

SUMMER/AUTUMN 2015

ISSUE 26

FREE

Reviews

Short Stories

Community

Poetry

Interviews

Enter our free writing competition
celebrating the re-opening of the
Borders Railway line - deadline
Friday 26 June!

THE EILDON TREE

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WHERE TO FIND YOUR FREE COPY OF THE EILDON TREE

The Editorial Team and Arts Development, Scottish Borders Council thanks all venues and outlets for their support in promoting The Eildon Tree.

Scottish Borders Council Libraries
Borders College
Scottish Borders Council High Schools
u3a Groups
WASPS Artist Studios, Selkirk
Forest Bookstore, Selkirk
Masons Bookstore, Melrose
Main Street Trading Company, St Boswells
Langlee Complex, Galashiels
Heart Of Hawick, Tower Mill
Damascus Drum, Hawick

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMITTING WORK TO EILDON TREE

Submissions of new writing are invited for inclusion in the next issue of *Eildon Tree*. The Submissions **Deadline is 31st October 2015.**

Poems, short stories and non-fiction articles of local and national literary interest, as well as short novel extracts, are all welcome for consideration.

- A maximum of 4 poems, stories or articles up to 3,000 words.
- Electronic format: Arial pt 12, single line spacing, unjustified margin.
- Book titles and quotes should be italicised, but without speech and quotation marks, unless specified in the text quoted.
- Include a brief biography, maximum 40 words.
- Please do not resubmit work which has been seen previously by the Editors.
- For an informal chat please contact Arts Development Tel: 01750 726400
- Teachers submitting work on behalf of pupils should contact Arts Development for further guidance.

HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR WORK

By post: The Eildon Tree, Arts Development,
St Mary's Mill, Selkirk, TD7 5EW
By email: eildontree@scotborders.gov.uk

(Please note: All work should be sent to the Arts Development and not to individual Editors)

THE PROCESS

- Your work will be sent to the Editors for consideration. Acceptance and inclusion in the magazine is at their discretion.
- You will be notified when a decision has been made. Please be patient, we receive many submissions.

- If your submission is accepted for publication you will be sent a copy of the work to proof-read before print.
- All contributors will receive a copy of the magazine
- If your submission is not accepted on this occasion, please do not be deterred from submitting alternative work in the future.

Publications Submitted for Review

Publishers and authors may submit publications for review. We do endeavour to review as many books as possible but cannot guarantee inclusion in the magazine. Please note we are unable to return any review publications.

The Editors and Arts Development Scottish Borders Council are not responsible for the individual views and opinions expressed by reviewers and contributors. The Eildon Tree is available from all Scottish Borders Council libraries and a wide range of local outlets throughout the Scottish Borders. The Eildon Tree can also be downloaded:
<http://www.scotborders.gov.uk/eildontree>.

The opinions expressed in this magazine do not necessarily reflect Council policy or practice in the arts.



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*Faster than fairies, faster than witches,
Bridges and houses, hedges and ditches;
And charging along like troops in a battle,
All through the meadows the horses and cattle:
All of the sights of the hill and the plain
Fly as thick as driving rain;
And ever again, in the wink of an eye,
Painted stations whistle by.*

'From A Railway Carriage' by Robert Louis Stevenson
From *A Child's Garden of Verses* (1885)

Welcome to the latest edition of *The Eildon Tree*, the only Council supported creative writing magazine in the country. It's a continuing testament to the breadth and depth of writers living in our area. It's also an indication of the value placed on nurturing literary prowess that has long existed here in the Borders, where we like to celebrate good writing, past and present.

Looking ahead we have the ever-growing and popular Borders Book Festival in Melrose in June which goes from strength to strength. We have the Duke of Buccleuch sponsored Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction which has become one of the foremost literary prizes in Britain. We have the launch of the James Hogg Creative Residency inspired poetry book, *Hairst* which has been beautifully illustrated by local artist Helen Douglas.

We have the second Yarrow, Ettrick and Selkirk Arts Festival (the YES festival) which will feature its own creative writing competition based on the theme of 'Ballads,' details of which are inside.

The Eildon Tree has always supported new and developing local writers and in celebration of the return of the Borders Railway re-opening in September after a gap of 45 years, *The Eildon Tree* is delighted to announce its own creative writing competition, aptly named 'Waverley Lines.'

This is an excellent opportunity for writers of all ages and talents to stoke up the creative boilers and head on down the writing tracks! Lucky winners will receive the chance to ride on one of the first trains in the shape of a Golden Ticket, not to mention the possibility of scooping a generous cash prize.

Poems and short stories must be in keeping with the theme of the Borders railway which should give plenty of scope. And if you need a push start or a little creative encouragement, look out for the poetry and fiction writing workshops at the Borders Book Festival organised and run by *The Eildon Tree*.

We all know good writing doesn't happen by accident. It is a craft which has to be honed through practice, continual reading, attending writing workshops and constructive criticism. To paraphrase poet Colin Will writing in this edition, you have to immerse yourself in the culture. There's certainly plenty of it happening here in the Borders this year.

I look forward to reading the chosen entries for the Waverley Lines anthology.

Councillor Vicky Davidson

WAVERLEY LINES

creative writing competition

In celebration of the re-opening of the Borders Railway Line, Arts Development, Scottish Borders Council and the Editorial Team from The Eildon Tree creative writing magazine are holding an open competition.

Waverley Lines is a competition, inviting aspiring and established writers of all ages to submit their stories and poems inspired by the re-opening of the Borders railway line, past and present, as we count down to the official opening of the line on 6 September 2015.

There are two parts to the creative writing competition: poetry and short-stories. Poems and short stories submitted must be in keeping with the theme of the Borders railway. Entrants might choose to write a poem or short story which is a fairy-tale, love story, thriller or fantasy or any kind of genre and can be factual or fictional. In deciding the winners, consideration will be given to the relevancy of each entry to the spirit of the competition, which is a celebration of the re-opening of the Borders Railway.

The winning entries (1st, 2nd and 3rd prize) in each category will be published in a special booklet *Waverley Lines* and the first prize winner of the best poem or short story will win x2 Golden Tickets for the special train journeys from one of the three Scottish Borders railway stations, Tweedbank, Galashiels or Stow on Saturday 5 September 2015.

Further information is available at
www.scotborders.gov.uk/artsdevelopment
Email: eildontree@scotborders.gov.uk
Tel: 01750 726400

Free Waverley Lines Workshops

Monday 8 June

7 – 9pm: Short story writing workshop (18+)
Supported by
The Edinburgh Sir Walter Scott Club
Galashiels Library
Tel: 01896 664170



Thursday 11 June

4 – 5:30pm: Short story writing workshop (18+)
Borders Book Festival, Harmony Gardens, Melrose
www.bordersbookfestival.org

Friday 12 June

1.30 – 3.30pm: Poetry writing workshop for young poets (8 – 18)
Borders Book Festival, Harmony Gardens, Melrose
www.bordersbookfestival.org

Sunday 14 June

12:45 – 2.30pm: Poetry writing workshop (18+)
Borders Book Festival, Harmony Gardens, Melrose
www.bordersbookfestival.org

Sunday 14 June

3.30 – 5pm: Young writers story workshop (8 – 18)
Borders Book Festival, Harmony Gardens, Melrose
www.bordersbookfestival.org



HYMN TO CREATION

It's all very well for you, Lord,
 who can do anything and everything.
 I should be so lucky.
 A trillion perfect daffodils materialise
 and Hyvot's Bank, the Oxgang verges,
 the borders at the Cockit Hat, the grassy banks
 around the library and two supermarkets
 are suddenly caparisoned in gold.
 Gratuitous exhibitionism after last month's displays
 of snowdrops at Kailzie Gardens and Dundas Castle?

My creativity, in comparison, errs on the side
 of modesty. It is, in fact pathetic. With my 2B pencils,
 sketch pad, choice of brushes and selected acrylics,
 I wish to immortalise a single daffodil in a jam jar,
 closely scrutinised, larger than life, to capture
 its magnificence. To reproduce its fine striations,
 its tonal shifts through fifty shades of yellow,
 the gossamer kiss-curls of its petals' tips, the
 platoon of Lilliputian guards in minute bearskins
 at its pollen-covered core, magnet for bees and
 butterflies.

But I lack the skill. I cannot reproduce,
 foreshortened from my point of view,
 the glorious receding trumpet or its frilly rim,
 or adequately suggest its cheerful flutings
 to the Household Cavalry. I cannot differentiate
 sufficiently infinite gradations of yellow
 on other yellows, incorporating hints of titanium white,
 suggestions of cerulean blue. Such subtleties
 are beyond my skill and I lay down my brush. Outside,
 a trillion blithesome masterpieces not in the wind.

Norman Bissett

TAPESTRY OF HOPE

Hope is my horizon,
 as I begin each breaking day,
 your promise will stay with me,
 my lips forever say.

Hopeless thoughts surround me,
 as I look inside my dream,
 your hand is there to hold me close,
 my solitude supreme.

Hope is my tapestry,
 as I weave it carefully,
 your face is all I ever see,
 my only reverie.

Eileen Cummings

SUGAR PLUM

No knowing why
 You plucked the perfect image out of the sky.

Whilst I've watched it ripen over time

The pendulous moon.
 Sugar coated.
 Bitter sweet.

Forbidden fruit.
 Crystal halo.

Warning of frost.

Christopher Hall

THE HERON

Grey all grey save some snow white.
 A solitary soul mate.
 Lightly long legged and lean
 her slender neck hunched and hidden.
 Stock-still. Silently watching.

Still Zen master standing like
 a folded umbrella waiting;
 not for the rain but to stab
 a nimble eel from the depths
 of a bubbling icy stream.

Steadily power-house wings
 beat till she is soaring sky high
 over fields, trees and river.
 To nurture and feed her young
 way up in the nesting tree.

Elaine Heron

BONNETS ON THE COAT STAND

(Coat stand was covered with perhaps a dozen or
more men's caps)

Two Cinquain
Bonnet
on the coat stand,
past suitors discarded
while waiting for a hat to call:
no luck.

Aa day
sitting her leen
she minds on the bunnets
she lat by, wytin for a hat:
greet's sair.

Mary Johnston

**A CHEMICAL INVESTIGATION OF
MELROSE ABBEY**

Friedlander has made the trip by train to Melrose
in search of lichen. Here it grows in swags on trees
and even a preliminary stroll by the river Tweed
reveals interest. It may not be necessary to travel
to Northumberland after all.

