell, Eliot , Crane, Poe and Lear. "Wishing to end more resoundingly," the note confides, Gray enables us to reflect on the process of composition, the playfulness of the poet and the raw uncertainty of the human heart.

The final poem in the collection, 'Last Request', is a moving accommodation with death but at the same time with life. It engages with the thinking of Johnson, Hume and Dante and finds a home in the words of Robinson Jeffers. The language is direct, the subject huge and the patient, balanced stanzas bring us close to a courageous voice. This poet of solidarity invites us into his confidence. We are changed and moved by this contact.

The outcome of a residency at the Harvard School of Hellenic Studies awarded in the summer of 2017, Hugh McMillan's *Heliopolis* is rooted both in classical Greece and contemporary Scotland. The poems are urgent and full of movement. Macmillan ranges from tender lyrics in 'Birthday' to political satire in '364 BC', from meditations on haunted ruins in 'Cottage' to the elegiac tone of 'The Shades of One Shade'.

The conceptual framework of the book gives each poem a classical context, invites us to look through an ancient Greek lens. 'Foteinos', the final section, is filled with moments of illumination. "Hope is keeping opening your mouth" he writes in the poem 'Hope', vibrantly alive to current problems.

These deeply serious poems are also capable of giving great delight. McMillan handles language deftly and lightly, paints vivid images, subverts our expectations. He challenges and engages us. 'Watcher', in the section 'Hyperborea', wonderfully evokes the world of the light keeper. The moths and the sailors exposed to the possibility of extinction, drawn to the light 'thrown like a rope across the back of the ocean' and the keeper himself watching the moths beating on the glass, then the muted sorrow of the final line: reel in hope after hope after hope. The poem taps into human tumult with delicacy, as does 'Psalm 121', whose tone moves from light to comic to tender so smoothly it feels effortless. The collection ends appropriately in a burst of sunlight - 'In Lit' - where Dumfries becomes Heliopolis. Nymphs at the fountains take selfies and the sun drops words in our palms.

"Poetry" he writes, "will come today from sand and scrim." Reading this book gave me a day of sun, with poems created from sand and scrim which turn out to be the flesh, blood and bones of our own experience.

The latest in a line of more than ten collections stretching back to the 1970s, Walter Perrie's new work includes the poem 'What can the makar?' where he writes that the makar illuminates *this where, this when, this cast*. His *Sorceries* is full of wheres, whens, folk and creatures, each offering a moment of insight. But Perrie qualifies the possibilities of language and poetry, admitting (with candour, given his status as a poet, editor, publisher and critic) that language is limited. 'What can the makar?' ends:

> all we thought we were collapses in earthquake
> and metaphor.

These poems of humility are not afraid of "time holding eternity's rage in his long strong arms." The makar's eyes are on eternity and time. The pamphlet is rooted in this paradox. Its author does not shrink from big abstractions and from distilling from them - in roads, hills, lizards and bindings. In the beautiful love poem, 'Though you are sitting beside me', the poet asks: "how can a twain be wholly one?" The language of love is qualified, "a two letter shift from is to was." The poem asserts that we are "fast in our osmotic chain", the condition we all share but the experience unique to each lover. Perrie's poems are robust expressions of fragility. They offer a lucid and honest account of this separateness.

Water bubbles through the collection. In 'Spaces' and 'As Glaciers Retreat' it shapes language and metaphor. The five short lines of 'Glen Etive' carry much of the emotional weight of *Sorceries*. Here human memory and landscape are one and the poem's soft rhymes enable the reader to reflect on the act of reading. Perrie's poems draw us further into "the enigmatic, the sovereign." After this task, the final poem is a song to prompt us to hymn, praise and make elegy and to let poetry carry the whole palette of experience. Which is what this pamphlet of quiet but potent sorceries does, each poem a *Hirundo rustica*, "a bold bundle of purposes."