He sits now warming by the fire it is raining and
somehow the wet
is sponged down into those draped trees. The clean air
and new-built villas in a honeyed stone
a laboratory of colour
compared to smoke-filled town.

He nods to the party of James Darling and sons
up from Suffolk although the father is local
and eavesdrops plans to go to Roxburgh or North.
The old haunts will be shown but they decide against.
There is no time.

Friedlander steps out in the damp
to look at the abbey and its primitive tanning pits
the acidic conditions undoubtedly achieved
by the most intimate of chemicals.
The abbey itself is repaired and even at dusk
allows an onslaught of the visitors
staying in the hotel attached.

Scott himself might have walked here
not so very long ago.
And to Friedlander's tired eyes, the shape

and pattern of a known past remain.
But on closer examination of the walls and tracework,
the lichen exudations, the things he loves,
are all scraped away.

Bridget Khursheed

HYENA

Hyena is best known
for his laughter and yet
you seldom hear

Hyena actually laughing.
Hyena is also thought of as
a ruthless killer but,

Hyena very rarely kills.
If Hyena is to be remembered
for anything, it should

really be for all that
blood. Just think about it
for a moment,

whenever you happen to
see him, he is almost always
covered in the stuff.

Gordon Meade

WINDFALL

Here I race through winter streets,
discarding items in the breeze
that's buffeting Dunbar
as I scramble to the station.

Hurried west for seventy miles.
I fetch up on a platform,
diminished by the absence
of the scarf that I've donated.

I pass time searching snapshot eyes
of missing poster persons
blown up into fame at last
when taken by the wind.

Roy Moller

ROUGH RELIC

The Abbey's bones smother
Kelso, empty windows
howling at the river.

Headstone needles stick
pinpricks sewing
the patchwork soil.

Cracked headstone lies
shattered, reading
'gone but not for-'

gotten the rougher
woeing. Smoke seared
into fragments.

At dusk, the Abbey's face
Granite eyes lack pupils
Should we stare back?

Jamie Norman

STORMY DAY EYEMOUTH

There is an easterly in the air.
The horizon line of the waters
jagg'd with crumpling sea flares
spraying anger at the wind's meddling.

The bay, a soft mouth between headland's
rocky jaws where half submerged reefs,
a curving dragons back, showers waves to surf,
broken glass on Buss Craig and Hurker's teeth.

Here humans, seduced by shelter
gained the will to defy the water
daring to pay the price that broken sea
means broken boats and slaughter.

Just out of reach we have laid down
in a graveyard beyond the Bantry wall
the salted flesh, polished bone of the drowned
who chanced a haul and failed the storms test.

They're moored in temporary safety,
until that certain day the unforgiving ocean
breaks through our civilized resolve,
retrieves what once was stolen.

The sea continually seeks its own
reclaiming what it long ago created.
Sandstones, shales, limestones,
bone, sinew, all returns to the recycling sea.

High tide tonight, on the turn water stills.
for a moment. The sea's surface marbles,
becomes torn shrouds of those it killed
defying its menace, drowned for the theft of fish.

(In 1881, 129 fishermen from Eyemouth were drowned when a freak storm struck the coast)

Keith Parker

VERY BIG NUMBERS

It's all in the numbers Stephen Hawking says,
No philosophers here, please, who can't add up.
Nor it seems do we now need a God---wonder if he
knows yet.
So we should count our way to the stars,
Sorting out time and space en route.
Only a trillion billion light years to a mathematical
heaven,
Although at the standard speed of light it may take a
little time.
E=MC2.....QED then relativity-ally speaking.
But can we trust SH to get the calculus right?
...Perhaps, with the help of his superfluous god:
God's rather good at maths.

Ronnie Price

YAMMER

The yammer this Yird maks,
the monie mous it haes,
an yit ayont the Yird
wha hears whit this warld says?

We dinna hear forby
whit life the cosmos haes:
the monie mous nicht speak
an mak thair ain adaes

Hamish Scott

WAR TALK

Language is kinder than reality, well
meaning, highbrow stuff. Words tell
our eyebrows to relax, they bend our ears
and calm our fears with logic out of hell.
So friendly fire has only good intentions,
if taking out a person by mistake
is just some virtual target practice.
Smart bombs are really clever, they

must demonstrate such sincere skill
to make a kill that's clean, and peer
reviewed by military intelligence.
I.E.D. s are economical with language
and with truth, if 'improvised' suggests
it may not work this time around. Sheer
damage must be totally excused
by multiplying syllables till they spell
col - lat - er - al – well, to make an omelette
you need to break some eggs –
and what are eggs but tiny shells
in which the future of a species dwells?

Jock Stein

CLEARING OUT MUM'S FLAT

Many things of beauty perished
In my mother's flat
This time not fleeing Italy, Bohmen, marriage but death

A life of beauty
Gathered, moment by moment
Gift by gift
Treasure upon treasure
Smile upon smile

Lost in a sea of pragmatism
Of speed
Of confluence of time and space
Shedding skins
But living in memories

Gunther Alexander

FERAL

Black and white, bearded
and heavy-horned, slot-eyed,
the goats of Galloway nuzzle
and munch their way down
the slopes near Clatteringshaws.

Nobody milks them but their kids,
nobody herds them, tends them,
but they do all right most years.
Come ravening winters a few
will peg out, drift-caught carcasses
rotting down or bird-picked
to rib barrels, spine snakes,
boxy skulls, thickened for impact,
horn curves a Fibonacci spiral.

Escaped once, goats on the lam,
they've reverted, resemble
those first goats, small, wiry,
dragged – no doubt protesting –
from a Middle Eastern homeland
by our farming forebears.
They've adjusted, changed their diets
for our soggy Scottish fare,
thickened coats to cope
with wind and damp, become
like us – thrawn, cantankerous,
at home here.

Colin Will

STOPPING FOR A CHAT

I watched a whinchat hunting,
pecking among the stones of the path.
Armed only with beak, eyes, and the determination
raising a family brings, she'll try anything –
spider, beetles, caterpillar – to take back
to her hidden brood in the gorse bush.

Her home, wallpapered in green and yellow,
is scented with coconut and fortified
by needles. She's nimble, agile, alert
for the frontal assault of sparrowhawk,
the darting swoop of merlin.
At the merest hint of danger
she's away, diving into cover
or flying up, twittering,
to distract a passing poet.

Colin Will

ONCE GONE, TWICE RETURNED

Thrice bound
the hollow hills
of my youth.
Forever sought,
not caught
or brought forward.
Thrice bound
the hollow hills
of Eildon
by the thorn.

Davy MacTire

HAWICK COMMON RIDING = MEN

NB, this is not intended to imitate the inimitable Teri tongue.

Hawick Common Riding equals men.

Men, men:

At seiven in the mornin'
Furst Friday efter furst Monday o' June:
Men, booted, tight-breeched and bare-heided
Linger ootside High Street pubs,
Empty the ATMs,
Heid fur their horses.

Men, men:

Baldy-heided men wi' paunches,
Troosered in chinos, shabby jeans an battered cords;
A few crooned wi' gaufin' bunnets, baseball caps,
Strine ranger hats.
Atween the troosers and the baldy heids or hats
They sport strippit shirts, and ties that boast
That yince they threw booted legs ower the saiddle
And rade the lang ways through the mosses.

Men, men:

young men, callants
On the cusp of legal drinking age,
Haudin pint glasses self-consciously
In the mornin' sun.
On their faces ye can see their likeness
Tae thon callant whae has ridden Ken the Horse
A hunnert years.

A wumman! A wumman!

Still, she kens her place:

She's gaitherin up the glesses,

Takin them intae the pub.

She's nae barmaid,

But she kens her place:

Servin' her menyfowk.

Weemin, weemin! –

Twae o them settin' on the roond steel bench

Atween the Hub an the pub:

Sparkly necklaces aroond their thrapples

Weel worn anoraks in case o' rain.

Booted an' a', they are –

Yin in spotty wellies, blue an' white,

The ither, in a pair o' joddy buits

At the end o' twae lang legs

Encased in sheer black tightts.

Men, men:

A dizen or mair men in a cafe,
Eatin a hairy breakfast
(they'll need it, tae sook up the speerits
Slidin' doon their thrapples this lang day).

Men, men:

Man and callant, in the saiddle,

The furst o' the day.

A faither and son, riding lang-reined at a languid wauk

Raise a cheer frae thae on fit –

The furst o' the day.

Men, men :

Men on horses

They come in their dizzens noo,

Their cuddies smairtened fur this day o' days.

Manes are plaited,

Tails are shimmering horsehair,

Coats glint back at the mornin' sun.

Horses, clean-legged or shaggy fetlocked,

Ribbed-kisted, deep-barrelled, or thoroughbred-lean,

Buckin' or behavin', snortin' or stallin' –

All revellin' in their naitural environment: the herd.

Men, men:

Men in green jaikets,

Saxhorns in their haunds,

Men in coats o' blue and gowd,

Twigs o' aik leaves in their bunnets –

Hey, man, that's no' a twig,

It's hauf a tree, mair like!–

Fifes an flutes in fingers,

Drums on their hips,

A' at the ready fur the furst melodic blaw.

Men, men:

Men wi faces

Carved frae the land, the mills, the rugby field.

Yin or twae are wearin'

The unmistakable features o' the landit gentry,

Matched by Panama hats, tweed jaikets,

Hatbands and ties o' auld regiments

Or far-off boardin' schules.

Men, men:

Men's voices singing the auld sang

That tells o' a battle even aulder

And repeats that phrase sae ancient that

It's lost in the impenetrable mirk

O' unrecorded history:

Teribus and Teriodin!

Men, men:

Men on horses, through Drumlanrig's airch!

And there, he leads them: king o' the day:

The Cornet, the Hawick Cornet,

Wi Richt and Left haund Men and Acting Faither.

Ahint them yae streekit line

O' five hunnert horsemen –

Nae less, or sae it seems.

Men, men:

Mair and mair men on horses.
Auld-farrant seats: feet forrit,
Bums weel back;
Or cramped and curled up in the saiddle
In the jockey style the callants love tae preen.
(*By God, they'll be sair the morn!*).
Ex- Cornets, future Cornets, would-be Cornets,
Men frae ither touns
Auld men on steady mounts,
Bairns on faithers' lead reins,
And a' the hunnerts in atween
Follow their leader on this shinin' day.

A lass, a lass!

Wad ye credit it!

A rider o' nae mair nor ten years auld
Long blonde curls spilling down her tweed jaiket
Passes pointing fingers.
-*Na, na, he's a laddie a richt* –
He bides at Ootbyeshields. Yin o' twins.
The auld yins ken it a'.
Tradition is uphauled yince again,
Nae reid faces, nae tabloid heidlines
Mar the Cornet's day, Hawick's day.
Five hunnert years o' history and horses
Pass joyously the cheerful. cheering croods.

Men, men:

Men in the big yaller lorry
Scoopin' up the leavings o' the horses.
They gain a cheer', an a'.

The Lasses, the Lasses!,

Here the come the Lasses!

Cornet's Lass, Richt an' Left,

An' Acting Mither

Wave frae rolled-down windaes

O' the big Mercedes Benz.

They ken their place:

Bussin the banner blue the nicht afore,
Following their menfowk
In a gaudy limo, no' on a horse,
Eating curds and cream ootside the Hut,
An lookin' gorgeous.

Hawick Common Riding equals men-

But mair nor that:

It maks a' men equal -

Save fur the Cornet.

A' weemin are equal here an' a',

Save fur the Lasses.

O' the big Mercedes Benz..

They ken their place:

Bussin the banner blue the nicht afore,

Following their menfowk

In a gaudy limo, no' on a horse,

Eating curds and cream ootside the Hut,

An lookin' gorgeous.

Hawick Common Riding equals men-

But mair nor that:

It maks a' men equal -

Save fur the Cornet.

A' weemin are equal here an' a',

Save fur the Lasses.

Judy Steel

CROSSING LAMMERMUIR

Herring Road

At Lammas,
creel heavy on her spine,
rain seeps through the blue shawl.

Friardykes

Brother Jack, stepping out:
one more day
within bounds.

Mossy Burn

Water for distilling
flows amber:
not for the excise men.

Beltondod

Swallows dress for dinner:
a black pot on the swey
simmers stew.

Healing Well

The shepherd once told me
he went there.
That was all.

Crystal Rig

Cottongrass
as far as you can see
fringing the young larches.

Yadlee

An old ring
to put in my backpack
and take home.

Cracking Shaw

Gusts flick and drop your hair:
white grass a strangely soft
crown of thorns.

Spartleton

Look this way:
I'm shooting the last frame
as you were.

Kate Campbell

NINETEEN

I left home chest out
kitbag in hand
heading to my
all-American future

but in that pre-dawn part-light
where grey sky meets grey ground
the only sound the clack
of my black-shined boots
as I stride in my mother-pressed
never-before-worn sailor suit
I slow and stand

with trembling hands
take out my *Pall Mall* pack
light up
and think
this is the furthest
I've ever been from home.

Vee Freir

STILL RUNS THE TEVIOT

The weak sunrise smiles on my valley side dawn
revealing nature's secret from absent burnt mist,
morning breaks on Fat Lips perch as it once more
surveys all its domain

And still runs the Teviot, its path heading north-east,
ever eking out the sea

Contours and patches in pantone hues,
descend to the riverbank's side, where
financial ruin lurks as a spiteful spate looms,
ruining crops and taking livestock lives

But still runs the Teviot, where only the foolish
thwart history

Regiments of tall, slender, near naked Scots pines
play host to the woodpeckers' cacophonous drill, whilst
their coiffured tops camouflage patient buzzards
weighing up their prey's percentages

Still runs the Teviot, eroding its route
inexorably through my vale

A murder of crows cruise the six nine eight
on another all-day breakfast swoop,
the scavenging menu of road kill delights
offers up fresh badger and pheasant puree

Still runs the Teviot, paying witness to diners,
as it flows on by my side

Metal road so modern you cut me so deep and
leave behind your litter and pollution
your network links me to all villages and towns
where more of the same beckons

Oh running Teviot make me drink and
sustain me for years to come

No leaping salmon now on this ladder of success,
no water to slake the sheep's thirst
just a stony riverbed, evaporated bone dry, proves
man meddler brought about his own demise

Still the Teviot is still, and runs no more through me.

Toni Parks

HAPPY

Once again, he asks me how to be happy.

How to pretend that all these eighty-plus years,
have not all come down to this bone-creak,
these inflexible knees, words all spongetwisted into
moans.

He wants to understand television again.
Wants to see the cowboy, the puppet, the clown;
all the white children applauding when told to.

He wants to know where his wife went,
why the scrambled eggs have been going wrong,
why she doesn't kiss his neck anymore.

When he holds his hands together,
sleeps on his outstretched thumbs,
makes tiny noises in his dreams,
I want to tell him she is gone.
I want to share my grief with him,

bind our losses together,
build each other up again.

But I am so afraid he will be enraged,
fumble to get up, knock down the TV.

So afraid he'll get up in my face,
demand to know where I've taken her.

Rafael Miguel Montes

TROUSERS, COCKROACHES & QUANTUM UNIVERSES

Something brown fell from my trousers onto the floor.

I was about to put them on. Perhaps, I thought, a fragment of the chocolate I'd devoured the previous evening during a Cold War Mole in the CIA movie on the telly – until it scuttled frantically in all directions. Chocolate never scuttles. Cockroaches do. If I were a Buddhist I'd have left it in peace. I'm not. It didn't survive the subsequent repeated and furious foot stomp.

Later, I tried to explain to my Texan granddaughters watching Dr Who that I had solved the mystery of how cockroaches seem to appear from nowhere. After all, my trousers had been hanging up in the wardrobe overnight and cockroaches cannot jump like grasshoppers.

Solution: *Quantum physics*.

The fourteen-year-old, destined, she says, for a career in genetic engineering, looked puzzled.

"Parallel universes," I explained.

Teenager remained puzzled.

There'll be a cockroach universe overlapping our own like a cosmic insect ghost. This has to be the only possible explanation. Trousers act as interconnecting portals, which could explain the occasional missing husband/lover who leaves in his wake only a pair of hurriedly discarded trousers. The truth is too terrifying to relate to fourteen-year-olds: erring male human emerges in a cockroach universe to scuttle and sweat before being reduced to a sticky pink splat by a fifty-foot high insect.

Quantum physics wasn't on our curriculum at school in the fifties. Not because it hadn't been thought about, but because it didn't neatly fit into Einstein's model of reality. But this is the twenty-first century. I was surprised the fourteen-year-old knew next to nothing about ideas that both blow apart all we've learned about the 'nature of things' and open doors on the unthinkable. Quantum computers, more than a theoretical possibility and already being tested by Google and NASA, will make conventional computers seem like pencil and paper jobs.

So I humbly handed my granddaughter the latest issue of Scientific American and suggested she at least read an amazing article on the giant leaps forward in her own chosen science. It spoke of genetic engineering holding the key to cures in AIDS, cancer and for stroke victims, but a week later had not been read.

The problem is that the US educational system, as with many across the world, focuses on what might be termed 'straight-jacket learning'. The demands of continuous assessment with a requirement of nothing

less than 'A plus' repeatedly in every subject allows no time for wondering what it's all about; no time for that enlightening cave-dweller experience when casual observation of a rolling stone can be transformed into the wheel that changes human society for all time. Weekends and holidays are spent doing 'homework' defined by the educators. The same granddaughter also complained that her Catholic school taught her nothing about other religions. That didn't surprise me. What did was the fact that if she's really curious why didn't she just search the internet? She has her own computer and is one click away from 45 million websites on Buddhism. There are some really interesting ones on the first page on offer from Google. But... if it's not on the curriculum then it's not part of an educational 'system' from which the eager pupil strays at her peril.

I should explain the reason for my distrust of the 'system': she had short, curly black (dyed?) hair, eyes like knife slits and an unpleasant habit of slapping children's legs, girls included. I'll never forget the slapper's face. It belonged to Mrs Fruin, my infant school teacher. She had me put down a year, labelled a dunce. Suddenly I had no friends. I was separated from my age-group peers in the junior school because infants, with whom I was forced to hang out, had a different playground. I was alone and miserable. My parents, not well-off, paid for me to see someone at the Institute of Child Psychology. I got IQ tested. The result apparently made me eligible for Mensa. I had no idea what that meant. Neither, apparently, had the grey-haired headmistress.

The reason for getting sent down? Apparently I fidgeted. Bored, my parents reckoned. Their persistence finally paid off. I was

eventually re-instated with my correct age-group in the junior class, but the damage could not be undone. The label 'dunce' stuck, although paradoxically the taunts strengthened my resolve to beat the 'system'. Learning became my passion. Not at school, but from books, libraries, anywhere where I saw doors that might open onto a universe way beyond the closed doors of formal education. At school, I was only happy if I came top in as many subjects as possible (including Divinity which I hated), but that wasn't my prime goal; it was a by-product of a nightmare courtesy of Mrs Fruin. My goal was acceptance.

My greatest love from seven upwards was to read 'creative' fiction. Not merely those books on fascinating subjects such as *Bacteria in the Milk Supply* (my choice of learning material aged eleven... loved it!) but stories that provided parallel universes into which I could escape from the perceived reality of being an 'idiot'. I would arise from the fantasy world of slumber at first light to enter, for at least an hour or two before setting off for school, a space created in the brain of an author who for me was no more than a name.

Why didn't I end up doing English? Because I was taught in tedious succession by the four worst English teachers ever to grace the face of our planet. First, an Anglo-Indian, nicknamed 'Beehive' because his voice resembled a hive of angry bees, would read from *Henry IV Part I* to a class of ink-pellet-flicking teenage rebels. The bees were followed by 'Food Wonk', a terrified camp American who tried anything to appease the cause of his terror: us. Because of his unusual script, 'Good Work' written at the end of every academic offering, regardless of quality, looked like 'Food Wonk'.

Hence *his* nick-name. After him came an Irishman, 'Browne-with-an-e'. The man had two purposes in life: one, to ensure everyone knew about the 'e' at the end of his not-so-Irish surname; the other, to knock W. B. Yeats. Yeats and Keats happened to be the only poets I felt able to connect with at that age. Shakespeare had been destroyed by The Beehive. My English 'education' was finished off by someone called Harding about whom I remember only a name, boredom and a single essay: 'What Advertising Means to Me.' 'Bugger all' is what I wished to write but it might have got me expelled and then I'd have missed out on the grey knickers (*vide infra*).

No one taught me grammar or anything interesting to do with my native language. Got that later from *Eats, Shoots and Leaves* and Bill Bryson's *Mother Tongue*.

Biology, on the other hand, was taught by an inspirational teacher way ahead of his time. Plus the biology lab was opposite the gym of the adjacent girls' school. The girls wore grey knickers for gym, offering a pleasing diversion from pimpled, smelly boys. I always chose a desk by a window. So biology became a testosterone-fired heaven and a medical career the only sensible thing that could be done with it. Medical training being a serious business, one might think it would have excluded the Food Wonks of the world. Not a bit of it. Enter 'Shifting Dullness'.