Sarah Stewart names her pamphlet with the Scots word *Glisk*, which can be defined as: *gleam of sunlight through cloud; a glow of heat from a fire. Figuratively, a glimpse of the good*. And that's what glints and glimmers over these poems. The opener describes a disastrous act of disappearance, while the closing one takes us to the ruins of the house where the writer's mother was born. These are poems of steady strength. They venture into pain, the unpredictable and impossible, without self pity and always trusting the image. Describing her young mother being refused a pint in a Dundee bar – "We don't serve pints to ladies,' the barman said." - she writes how:

> My mother did not flinch. Coolly,
> she asked for two halves,
> decanted them into a pint glass. I like
> to picture her, backlit by the jukebox
> in the pub's smoky fug, raising
> that tarnished gold to her lips.

Glisk illuminates the bodily-ness of life with tenderness. It is also a robust analysis of the ways society has diminished women. In 'You Ask Why I Seldom Write About Men' Stewart deftly reverses gender roles, and describes marginalised men, inviting us to notice the way language has been appropriated.

There is fascinating range in these poems. Each offers pleasure where language and sense fit perfectly together.

Like Alasdair Gray, Ken Cockburn invites us to enter a dialogue with and about his poems. 'The Afterword' in *Floating the Woods* lets us into the process of creating; often playful and always intriguing. His methods are as beautiful as the poems. So 'The Solitary Reaper' is conceived as: "translations of (Wordworth's) reaper's song made by a poet familiar with Basho's work."

This poet of fragments and random comings together, whose currency is what the eye sees and the ear hears and nothing second-hand, through his collaborations and projects, makes writing an adventure. An adventure for the reader too. He shares with Gray a delight in the texts of other writers. He also explores the use of other languages. Interesting too is his use of given measures, the alphabet, the months of the year. "These constraints" he writes, "evoke (memories) in a way that more direct approaches often fail to do."

Cockburn collaborates regularly with visual artists, which led to some of the work in this collection. This includes the six poems of 'Ness', which form a linked chain of responses to the eponymous river. They were composed to a brief drawn up by sculptor Mary Bourne as part of the River Ness Art Project - a series of inter-related works commissioned to highlight the ways the River Ness connects Inverness to other times and other places. The sequence is mesmeric. Collaged reflections assemble the river's parts, from its tongue to its creatures, from the names of its tributaries to its power-balance with the tide.

These 'woods' are entirely welcoming and entirely unfamiliar. The poems are spare and exuberant at the same time, with such variety of response to the endlessly fascinating world of the poet's imagination. The reader cannot help but be exhilarated by this collection. ■

CONTRIBUTORS' BIOGRAPHIES

Frances Ainslie lives in Perthshire. A finalist in the 2017 Costa Short Story Award, she writes poetry, fiction & non-fiction and is currently doing an MLitt in Scottish Literature.

Anjali Suzanne Angel is a Skye poet, lyricist, ghostwriter and former journalist. She writes about UK history, travel and is working on a book of essays about Hungary.

Juliet Antill lives on the Isle of Mull. Her poems have been seen most recently in *Magma, New Writing Scotland* and the ezine *Antiphon*.

Phil Baarda is a playwright and theatre maker from the Highlands. Creative director of Mangonel Theatre Company, he also runs the Inverness Playwrights – a group of drama writers of all kinds.

Meg Bateman Tha Meg Bateman, a rugadh an Dùn Èideann an 1959, na h-ollamh aig Sabhal Mòr Ostaig san Eilean Sgitheanach. Tha i air trì leabhraichean den bhàrdachd aice fhèin a thoirt a-mach, agus tha i cuideachd air trì cruinneachaidhean de bhàrdachd Ghàidhlig eadar-theangachadh is a cho-dheasachadh.

Kirsteen Bell is a poet, writer, copywriter, and literature student (University of the Highlands and Islands). She lives and works on a croft in Lochaber.

Sharon Black is from Glasgow and lives in the Cévennes mountains in France, the subject of her fourth collection. www.sharonblack.co.uk

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

Aonghas Pàdraig Caimbeul 'S ann bhon An Leth Mheadhanach an ceann-a-deas Uibhist a Deas a tha Aonghas Pàdraig Caimbeul. Tha e air grunn leabhraichean fhoillseachadh, nam measg 'An Oidhche Mus Do Sheòl Sinn', 'Aibisidh' agus 'Memory and Straw' a ghlèidh duaisean thaobh ficsean is bàrdachd na h-Alba.