Shifting Dullness, also a medical term for detecting fluid in a diseased belly, was our distinguished Professor of Medicine. His nick-name was remarkably accurate and I doubt whether anyone ever learnt anything from him. Conversely, my tutor, a mere senior lecturer, was a gem of a teacher. He and other *good* teachers at medical college taught me how to be a doctor. Not only that. They taught me how

to learn – adding golden layers to the onion of my educational experience whilst covering up (apart from the knickers) the many shades of grey left behind by bad teachers from Mrs Fruin to Shifting Dullness – mere passing annoyances who, at best, ate into precious learning time.

Learning how to learn must surely be an integral part of a good, balanced education for the world around us is constantly changing. And this should go hand-in-hand with good teaching. Plato knew this over two thousand years ago. He realised that only education could free those shadowy prisoners from their chains in *The Cave*. When a fourteen year-old has far too much homework to read about exciting advances in the field that is to become her life, is something not seriously wrong? At least science was well taught at my school and those of us fourteen-year-old acne-ridden brats wishing to pursue the sciences were encouraged to read the *New Scientist* weekly. I did and still do over fifty years later.

My wife is Chinese. I love her country, its culture and people. But I feel for those ten million young Chinese students who each year sit the *gaokao*, the country's National College Entrance Examination which alone determines whether a child goes on to university and if so which one. It's a two-day nightmare that has led to many pointless suicides. Why, one wonders, does little of innovative scientific importance emerge from a land of 1.4 billion? Perhaps because China is stifled by an educational straight-jacket of rote-learning little changed since the Tang Dynasty; a system that doesn't inspire children to learn, like the cave-man inventor of the wheel, from everyday life. I often wonder whether I might have scored more goals in *my life* if I'd been taught how to learn at an earlier age.

My wife's job? A teacher, of course. Once, at church, a young man called Keith came up to her to thank her for being such an inspiring teacher twenty-four years before, and for making him realise how good he was at maths. Although, like me, she's no mathematician, she had opened rather than closed doors for him. But she hates cockroaches, so I haven't yet learned the Buddhist approach to our six-legged counterparts from that parallel universe.

Oliver Eade

RUNNING UP THE ESCALATOR

You know when you're standing on the escalator, bags tucked in, patiently being carried up or down? And someone rushes past and overtakes you? If you're feeling charitable, you think, 'Poor soul – I hope she catches her train,' or fractiously, 'What's the rush? He'll only gain a few seconds.'

Gemma was like that – always in a hurry. Too impatient to wait to be transported serenely up to the concourse or down to the trains, her mind already two steps ahead, she would walk or run – not because she wanted to overtake or get the better of her fellow-travellers, but just to get there quicker.

She was always questioning, anticipating, her mind ahead of her legs; often ahead of her mouth, sometimes ahead of her manners.

'Oops,' she'd say, when someone looked at her strangely after a lightning riposte to a well-meant observation.

'I've done it again. I really should remember to engage brain before opening mouth.'

She often used to say that her favourite piece of advice came from William Penn, wise Quaker,

founder of Pennsylvania. 'If thou thinkest twice before thou speakest once, thou wilt speak twice the better for it'. It was advice that she rarely managed to follow.

Gemma hurried when others took a more leisurely pace, seeming to wish her life away in plans and promises and schemes for tomorrow, next year. She'd say 'I can't live without something to look forward to' (she'd loved being pregnant). But she could spend so much time in the future that she fell over her own feet in the present. Any group she was part of could rely on her arriving late, laughing, apologetic, running her hands through her thick springing dark hair. But the staid, punctual people put up with it because they needed her, with her ability to dream, to ask 'Why can't we...?'

And she needed to learn. Always. She sought to understand people, to explore ideas. Curious about death, she wanted to know what was on the other side and she didn't want to wait.

Last Tuesday, (a description of the weather is unnecessary, but if it helps you form a picture, it was sunny) Gemma took a lethal overdose. 'While the balance of her mind was disturbed,' the coroner will say. To her friends and family, it seemed like the same impulsive, inquisitive mind they were used to. 'No, she certainly hadn't seemed depressed.'

'She didn't have any obvious worries.'

'She was her usual self.'

Instead of waiting for the inevitable, she'd run up the moving escalator, overtaking a few of us who might have expected to get there before her. It wasn't cheating – and how could it be a sin? She was going there anyway. We all are.

Jane Pearn

EVERY PICTURE

The pale eyes stare at us. She has played her part and is caught in black and white forever.

‘Jings’,

The tall handsome woman punctuated the summer morning with an uncharacteristic exclamation.

A small urgent figure was heading towards her. The newsagent’s open door provided a convenient if temporary respite. Jim Lawson, resplendent in his new overall, stood behind the counter positioned at the perfect level for children deciding how to spend their pennies from the assorted array of sweets.

He was delighted to see Janet Hamilton and frequently extolled her virtues to his long suffering wife.

‘She’s a perfect Lady’ he enthused. His wife had to agree as Janet was held in high esteem in the town. ‘Good morning, Janet. How can I help you this lovely day.’

‘A Scotsman please Jim’, Janet glanced at the doorway through which Aggie Heeps had barged. She was wearing her usual knitted hat and tweed suit. No-one had ever seen her in anything else. Her eyes darted round the shop taking in Jim’s overall and Janet’s new hair style.

‘Janet Hamilton,’ she announced as if passing judgement, ‘Just the very person I’ve been wanting to see.’

Janet tried hard to smile, ‘Hello Aggie, it’s a bonny morning.’ ‘I thought you got a Herald delivered by Alec Watson,’ Aggie continued. ‘I saw him at twenty to seven this morning on his bike. He is always quick off the mark. No like that yin who delivers mine.’ Aggie’s paper boy was Janet’s nephew. Janet, to her annoyance, flushed.

‘Yes, Aggie, I do but there was something I wanted to see in the Scotsman.’

‘The article about the new Royal baby, Princess Anne, has some good photographs in the Scotsman Janet,’ interrupted Jim. He was vexed at the attack on his friend. News outwith her stamping ground, however, was of no interest to Aggie.

‘I always think one newspaper is enough,’ she nipped, ‘but some folk have mair money than sense.’ Aggie’s voice, resonant of a wire brush on metal complemented her complexion which seemed to have received the administrations of sandpaper. Today, her cheeks were livid due to her heightened emotions. Janet was uncomfortably aware of her presence as she left the shop. ‘About the Flower Show, Janet,’ Aggie’s screech could be heard by other shoppers whose avoidance techniques had been honed by years of living near a dangerous gossip.

‘Oh yes, Aggie,’ Janet, once more found herself blushing. ‘It’s quite soon, isn’t it?’

‘Soon!’

This time Aggie’s outburst wakened a baby whose yells drowned out any attempt by passers by at listening to the intriguing conversation.

‘Ye ken fine it’s soon.’ Pointing to the sign on the shop window she continued, ‘It’s next week and I’ve no been asked tae judge.’ Aggie’s accent broadened as her indignation increased.

‘Ah wis yin o’ the judges last year if ye remember and had quite a time keepin you and Morag Broom right. Yon gladioli o’ Nancy Frame’s were too spiky’.

Janet remembered Aggie’s bullying and their guilty capitulation as she wore them down.

‘We fully intended to ask you to help Aggie, she soothed, ‘but we haven’t had a minute recently.’

Aggie’s eyes were popping alarmingly.

‘Ye might have asked me to yer wee party in the Buttercup Tea Rooms then,’ she pounced. ‘I saw the pair of you ten days ago bletherin’ ower yer tea and those awfy chewy meringues.’

‘We hadn’t planned a meeting Aggie,’ Janet, once more, was annoyed to find herself blushing, ‘we met by accident.’

‘Ah ken fine Morag visits her mother on a Tuesday,’ Aggie was triumphant. ‘Her man isnae weel either. She should not be leavin’ him in the hoose himself coughing ower that expensive carpet they bought last year in Edinburgh.’ To Janet’s relief, she saw Morag walking towards them. Janet quickly explained the situation before Aggie could get a word in. ‘I was just saying to Aggie we hoped she could help with the Flower Show judging. We valued her opinion last year didn’t we?’ Janet nodded her head enthusiastically.

Morag smiled but maintained a guarded look.

‘Of course Aggie, I remember how you helped us last year.’

‘You’ll need my help anyway. Yer man is still no weel. Isn’t he?’

Aggie’s sympathetic tone lacked authenticity.

‘Bill is much better thank you Aggie,’ Morag replied quietly.

‘He certainly was enjoying himself last night when he came oot the Fleece Inn,’ Aggie smirked.

‘Aboot nine o’clock it wis. Wis that yer daughter he was with. She’s a bonny lassie. Lovely long yellow hair.’

Aggie’s cottage was strategically placed in the High Street and provided her with hours of useful entertainment.

Janet took her friend’s arm and began to move away before Aggie could inflict any more wounding comments.

'Let's meet tomorrow in the hall to discuss the table lay out. I think we'll need more this year. See you later Aggie.'

Once out of earshot, Morag exploded.

'That woman! She knows Fiona has short, dark hair and is in Glasgow just now. She is evil and spiteful. No-one likes her. It's time something was done but everyone is afraid of her. She knows everyone's business. Janet tried to deflect Aggie's attack. 'I know Morag but we are weak mortals compared to her. Remember last year's flower show?'

Morag was thoughtful.

'Who could the blonde have been Janet,' she quizzed. 'Bill did go out to a club meeting at the Fleece last night.'

'There will be a simple explanation,' Janet reassured her friend. 'You know what she's like. She loves to upset people and is never happier than when she has a victim.'

'Even the children are afraid of her,' announced Morag. Janet and Morag helped organise children's parties for local festivals. 'She joins in their games and manages to win the prizes. She always gets the last parcel in 'Pass the Parcel.' She is supposed to help but goes home with the bairns' sweets. The pensioners complain that she always wins at their domino tournaments and somehow her ticket always gets picked for the tombola. She organises that event of course.'

Janet nodded. 'This year we will be strong Morag. If Nancy's gladioli are the best entry then she gets first prize.'

'Aggie doesn't like Nancy,' affirmed Morag. 'Nancy represents everything she lacks. She has a lovely family and is well-off. She is also a very competent gardener.' 'That's why you should not concern yourself with her latest accusation.

She envies you.' Janet tried to assure her friend. 'I'll bring the tea things tomorrow if you could spare some of your Empire Biscuits. Aggie never offers anything but she'll take all that's going.' Despite her comforting words, Janet knew Morag would have her suspicions. Such is the power of the evil tongue.

The following evening, the three judges were studying the tables in the village hall.

'We had a lot of roses last year, if I remember,' announced Janet. 'Well, there will no be as many this year,' Aggie's face had assumed a smug expression. 'I've been roon the gardens and some of the roses are past their best. Mr. Grieve's no up to his usual either. I was looking in his green hoose.'

'The woman is impossible,' thought Janet. She was relieved to see Morag looking calm. She even smiled at Aggie.

'Oh Aggie. I nearly forgot to say that Bill thanks you for your concern and he is much better. Maureen Craig, the lovely bar maid, as you, no doubt know, asked him to have a word with her father who lives near the pub about the new bowling fixtures. He seems to have caught the same bug.'

Aggie, ignoring Morag, began to fill the kettle.

'Did anyone bring some biscuits?' she asked.

The evening before the flower show entrants had been arranging their displays and soon the hall was a mass of colour and scents. Lilies, roses, asters, daisies, gladioli waited for their moment of glory. The curtains had been drawn to keep the hall cool and the assorted perfumes lay heavy in the air. 'That's a bonny smell,' Janet closed her eyes as she breathed in. 'Better than anything from a bottle.' 'It fair makes me sneeze,' complained Aggie. 'And that

pollen goes for my sinuses.'

Morag and Janet exchanged glances and refrained from stating the obvious. That could wait for a more appropriate moment.

Aggie continued complaining.

'Those gladioli are too leafy. I think the lilies are the best this year.'

'Yes,' agreed Janet. 'The lilies are indeed spectacular but it is the best exhibit overall that gets the first prize. Once we have thought it over we'll leave the final decision till first thing tomorrow morning ladies. Time to go home now. I still haven't decided what I'll wear.' As they walked towards the door, Aggie, who had held back, announced, 'I never have a problem wondering what to wear. I'll lock up if you like. The floor needs a sweep.'

'How very nice of you Aggie,' said Morag, puzzled. 'See you tomorrow then.'

Sartorial issues were the topic of as the two women walked home. The print dress or the georgette?

'That was a friendly offer of Aggie's,' mused Janet. 'Perhaps she feels guilty about Bill.'

'I don't trust her Janet,' Morag looked thoughtful. 'I think she's up to something.'

Arranging to meet early the following morning, the two women parted. As she walked home, Janet saw Tom Scott working in his garden. He came up to the gate to greet her.

'Hello Janet. Big day tomorrow.'

'I see you don't have an entry this year Tom.' Tom's asters were always of a high standard.

'I think I've used the wrong feed this year Janet,' he said. 'Or over-watered. Whatever I've done seems to have killed them off.'

Janet sympathised and was almost home when, to Tom's surprise, she turned back and ran past him. As she quietly opened the hall door she saw Aggie standing at a table.

In her hand was a kettle, steam issuing from the spout. 'How kind of you to think of watering Nancy's gladioli Aggie,' she murmured, 'but I don't think boiling water is a good idea. Give me the key. I'll lock up.'

In the centre of the photograph, a woman with a radiant smile stands beside a pot of flowers. She holds up a sign 'FIRST PRIZE'. Three ladies wearing judges' badges are in the background. Two, dressed in pretty frocks, are applauding the winner. A third, in hat and suit, stands apart, staring into the distance.

June Ritchie

OSCAR'S LAST SUNSET

Oscar could tell that the sun was setting; the grey light that filtered through his eyelids was beginning to fade. He wished that he could open his eyes and watch the sky turn red, as the sun dropped below the horizon. But he could not. He had tried many times over the years- it must be years- since he was placed on his back in this bed. Oscar tried to recall the burning sky and sea in Turner's *Fighting Temeraire*, but the image refused to come to him.

Mid-zenith hangs the fascinated day..... Wharton's words drifted into Oscar's mind. Poems had kept him sane during his long imprisonment in this insensate body. He knew dozens by heart; they were his life-blood. He had even composed some of his own- for his posthumous collection. *Across the ensanguined ruins of the fray.....* A flash of colour startled Oscar, but then the darkness seeped back in.

"Are you awake, Oscar?" It was Angel. She came to him at the same time every night, and Oscar looked forward to her visits. She

took his hand and began to stroke it. "The sky is so clear tonight I think I can see Heaven up there." Oscar felt a cool breeze drift across his face. He wondered what Heaven might look like. *The silver torch-light of the evening star..... Wherewith to search the faces of the dead....* Angel tightened her grip. She tugged and Oscar floated towards her. "It's time to go," she whispered, "Come with me."

Sean Fleet

(Acknowledgement: Lines of poetry from *An Autumn Sunset* by Edith Wharton (1894))

SITTIN HERE

"Aye that's me John Everyman, ah just sit here at ma window and watch the world go by, I'm getting old now, ah hardly ever go out.

Yin of thae, Nightingale nurses comes roond twice a day and makes sure everything's ah right.

Well since you ask, I must admit, this is a really friendly Village; I've lived here all my life everybody knows me, but we ah mind our own business.

I just sit here opposite the P.O and the chemist and watch folk go by.

There's auld Mrs Smith she'll be going intae the P.O to get her Pension, she's aye on the go early unlike her drunken Husband, you never see him before 12: and then he's heading for the pub.

Oh! That's Granny Elliot, 80 years old and you can set your watch by her, every day she goes past 9.30 on the dot, straight to the off-licence to buy her half bottle of Sherry.

Aye fine day Jimmy, that's Jimmy the local layabout his wife has tae have three jobs just to keep the house together.

He tells everybody he's going to take her away for a holiday this year but we ah ken whae'll be paying.

Hang on there's that bottle Blonde divorcee, she just moved in a fortnight ago. This village has far ower many incomers; there only five minutes and they want to change everything. But there'll be trouble with that yin, with my binoculars I can see her washing line. She doseny wear thae frippery's to keep her backside warm, ah can tell you.

Wait a minute; she's talking to that Morag, Oh mark my words there'll be trouble if that pair get together, when that Morag goes jogging every man in the street turns round to watch her go past that woman's chest is over developed, it's no natural.

What are these laddies doing hanging about outside the chemist? Oh one if them's away in The young devil I'll bet his Mother doseny know what he's buying.

Good day to you Minister, he'll be on his way to see old Willie Jones, Willies been ill for months.

That man aye looks hattered, I don't know, why he spends most of his time visiting Widows and drinking tea, they say he buys his sermons.

Then there were all the rumours about him and that young organist never believed them masell, but you know what they say there's no smoke without fire.

Poor old Willie Jones, worth a pretty penny is Willie never married and a bit of a miser, if he dies there'll be relatives turning up

at his funeral he didnae know he had.
Aye nothing like a death to bring out the Vultures.

God there's that Traffic Warden she's got her book out, does that woman never give up, if ye notice its aye the men she harries never ever bothers a woman.

"Hello Geordie your doing a grand job". He's been the road sweeper for 20 years, aye fu of wee jokes.

Poor man he was born in Hawick, still I don't suppose he could help it.

He telt me this one yesterday.
Why should a Headmaster never look out of his study window in the morning? I had to admit I didn't know.
Because if he did he would have nothing to do in the afternoon.

Oh here's the Minister coming back That's very sad Minister the funerals Thursday you say, very peaceful that's nice to hear, it will be a big funeral Willie was very popular everybody kent him.

Yes this is a real friendly village, we all look out for one another."

Alistair Ferguson

TICKING BOMB

Fingers fumble into black gloves.
With a token glance the die is cast .
The clock is ticking
for whom the bell will toll.

Paul manoeuvres the shopping bags to check his watch. Ten minutes to three and he is beginning to tire of this place.
"Right then, Rachel, I've had enough"
"Ok, but just give me 5 minutes more..I really want to try on these red shoes."

Paul grimaces, then heaves a sigh
"The ones in that new shop at the far end of the Mall. Remember ..they were in the window,"
"I've seen hundreds of shoes in windows , Rachel."
"You must remember the red ones ... with the wedge heel."
"Red shoes.....wedge heel? Rachel, do you honestly need more shoes?"
"Red shoes are a wardrobe essential this season" she chuckles
"And very sexy."
"Sexy shoes..I've heard it all...." he shakes his head, pursing his lips as if to emit a soft kiss.
"You go on, then....I'll catch you up in 5 minutes....the 101 on the corner of the High street is supposed to be good " she holds on to his arm as she bends down to take off her right shoe and rub her toes.
"My feet are killing me,.... I might be more than 5 minutes, Paul"
"That probably means 5 hours" he smiles knowingly. "Tell you what, be in the pub by half three, and we'll have a meal in town before we go home."
"Right you're on" she gives him a teasing nudge in the ribs. "I'll be with you in a tick, promise."
Paul weakens with her innocent seduction,
"Give us a kiss, little miss red shoes".
"No time, or I might need five minutes more" she jokes
He watches her scurrying off in search of sexy red shoes.
"Rachel is right," he muses, "we never do things together at the weekend. We should go for walks... in the country ... I hope she gets the bloomin red shoes ...next Saturday's fixture is important."
He readjusts the balance of retail weight on his arms and tries to digest the madness before him.
"Kids should be outside kicking a ball on a Saturday afternoon....not shuffling round a shopping mall. They should be playing with their pals."

He turns to go through the swivelling doors and catches sight of an old man, an old man with time on his hands, sitting on a pink plastic bench. "Bet he wishes he still had pals to play with" he asks himself.
"I need that beer" he mouthed .

"Tennents please...a pint...been busy today?"
"Lunch time wasnae bad, but everyone's off to the Mall this afternoon."
"That's where I've been,.. it was murder ...the place is heaving, children jumping about all over the place"
"Aye it will be the day, there's a kids talent contest in the foyer this afternoon, it's to be on the telly".
"Oh well just as well I got out in time" he says as the barman hands over his pint.
"My wife's coming in a minute, she'll be having a white wine, a large one. She's now decided she needs red shoes."
He lifts his pint and makes his way to the cosy snug in the corner.
"How many pairs of shoes does a woman need?" he asks the barman without seeking an answer.