Leonie Charlton (Bonniwell) lives in Glen Lonan in Argyll. She recently completed an MLitt in Creative Writing at Stirling University and writes fiction, non-fiction and poetry www.leoniebonniwell.co.uk

Adrian Clark is a keen Gaelic learner who chairs the *Northwords Now* board and is Hon. Secretary and former chair of Evanton Wood Community Company.

Janis Clark's poetry is published in a variety of magazines and anthologies. She received two commendations for the Geoff Stevens Memorial Award and other competitions.

Paul F Cockburn is an Edinburgh-based freelance magazine journalist specialising in arts & culture, equality issues, and popular science. He is Scotland editor for broadwaybaby.com

Evan Cowen is a Lake District-born resident of Fort William. Gripped by writer's block throughout university, he's recently picked up the pen again. Fuelled by good coffee and bad weather.

dubh is a writer and hermit in Glasgow who spends a lot of time meditating or walking the city without destination

Trudy Duffy-Wigman says that: "Flash fiction is my natural home. The sparseness of words: a haiku in prose. English is my second language. I was born in the Netherlands."

Susan Elsley writes poetry and fiction and lives in Edinburgh. Her work is influenced by Scotland's wilder places and our interaction with them.

Sally Evanz has been publishing poems and books of poems for many years. She is celebrating her retirement by studying for a PhD in Creative Writing at Lancaster University.

Dàibhidh Eyre Rugadh Daibhidh Eyre ann an Siorrachd Lannraig a Tuath ann an 1972. Tha dàin aige air nochdadh ann an irisean leithid *An Guth, Gutter, Irish Pages, Tuath / Northwords Now, Poetry Scotland* agus *Poblachd nam Bàrd*. Bha e na bhàrd air mhuinntireas aig Fèis Bàrdachd StAnza ann an 2018.

Sally Frank lives in Fife and Tiree. When she can, she walks the machair with Tim, planning.

Matthew Gallivan is a Canadian living in Belfast. His poetry and short stories have been published in numerous journals.

Joan Gibson lives in Kinross and is a member of Kinwriters. She began writing short stories and poetry in retirement.

David Gilbert is a lapsed Landscape Architect, a founder member of Resolis Community Arts and Cromarty and Resolis Film Society and an enthusiastic supporter of all the arts, particularly film, music and painting.

Jo Gilbert is a writer and spoken word artist from Aberdeen who won the 2018 StAnza slam and is currently working on her first poetry collection.

Merryn Glover writes poems, stories, plays, novels and lists. She is very happy to finally tick off 'get poem published'.

Peter Godfrey lives in the Hebrides and covers his tracks by working as a journalist.

Lydia Harris has made her home in the Orkney island of Westray. In 2017, she held a Scottish Book Trust New Writers' Award for poetry.

Jennifer Morag Henderson's book *Josephine Tèy: A Life* was included in the Observer's list of the best biographies of 2015. Her website is www.jennifermoraghenderson.com

Marc Innis has been writing a novel for some time. His book of poems *Sireadh* is available online.

Sheila Lockhart is retired and lives on the Black Isle. She started writing poetry two years ago following a bereavement and now finds she can't stop.

Gail Low teaches at the University of Dundee. Having written academic essays for most of her working life, she is just discovering the possibilities of the essay form.

Mandy Macdonald's poetry appears in journals and anthologies in and outwith Scotland, with contributions forthcoming in *Multiverse* (Shoreline of Infinity) and *Vaster than Empires* (Grey Hen).

Sian MacFarlane works as a graphic designer at Tangent in Glasgow. A graduate of DJCAD, University of Dundee, more of her work can be seen at: www.sianmacfarlane.org

S.A. MacLeod's short stories have appeared in anthologies, online and been shortlisted for competitions. She has just completed a novel that moves between contemporary Scotland and wartime Japan.