The blast rips through his eardrums, riveting Paul to his seat in shocked horror. The piercing screams stun him into an agonized glaze.
"What the bloody hell" the barman yells.
The doors crash open. The stench of evil dust escapes into 101 on the corner of High Street.
"Get in everybody in here" someone bellows
"The Mall, it's blown up ..."
The sound of screeching sirens bombast the streets outside, while an eerie silence of trauma envelops the lounge bar.
Paul scrambles through the haze, confronts the torrid faces, the

coughing, the spluttering and the floating fog.
 “I need to get out.” he yells in a frenzied madness “my wife’s in the Mall.”
 “You better no go out there, sonny, fuckin’ terrorists ...that’s what they are ...evil bastards ...
 blown to pieces...wee weans...
 blown to pieces”
 Someone tries to hold Paul firmly by the shoulders as an old man is carefully guided inside.
 “In here Jimmy, you’ll be aw right in here.”
 Paul stares at the old man, the old man with time on his hands. Broken fragments of pink plastic are nailed to his coat, blood stained hands clutch a single shoe. Someone’s shoe.

Keep climbing ...there’s dust and stones and gravel. Keep breathing...eyes...stinging eyes... choking smoke. “Help” ... knees ... blood ... “Paul” burning... swirling ... eyes losing focus
 shiny shoes floating above...red shoes...bright and red...
 I need to get out...I need to..., I need to... Ho...Burning... Thumping .. Thudding.
 “Paul... please someone...help”
 I’m floating away... catch me... please.
 Rocks...there’s rocks...rocks everywhere... head in my hands... yes...my hands ...where are they?
 I try to stretch out... To dust ... to the stones... stretch out to... screaming.... piercing pain....
 ...someone’s moaning ... rasping, ...a gasp...faint fuddled groaning... a whimper to let me know
 I am not alone . “Our father”...no
 I need to keep climbing...need to...
 ...take my hand “hallowed be... God please”
 I let go and slide into a long dark tunnel.....slowly...softly...slipping
 ...to light far far away...bright burning light, flashing light...

dancing light. White horses are leaping in the fiery sunset, shadows are shimmering in the burning glow.
 Yes it’s Paul, my Paul. I try to hold out my hand, just to let him know.
 “I got the red shoes, Paul.”
 I want to put on the light, but there’s no switch...I try again...and again...
 Please God give me light... the voice tells me to let go again....
 Paul floats away quietly...my stretching melts into darkness.

Bright lights are flashing in the tunnel, the sky is burning with flaming flowers..... Dancing diamonds sparkle on the horizon. A beautiful rainbow fleets over my head, but the colours fade as I try to touch its wonder.
 I stretch out... into an empty hole... shaking, shivering, with floating red shoes and waves crashing over rocks.
 “Paul, stay in the boat.” I try to call out....but the pain gnaws inside me. I close my eyes as the tide turns and let an inner peace pervade my soul.
 The sea is calm now, just a silent ripple to disturb its mirror.
 The light at the end of the tunnel flickers, a gentle bleep keeping time. I squeeze him tight, to let him know, I am alright...

Paul gently rubs my hand, his thumb weary in my palm.
 “Paul”
 “Rachel, it’s me,... Paul... you’re going to be alright ...”
 “I’ve been dreaming”
 “You’re in hospital, Rachel, everything is going to be fine...”

Tears flow as he gently strokes her face...
 The clock on the wall ticks the minutes away.
 Tomorrow the doctor will explain why Rachel doesn’t need shoes any more.

THE RIVER OF SILVER

Everyone knew that in summer the road to Quilmes would grow as tropic as the jungle, and everything on it become a mirage. After the war, when the oil refineries started up again, the skies above Buenos Aires had turned green with smoke, and the surrounding network of capillary roads were choked with drum-heaped trucks. From then, things had gone from bad to worse, and nowadays even the silver ripples of the Rio de la Plata, which ran along the cliff-side road, were murky with the sky’s reflected grime. It was far from the Argentina Juan Botasso had grown up in, before the war, before the revolution. Though given to fantastic gestures, he was not strictly speaking a political man, and neither of these events had meant much to him; as he squinted into the leaking wall of colours ahead he merely reflected on the pity of it, that he, *la arana negra*, should now need glasses just to ride his motorbike.

La arana negra, the Black Spider – that nickname had not stuck. In fact, he had not been called it in twenty years. The final had not been quite the hoop-la then that it later became – Juan did not kid himself – but there were those who said the first *coup* might never have happened if only Argentina had won. It was not a notion which found much favour with Juan (“Then perhaps *El Presidente* should have played in goals himself,” he would caustically remark) but it chimed in certain aspects with his increasingly narrow view of his fellow man, and there were moments indeed when he found himself wondering. There had been no more World Cups after that, no more finals. Juan’s runners-up medal was rumoured to lie at the bottom of the Rio Plata –

Janet Hodge

children attributed to this belief the water's name, *the River of Silver* – but in fact he had sold it from necessity long ago. No, that was not true. Necessity had played no part. He had simply had enough.

On a clear day like today, as he climbed the cliffs and cut the evening smog, he could see all the way to Uruguay across the Rio; and yet not until the last moment did Juan spot the trucks as they bulleted towards him, turning the wheel of his motorbike towards the cliff-top's edge. There had still been time to react – in split-seconds shorter than these he had thrown himself at impossible distance, turned thumping headers back into the sky – but instead he watched and sat erect as the dusty ground spooled out from under him, and the brawling rushes of the river reached up. Then the wheels of his Ducati were spinning impotently against the sky, and the grand capital of Uruguay sprung up from where it crouched on the other side of the river, like a beast that drank, the only point of reference for Juan as he struggled in the air.

Montevideo – *I see the mountain!* – where the final had been played, and was still played now, in the hilltops of men's dreams. As he scuttled across the invisible line of his goal, Juan Botasso wished desperately that when the brown ball (whose fleeting glimpses he followed from one place to another like rumours of gold) emerged next from the ruck of legs and boots and rolled-down socks, it would be flying towards him rather than away, the imperceptible whistle of its valve cutting through the air, its panels spinning in the artificial light. If a ball spun, it assured him that not only had the striker failed to catch it right, but also that the laws of physics had not been momentarily suspended, that the shot would not simply pass through

his hands like water. But strikes hit perfectly, as this Castro's was, they didn't spin – they simply vacillated a little from side to side, like the point of a pen being scribbled in the air. Its stillness made it seem like the ball was getting bigger rather than closer, a dark gigantic sun eclipsing the countless eyes that ranged beneath it. There was silence.

The Argentinians had come expecting mischief, but the only trick the Uruguayans had was their football. What a joke that was! Against better teams there was a chance at least. You knew what they were trying to do. Take France, for instance. They always chose the correct pass, and the chance, and the instant to take it – with them, everyone was on the same page. But Uruguay, though! *Hijos de putas!* They just stumbled from one mishap to another. This volley from Castro, in the final minute; Juan had tensed and relaxed, tensed and relaxed so many times that his nerves were shot with waiting. Feet flat, he stood transfixed as the ball crawled through a maze of limbs. A clean shot from an unclean moment – it was the worst of every world.

But he could see its whole circumference at least, so there could be no deflections, no clumsy shins or shoulders to turn away its arc. If he was going the right way (and he thought he was, his studs biting into the dirt) the ball was his. Stamping with his right leg, he pushed away the ground below, his feet lifting gently from the grass. His flight would be momentary – even now his entire body, from the top of his stretching hand, curls accommodatingly for its return to earth, his hip presenting itself to buffer, his bicep pressed, a cushion, to his head. And in the sky above the Rio de la Plata, Juan Botasso manages to right himself, set still

the see-sawing horizon that lies ahead, with Montevideo in the centre and nothing beneath but silver silence.

Here in mid-air he is safe from all the harm that is rushing in to meet him – the russet sphere his hands claw agonisingly towards, the many-thousand stares from both sides of the river, open-mouthed, intook breaths about to come roaring out, the very earth itself, that gigantic moon, crashing up into his gut. His gaze travels up the wrinkled terrain of his sleeve, stripes like village roads dashing along its canyons to emerge at the wrist, his thumb and forefinger visible behind his arm. The shadows beneath are spilling everywhere, in all directions; and on the blank grey static of the Rio de la Plata, a single outstretched arm has cast the shadow of a spider, and each and every bird becomes a flock in flight.

Thomas Clark

THE UNADOPTED ROAD

If I were to suggest a remedy for all the ills which plague us in our daily lives, peace and quiet would be my favoured choice. Not simply peace and quiet but escape – even temporary escape – to a place in the countryside, unspoilt by progress and free from the ugly trappings of modern life.

This is what was prescribed for me following a mild nervous disorder – nothing to be concerned about, the doctor had explained. Many of us suffer from these disorders, some don't even realise it believing that an increasingly negative attitude towards life is part and parcel of the human condition.

I can see how my own downward slide was arrested by the simple expedient of a change of scene. Of course, at the time I could not have foreseen how fundamentally my life was to improve as a result of such a holiday. But it did, and I am very grateful to my doctor for suggesting it.

A search online found us the prettiest of cottages to rent. The location was ideal: not quite Highland country but with ample countryside and woodland walks for the most earnest of hikers and most reluctant of dog-walkers. I fell into the latter category. Our Springer Spaniel, Mister Atkins, was always far more enthusiastic than I when it came to taking exercise. However, once cajoled by his pawing and squeaking, I actually enjoyed the experience of walking with him, especially in the peaceful surroundings of our rented holiday cottage.

It was on the first walk, shortly after we'd arrived at the house, that I saw it. A tiny, rather dilapidated sign at the entrance to what looked like a farm track. "Unadopted Road," it read. I had come across this phrase before and had

wondered precisely what it meant but had never bothered to find out. I'd always imagined it to mean that the road had been abandoned in some way by a parental dual carriageway who was now far too busy to pay it any attention, or that it had been so long forgotten by the outside world that it was trying to advertise for a family. I preferred this idea. Indeed, as a sort of jokey holiday pastime, I decided to make it my mission to 'adopt' the road. On my return to the cottage, I announced the decision to my wife who, finding the notion amusing, nevertheless went on to explain the sign's true meaning. It was simply a road that is not publicly maintained – a private road, in effect. This was informative but slightly missed the point of my desire to see the unkempt track as part of a loving household.

The following morning, I took Mister Atkins for his early morning tramp. Once again, we approached the sign. I looked along the track and judged it to be passable, despite an attempt by weeds to envelop what remained of the tarmac and to join up across the entire width of the track. I began to walk along it. I'd gone only a few yards when I noticed Mister Atkins was not following behind. Instead, he remained at the end of the track, refusing to walk any further. I continued a little way but decided I couldn't leave him there for fear of him running off in the opposite direction and becoming lost on his way back to the cottage.