Aonghas MacNeacail Poet in three languages, songwriter, journalist, broadcaster, translator, scriptwriter. A Borders-based, multi-award-winning Skyeman, he is a Fellow of the Association for Scottish Literary Studies, with an honorary Doctorate of Literature from Glasgow University.

Màrtainn Mac an t-Saoir Rugadh Màrtainn Mac an t-Saoir ann an 1965 agus thogadh ann an Lèanaidh e. Ghlèidh *Ath-Aithne*, cruinneachadh de sgeulachdan goirid, Duais na Saltire Society airson Ciad Leabhair ann an 2003. Anns an Iuchar 2018 chaidh an nobhail ùr aige *Samhradh* '78 fhoillseachadh le Luath Press.

Ian McDonough has published four collections of poetry, most recently *A Witch Among The Gooseberries* (Mariscat 2014). His work has appeared in *Poetry Review, Ambit, New Writing Scotland* and other places. Brora Rangers supporter.

Fearghas MacFhionnlaigh Tidsear ealain air chluainidh ann an Inbhir Nis.

Roddie McKenzie has published in Nethergate Writers' anthologies since 2006 and recently also appeared in *Lallans*, *Seagate III*, *New Writing Scotland* 35, *50 Shades of Tay* and *Rebel*.

Caoimhin MacNèill Tha Caoimhin MacNèill na òraidiche aig Oilthigh Shruighlea. Am measg nan leabhraichean aige tha *The Brilliant & Forever* agus *The Diary of Archie the Alpaca*. Sgrìobh e am fiolm *Hamish: The Movie*.

David McVey has published over 120 short stories and also writes non-fiction articles. He lectures in Communication at New College Lanarkshire.

Martin Malone lives in north-east Scotland. He has published two poetry collections: *The Waiting Hillside* and *Cur.* He's an Associate Teaching Fellow in Creative Writing at Aberdeen University.

Linda Menzies lives in Dunfermline and has had poetry and short stories published in magazines during the past 20 years. Her first novel was published this year.

Deborah Moffatt À Vermont (USA), a' fuireach ann am Fìbha a-nis. Bidh dà cho-chruinneachadh aice air fhoillseachadh ann an 2019, "Eating Thistles," (Smokestack Books), agus fear ann an Gàidhlig.

Sherry Morris lives in the Highlands where she pets cows, watches clouds and dreams up stories. Her published work is here: www.uksherka.com. She also tweets @Uksherka.

Maxine Rose Munro is a Shetlander living in Glasgow and still suffering from the culture shock. Her poetry is an exploration, and interpretation, of this.

Robin Munro now lives on Bute, after running a bookshop in Galloway. His two published poetry collections are *The Land of the Mind* and *Shetland like the World*.

Hamish Myers lives in the Highlands and enjoys writing poems mainly inspired by the history, landscape and natural rhythms of the area.

Bob Pegg lives in Strathpeffer in Ross-shire. He is a songwriter, musician, author, and occasional storyteller.

Sharon Gunason Pottinger's novel, *Returning: The Journey of Alexander Sinclair* was published in 2015. Her work has also appeared in *New Writing Scotland*.

Marie-Bernadette Rollins is a Dundee-based poet, editor and non-native English speaker who believes in the power of words across borders.

Isobel Rutland enjoys penning novels as well as short fiction. She won the Romantic Novelists' Association Elizabeth Goudge Award in 2015, is an arts correspondent for *The Wee Review* and a member of the Aberdeen Writers' Studio.

Mark Ryan Smith lives in Shetland. His poems have appeared in various places, including *New Writing Scotland, Gutter, Ink Sweat and Tears* and *Snakeskin*.

Arun Sood teaches Romanticism, Gothic Literature and Critical Theory at Plymouth University and is also working on several writing projects, including a book about the transatlantic cultural memory of Robert Burns.

Ian Tallach was raised in Taiwan and Hong Kong, worked in Botswana and retired from paediatrics with progressive M.S. He now lives in Glenurquhart with his wife, daughter and son.

Judith Taylor originally from Perthshire, now lives and works in Aberdeen. Her first collection, *Not in Nightingale Country,* is published by Red Squirrel Press.

Amanda Thomson is a visual artist and writer who lectures at the Glasgow School of Art. Her award-winning artwork focuses on place, space and landscape in Scotland.

Iain Twiddy studied literature at university, and lived for several years in northern Japan. His poems have been published in *The Poetry Review, Poetry Ireland Review, The London Magazine* and elsewhere.

Linda Tyler lives in Aberdeenshire. Her short stories have been published in the UK, the US and Australia. She is currently seeking a publisher for her first novel.

Eileen West is a former freelance journalist, advertising copywriter and magazine editor who is now exploring her creative side and dabbling in fiction and poetry.

Jim C Wilson is an award-winning poet who lives in Gullane and has for many years run the Poetry in Practice workshops at Edinburgh University. His five collections include *Come Close and Listen* (Greenwich Exchange).

Robin Wilson has had two poetry collections published by Cinnamon Press - *Ready Made Bouquets* (2007) and *Myself and Other Strangers* (2015). His poetry has appeared in many UK poetry magazines and literary journals.

Olga Wojtas won a Scottish Book Trust New Writers Award in 2015. Her debut novel, *Miss Blaine's Prefect and the Golden Samovar*, is published by Contraband.

Howard Wright lectures at the Ulster University, Belfast School of Art. Long-listed in the 2016/17 National Poetry Competition and widely published, his first collection is *King of Country* (Blackstaff Press).

Northwords Now at Ness Book Festival & Dingwall's Word on the Street

As part of NBF 2018, Kenny Taylor will be joining Rosemary Badcoe, editor of online poetry magazine Antiphon, in the Highland Print Studio, Inverness, at 4pm on Saturday 6th October to discuss the pleasures and challenges of publishing literary magazines.

As part of Dingwall's 2018 Word on the Street, several writers whose work often appears in the magazine will be joining the editor in Highflight Books from 2pm on Saturday 20th October to launch this edition of Northwords Now. Tea, coffee and cakes will combine with readings and conviviality. www.word-on-the-street.weebly.com

Keep in touch

With occasional news about Northwords Now and other aspects of the literary scene in the north through following us on Twitter @NorthwordsNow and Facebook www.facebook.com/NorthwordsNow/

Ullapool Shore

Adrian Clark

She takes her time seeking weathered shards along the shore,
I stride on, pocketing the odd one,
Wondering at the abrading power of sand, sea and stone
In rendering jagged glass from mindless acts
To potential jewels at our daughter's hands.

For what is waste, a sage has said,
but atoms temporarily out of place.

Where to find a FREE Northwords Now

Northwords thanks all the locations below for their support in distributing Northwords Now. Special thanks go to all the librarians who put us on display.

Inverness
Waterstones, *69 Eastgate Centre*
Eden Court Theatre, *Bishop's Road*
Inverness College, *UHI Millennium Campus*
Leakeys Bookshop, *Greyfriars Hall, Church St*
Moniack Mhor Writing Centre, *4 Teaveran, Kiltarlity*
Highland Wholefoods, *Unit 6, 13 Harbour Road*
Museum & Art Gallery, *Castle Wynd*
Waterstone's, *69 Eastgate Centre*
HICA, *Dalcrombie, Loch Ruthven, by Dores*
Visit Scotland, *High St*
Bogbain Farm, *Drumossie*
Simpsons Garden Centre
Hootananny, *Church St*
Culloden Battlefield Visitor Centre,
Raigmore Hospital
HICA