I hadn't realised dogs could tremble. Stoic fellow though he was, Mister Atkins was trembling quite noticeably. I thought at first it might be the cold weather until he began to whine. I attached his lead and we continued our walk away from the track. I recounted the tale to my wife on my return. She reminded me that Mister Atkins had had an unpleasant experience as a puppy with some very sharp

brambles and that he didn't want to walk along a path which was so overgrown. Very wise, I thought. Typical of her to point out such truths. I expect Mister Atkins had complained to her in detail about the diversion.

After lunch, I took myself off for a contemplative walk alone. My wife was all for this as the purpose of our holiday was for me to regain my equilibrium. Needless to say, I made straight for the unadopted road. As I walked along it, I was struck by the beauty of the overgrown vegetation. Everything had been allowed to develop freely, unchecked by scythe or hedge trimmer until, that is, I reached a gap in the hedgerow. A gateway in rusting cast iron was showing through. By spring it would have been almost invisible under the burgeoning brambles and weeds. Given the prickliness of the dried-out branches, I had little chance of opening or climbing over it. However, I could just see a building beyond. I stepped back to the opposite side of the track and stood upon the verge. Over the top of the hedgerow, I could see a roof almost completely covered in ivy. How I would have dearly loved to have investigated further, but my wife's schedule for the day and Mister Atkins' routine demanded my return.

My wife and I spoke little on our visit to the village that afternoon. I decided not to tell her about the house – it wouldn't have interested her. At the village shop we bought provisions for the next couple of days and then took a circular walk with Mister Atkins around the local environs. Arriving back at the cottage, I announced that I would be going for another walk. This did not go down at all well with my wife who questioned my need for further exercise. I explained that there was something I had to do. She didn't argue with me but said that I was not to be too long

as it was going to be dark soon. I remember being rather irritated by her trying to impose a curfew but decided to let it pass and left the cottage without responding. Once again, I found myself at the entrance to the unadopted road. I followed it to the gate which I had glimpsed earlier. Could I get through it to the other side, I wondered? Possibly. It might hurt a little, though. Carefully, I separated some of the branches which obscured the entrance. The latch on the gate was very rusty but responded to a little bit of force. I had managed to create just enough of an opening to squeeze myself through. Ouch! The brambles were very sharp and my face, neck and hands took a number of scratches. It was worth it. I saw before me a large house, circa 1860s, which was almost entirely encased in ivy. It reminded me of my parents' house in which I spent the early part of my childhood. I was very young when we moved but remember playing with my dog on the drive. How coincidental, then, to see a dog. The same dog? It couldn't be Reggie. It looked like him - same breed and colouring, same squint in his left eye. I called him over. He came towards me and I must admit to having felt slightly faint at this point. It was Reggie. I don't know how, but it was. 'Hello boy,' I said to him. 'Where's Mummy? Shall we go and find her?' I knew this was fantasy, but I had to see if there was anyone inside the house - anyone I knew.

Reggie and I walked up to the front door. It looked as though it hadn't been opened in years. I tried the handle but the door was locked. Unable to gain access to the house via orthodox means, I resolved to break in and checked the viability of my plan by trying to lift one of the sash windows. It moved easily and I pushed it up far enough for me to be able to climb inside the house. I told Reggie to wait for me

and he gave a vigorous wag of his tail which rocked his little body from side to side. I allowed my eyes a few seconds to adjust to the dim light indoors. As they did so, I felt my stomach rise into my mouth. I was standing in my father's study. It didn't just look like my father's study; it was the actual room - the room that I used to rush into after playing in the garden so that I could throw my arms around my dear daddy. How could this be? The house was nowhere near where I had lived as a child. Yet here it was, overtaken by ivy and cobwebs and in another location entirely. All the furniture and fittings were there too. The desk, the lamp, the upright piano in the corner. Everything was as it was all those years ago. What of the rest of the house? Was it all like this? With a mixture of delight and disbelief, I opened the door into the hallway. It was all the same. It was our house. My home.

So engulfed was I with emotions that I had completely forgotten to be mindful of the time. Realising how late I already was, I dashed out of the house and caught up with Reggie in the garden. I hoped he'd come with me back to the cottage - I was loathe to leave him as I wondered who fed him and how he was looked after. Refusing to step outside the threshold of the garden, Reggie stood firmly and watched me make my way back through the brambles and the iron gate.

I jogged most of the way back to the cottage, partly because I wanted to tell my wife about my extraordinary experience and partly because I thought I might incur less of her wrath if I returned more quickly.

Naturally she didn't believe me when I told her about the house. Nor did she believe that I had met Reggie again. She said he'd be dead ten times over by now. All I had done was stumble upon a derelict house and a stray dog that just happened to resemble

my childhood pet. I told her that it wasn't just the house or the dog but the furniture and all the bits and pieces in the rooms. She reminded me that any belongings left by my parents after they had died had been sold at auction many years ago.

If she didn't believe me, I'd take her there. But, of course, there was no way she was going out at this time. There was dinner to organise. There was that programme on the television. I told her I wasn't hungry and that I certainly wasn't going to watch television. I grabbed the torch and put on my thick overcoat. Mister Atkins stirred from his basket and seemed to wonder why I was getting ready to go out again. I told him to stay with his mistress who was by now becoming quite agitated. She warned me that if I went out again she would have to call Doctor Collins. He certainly wouldn't believe any of this nonsense about finding my parents' house.

Why I used the torch to hit her, I don't know. It wasn't the most practical of instruments and required repeated use to knock her unconscious. I remember thinking that the bloodstain would lose us our deposit on the cottage so I folded a tea towel and put it under her head in the hope that this would limit the damage to the carpeted floor. I then made my way as quickly as I could to the unadopted road.

I passed through the gate and saw Reggie in the moonlight. He was wagging his tail again. Not only was the front door open but I could see a light emanating from a room at the back of the house. It must be coming from the garden room, I thought - this was where we all used to sit in the evening before I went to bed. The door was ajar so I went inside. There they both were, sitting by the open fire.

Dad asked me what his little boy had been up to in the garden. I told him I'd been out playing with Reggie. Mum just smiled at me. I hadn't seen that smile since I was a child. I looked at their faces and felt overwhelmed by love and warmth. Dad told me to take my seat by the hearth. My usual seat. I sat down and gazed into the fire.

* * *

It has since been carefully explained to me that my wife was saved by Mister Atkins' persistent barking which had roused her from her unconscious state. She'd had just enough blood left, apparently, to raise the alarm.

I had been found wandering in a wooded area some hours later and taken directly to hospital from where, with the help of Doctor Collins, I was transferred to my current home. Life is less hectic here – they do everything for me. Sometimes, when I'm walking in the gardens, I imagine seeing Reggie on the lawn.

Looking back, I don't think I would have survived the life I was leading before I took that holiday. It's funny to think just how much taking a short break away from one's usual routine can change a person's life for the better.

I would recommend it to anyone.

Tim Nevil

ICE SCREAM

Drum roll... da, da. Hello Liverpool. Hello Manchester. Hello Rome... and to any post-modern feminists in the audience I apologise in advance for anything I might say to offend you. My name is Carla Maria Benuto and I'm here to entertain you.....

Before I go on stage I have my little rituals. I wear my lucky red underwear beneath my outfit of black trouser suit, white shirt, black

bow tie and red socks. For extra effect I sometimes carry a little silver tray with a white tea-cloth over my arm. I can always rely on some clever Dick or Harry in the auditorium to heckle, 'You look like an Italian waiter in that get-up.' 'It's ironic.' I shout back, happy to embrace the stereotype as a convenient shortcut helping to pace my quick-fire routine. Much to my surprise my career as a stand-up comedian has taken off and I've even been booked to appear as a guest on Loose Women next month. But no matter where I am I always have the photograph in pride of place on my dressing table. I touch it for good luck before I go on stage.

Let me share the story of the photograph with you. I was just coming up to six years old. The picture was taken by my Uncle Luca who was studying cold temperature physics at Manchester University. He used his student pass to travel by bus to Blackpool once a month. He was 22 and studying for his PHD and dreamed of winning a Nobel Prize. He had turned his back on the family ice cream business – too predictable, he used to laugh. But somehow the sound of refrigerators must have been in his DNA and he strove hard to achieve colder and colder temperatures. He was the first Benuto to go to university and all the family were proud of him.

I was a different story. From an early age I knew I was a disappointment. My great-grandparents had come to England from Naples sometime between the wars. They came with just the clothes they stood up in, a few bags of bits and pieces and most valuable of all – the family ice cream recipe. I'm not sure how they ended up in Blackpool, but it is as good a place as any to sell ice cream, in fact a very good place. I was born, and probably conceived in my

parent's bedroom over Benuto's Italian Ice Cream Parlour. The room was large, running the width of the shop and doubled up as a storeroom, piled high with boxes of ice cream cones, wafers, flavourings and syrups. I was an only child and my father had to endure the humiliation of the ribald comments of his many brothers, on the other hand my mother was probably very relieved.

If I could remember as far back as the day I was born I would tell you that as soon as my mother put me to her breast I spat out the milk. One breast tasted of vanilla, the other of the famous Benuto roasted almond flavour ice cream. I was, and perhaps still am, the only Benuto to be brought up on powdered baby milk. From that day on I was a disappointment. I refused to eat any ice cream. My mother tried to tempt me with raspberry ripple, chocolate and hazelnut, coconut and toffee chunks but I kept my lips firmly sealed. On the few occasions I yielded to maternal pressure, as soon as my mother wasn't looking, I would put my fingers down my mouth to make myself sick.

Anyway back to the photograph. It was a cold October day. Harsh breezes blew off the sea; the wind was biting cold and holiday makers were few and far between. Uncle Luca took me to the Pleasure Beach, and then we walked along the promenade and stopped to sit on a bench. Because of my aversion to ice cream I rejected anything sweet so we munched on savoury crackers. Uncle Luca broke one in half and placed the two pieces in his mouth like fangs. He pulled funny faces and made me laugh murmuring, 'Appy Alloween, Appy Alloween,' and I couldn't stop laughing. Uncle took the photograph just as I had a fit of the giggles.

Then we went to the amusement arcade on the pier for warmth, we won a few bob on the one-arm bandits, which we spent on a bag of chips each. That day there was a matinée performance in the theatre at the end of the pier. This is where we always ended up on each of my Uncle's visits and where I was my happiest. Sadly I can't remember what was showing, but I do remember it was the last time I ever saw my uncle.