Highlands (plus Moray and Perthshire)
Highland Libraries
The Community Centre, *Tulloch St, Dingwall.*
Picaresque Books, *High St, Dingwall*
High Flight Bookshop, *High St, Dingwall*
Kilmorack Gallery, *by Beauly*
Timespan, *Dunrobin Street, Helmsdale*
Dornoch Bookshop, *High St, Dornoch*
The Nairn Bookshop, *94 High St, Nairn*
Moray Libraries
The Ceilidh Place, *14 West Argyll St, Ullapool*
Ullapool Bookshop, *Quay St., Ullapool*
Storehouse of Foulis, *Foulis Ferry*
Achins Bookshop, *Inverkirkaig, Lochinver*
Caithness Horizons, *Old Town Hall, High St, Thurso*
VisitScotland, *High St, Aviemore*
Birnam Arts Centre
Anderson Restaurant, *Union St, Fortrose*
John Muir Trust, *Station Road, Pitlochry*
The Bakehouse, *Findhorn (village)*
The Blue Cafe, *Findhorn Foundation*
Moray Arts Centre, *Findhorn Foundation*
Sutor Creek, *Bank St, Cromarty*
Cromarty Arts, *Church St, Cromarty*
Spa Pavilion, *Strathpeffer*
Waterstone's, *Elgin*
Yeadons of Elgin
The Loft Bistro and Venue, *E. Grange Farm*
History Links, *Dornoch*
Dornoch T.I.C
Neil Gunn Centre, *Dunbeath Heritage Centre*
The Pier, *Lairg*
Abriachan Forest Trust
Torridon Visitor Centre
Loch Ness Clayworks and Cafe, *Drumnadrochit*
Tain Service Point
The Hub, *Muir of Ord*
Loch Torridon Community Centre
The Bookmark, *Grantown on Spey*
The Highland Bookshop, *60 High St, Fort William*
Cocoa Mountain, Balnakiel Craft Village, Durness

Islands, West & North
Isle of Eigg Craftshop, *Isle of Eigg*
Colonsay Bookshop, *Isle of Colonsay*
Caledonian MacBrayne Ferry Terminals
Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, *Slèite, Isle of Skye*
Blue Shed Cafe, *Torrin, Isle of Skye*
Cafe Arriba, *Portree, Isle of Skye*
MacIntosh's Bookshop, *Portree, Isle of Skye*
Carmina Gadelica, *Portree, Isle of Skye*
An Buth Beag, *Skeabost, Isle of Skye*
Mor Books, *Struan, Isle of Skye*
Ceol na Mara, *Dunvegan, Isle of Skye*
An Crubh, Camuscross, *Isle of Skye*
Staffin Stores, *Isle of Skye*
Sligachan Hotel/Seumas's Bar, *Sligachan, Skye*
Ravenspoint, *Kershader, Lochs, Isle of Lewis*
An Lanntair, *Kenneth St, Stornoway*
Acair Ltd, *Stornoway*
Hebridean Jewellery & Bookshop, *63 Cromwell St, Stornoway*
Taigh Chearsabagh, *North Uist*
Shetland Arts Trust, *Mareel, Lerwick*
Shetland and Orkney Libraries
Western Isles libraries
Carraig Mhor, *Isle of Islay*
An Buth Bheag, *Ferry Rd, Kyle*
An Tobar, *Tobermory, Mull*

Aberdeenshire
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*
Better Read Books, *Ellon*
Banff Castle and Community Arts Centre
Orbs Bookshop, *33A Deveron St, Huntly*

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*
J & G Innes Bookshop, *St. Andrews*
Topping & Co. Bookstore, *7 Greyfriars Garden, 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*
Gracefield Arts Centre, *28 Edinburgh Rd, Dumfries*
The Tolbooth and Albert Halls, *Stirling*
The Bucleuch Centre, *Langholm*

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*
MacNaughtons Bookshop, *3-3a Haddington Place*
St Margaret's House, *151 London Road*
Summerhall, *1 Summerhall*
Amnesty Bookshop, *12 Roseneath St, Marchmont*
Word Power, *4-5 Nicolson St*
Out of the Blue, *36 Dalmeny St, Edinburgh*
Edinburgh Bookshop, *219 Bruntsfield Pl*
Golden Hare Books, *68 St Stephen St., Stockbridge*
City Arts Centre, *2 Market St*

Glasgow
Centre for Contemporary Arts, *350 Sauchiehall Street*
Òran Mòr, *731 Gt. Western Road*
The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, *100 Renfrew St.*
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*
An Leanag, *22 Mansefield St*
Glasgow Concert Halls

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.