It was a while before anyone realised he had disappeared. That winter was cold with deep snow and some hikers found him high up on Saddleworth Moors - frozen solid. The coroner gave an open verdict. No-one knew why he was out on the hills with nothing but a bottle of chloroform and some pads of cotton wool in his pocket. I like to think he was conducting some experiment that must have gone wrong. I don't know what I would have become if my beloved Uncle Luca hadn't died tragically so young, but with his loss the shine went out of my life.

When I was told the news of his death I screamed and screamed. Desolate, I refused to eat for days. Then one night I woke up and I thought I heard Uncle Luca calling me, 'Carla, Carla. I'm here.' I ran downstairs to the ice cream parlour but couldn't see him. I sat by the freezer to wait, but lulled by its steady hum I fell fast asleep. I woke up hungry so lifted the freezer lid and tried each flavour a tiny scoop at a time, but no, I still didn't like any of them. My parents found me with ice cream smeared round my lips. My poppa lifted me up and hugged me. My mother laughed. 'Our little girl likes ice cream after all.'

I hid my grief behind tantrums, and bulimia, trying to get my parents attention by eating as much ice cream as I could. I kept thinking of my uncle dying all alone, so I surrounded myself with people and

with laughter. Whenever I could I went to the theatre at the bottom of the pier. That's where I learnt my craft; the timing, some very bad jokes and where eventually I got my first break.

I have my rituals; the lucky red underwear, my black and white uniform, and my photograph. My happy six-year old self laughs at me as I take just one teeny weenie whiff of chloroform to steady my nerves and I'm off.....

Drum roll... Hello Kelso. And to any post-modern feminists in the audience I apologise in advance for anything I might say to offend you. My name is Carla Maria Benuto and I'm here to entertain you.....

Barbara Pollock

ON PHARMACY ROAD

Ayisha lies on the flat roof of her grandmother's house. Despite the early hour, heat from the clay tiles burns through her thin tunic and trousers, setting her skin on fire. Each indrawn breath is a blend of heat and grit, stinging her nose, drying her throat. The dog is flopped beside her, panting, and she touches her nose to his, the cool, dampness of it welcome. His tail thumps, once, twice, raising puffs of dust so that they sneeze in unison. He is almost better now, his half-hoppity walk the only reminder of the night she found him, cowering behind the shield of empty kerosene drums, one paw trailing, the gash on his leg oozing blood.

The night her mother and would-have-been baby sister died. She doesn't know where the dog came from – perhaps he too had been lifted by the blast from the stray shell; the blast that cast her mother under the collapsing wall at the corner of the alleyway that ran behind their house, so that she was carried home, limp and bloody,

her clothes in shreds. Her legacy to Ayisha a new memory: of a dust-covered hand dangling by her side, a last look of terror in her eyes.

The dog Ayisha could save, tangling her hands in his matted fur, his whimpers stilled as she buried her head in his side, closing her eyes and ears to the sweat that blurred her mother's face, to the bundle of bloodied rags, to her grandmother's keening. For a month now he has shadowed her, waking and sleeping, his ribs receding, his rough lick a comfort; while her grandmother looks on, strangely without complaint.

Ayisha traces her name in the dust of the parapet and pokes at a beetle lying prone, as if it too is sapped by the heat that rises in waves. Below, imprisoned within the compound wall, chickens scratch among the dusty shrubs. Beyond, Wishtan spreads: a jumble of mud-brick houses hidden among twisting alleys, their high walls guarding against the sun. A string of children, bright, like coloured beads, thread their way to the mullah's house squatting beside the one-room mosque. Yesterday she too passed through that iron gate, sat in the courtyard that serves as a school: chanted her numbers, formed her letters, listened to the reading of the Koran. Yesterday she was nine and therefore permitted to learn. Today is her tenth birthday. Today, by Taliban decree, she can no longer go to school.

She doesn't want to watch but can't help herself. At the end of the line Ahmed hangs back, turns, his hand raised, shading his eyes. Ayisha stands up: a flash of emerald against the sky; raises her hand in return, bridges the distance between them. She dips her head, a reed bending before the wind, unbroken; mouths, 'Go on.' He is ten today also, but a boy. She knows he's too far away to see her lips move, but her thought flies to him, his response equally

swift: 'Later we will have our own school.' Another boy appears in the gateway, grabbing Ahmed's arm, and with a last backward glance, he disappears beyond the gate. Dropping to her knees she squeezes the dog more tightly, wedging Ahmed's promise between them: warm, secure.

Later, when all of Wishtan closes its shutters against the ferocity of the sun, they will huddle together in the corner of the deserted house that has become their secret place, the hoarded stump of candle guttering in the draught from the gap between the planks that board the windows, while Ahmed shares with her all he has learnt. Today and every day - at least while the summer lasts. She thrusts away the thought of winter, vows to find a way. It is a vow she cannot qualify with the usual *In sha'Allah*, for Allah doesn't will it. Nor would their father if he was to find out.

Their father she fears more, for Allah she can't see, and so isn't sure about, although that is a sin she knows she must hide deep within her; along with her curiosity about that other, more musical God, who once danced in the sounds that drifted from the military base at the end of their road. The road the infidels call 'Pharmacy'. She remembers the silent fall of snowflakes, the jingle of bells, the lilting tunes which caused her feet to tap, and the words that, though unknown, repeated themselves in her head and made her smile.

Those soldiers are long gone, but others, they say, are coming. This time they will not roll in column down the road which, gouged through the centre of Wishtan, cuts her family in half. Few pass there now and the metal shutters that punctuate its walls rarely open. Piles of stones, three or four high, dot its length, warning of danger. She can signal from her grandmother's house to her cousins living on the other side, but can't

cross to play without someone to take her. She looks at the roofs opposite, from today, play too may be denied her.

Behind her a bang, followed by a low rumble, a grey dust cloud filling the sky. Instinctively she crouches, shushing the dog. A second rumble, a second fountain of dust: clearing, settling. She raises her head, turns towards the sound, sees a tumble of bricks scattered about a newly opened space where before there had been a clutter of roofs. A moment's silence, then running footsteps, raised voices carrying clearly in the still air. Two soldiers wave towards a gash in the wall, shout at a third. Ayisha senses shock in their voices, tinged with fear. An old woman emerges from the gap, shaking, her shayla across her face. An older man follows, his beard white-streaked, his skin creased, like paper folded many times. He stoops to tug a prayer mat from the rubble, shaking it clean.

Ayisha knows them, has played with their grandchildren, been shouted at for chasing their chickens: has wished them ill. She focuses on the prayer mat, its colours muted by the dust, thinks - is this my doing?

The old man reaches the soldiers, gestures towards the rubble. His voice is staccato-sharp, like gunfire. 'These are our homes. That one my house. My children, my grandchildren, where are they to live now?' He pauses, gathers breath.

One of the soldiers spreads his hands as if in mute apology, while another says in precise Dari, 'The houses...we thought they were empty.' He is scribbling on a piece of card, holds it out, 'At Jackson base, you will receive compensation. We didn't know...' The old man spits at the soldier's feet. 'You know nothing.'

There is a stir below, her grandmother calling, 'Ayisha.'

She hugs the dog again, stands up slowly. Today she has new work to do. Today she must start to practise to be a woman. It is too soon, unwelcome, but she has no choice.

* * *

Darkness settles on Wishtan, a cloak of cold imposing its own curfew. Breaking it, two men slip silently into the kitchen of her grandparents' house. Ayisha is startled awake by voices raised in argument. One word repeated, louder than the rest, punctuated by the emphatic thump she recognizes as that of the butt of a Kalashnikov on the dirt floor: 'Panjwai...' There have been other nights, other visitors: their voices low murmurs that lulled her to sleep. But tonight she shivers and crawls onto the pallet beside Ahmed, curling into him, reassured by his even breathing, by the sharp jab of his elbow in her side. Tobacco smoke eddies under her bedroom door, warning footsteps signalling her father sending her scurrying back to her own mat. She injects a faint catch into each breath, readying herself to feign an awakening at his touch. Heavier breathing above her and then a draught brushing her face, the faint click of the latch. Cautiously she opens one eye, lets out a whoosh of relief. To have been found on Ahmed's mat ... her father isn't slow to wield his stick.

In the morning she slips out onto the roof again, tracks her twin's course to school, adds her address to her name drawn in the dust of the parapet. '...Sangin, Helmand.' A voice, crackling and disembodied, breaks the silence. 'People of Sangin. Peace and the blessings of God be with you.'

She peers over the parapet. '...Help your Afghan brothers ... bring us the hidden weapons and bombs so we can destroy them. If you do this we can help you. If not...' A high-pitched whine blanks out the voice, fades again, '...It is your choice.'

She thinks of her mother, and of how she had no choice. The dog stiffens under her arm and she looks up to see Nouri looming over her, blocking out the sun.

'Your uncle is here and wishes to speak to you.'

Ayisha jumps up smiling, the dog leaping beside her.

Her uncle isn't smiling. He glances towards the black-turbaned stranger watching at the window grill, and coughs, as if his mouth is dust-clogged. 'We have a task for you.'

She darts a look at her grandmother pummelling dough, at her grandfather running worry beads through his fingers, but neither raise their head.

'Come.' Her uncle hefts a bulging sack and slams the door behind them, sticking out his foot to stop the dog from escaping, his puzzled yelps trailing them along the alley. His grip on her arm is tight, as if he does not trust her to follow, and when she looks up at him he looks away, so that her question dies in her throat. In the deserted alley, the windows of the houses planked, he stops, nods towards a door that sags on its hinges. 'You know this place?'

She looks down at the scuffed markings in the dust, a perfect match for her sandals, recognizes the futility of denial. He doesn't wait for her answer, but is already edging open the door, gesturing the stranger in, indicating the boarded window, the narrow gap between the bottom two planks.

The stranger nods. 'It's ok.' He bends down to the base of the wall, pokes at the mud with his penknife, forms an almost invisible hole. He nods again, disappears outside and Ayisha hears him scrabbling in the dirt. The question forms in her head: what do they want from me? Understanding washing cold over her. as thin wires poke through the hole, waving like scorpion antennas.

'You can do this, Ayisha?'

Her uncle is lifting a makeshift plunger from the sack, attaching the wires. He rests his hands on her shoulders, stares into her eyes.

'You know how it is. Last week, Panjwai. Yesterday, our houses destroyed. Tomorrow...' he shakes his head, 'We will show them we do not abandon our brothers.'

He pushes her down to crouch on the floor, her eyes level with the peephole gap. 'Soldiers will come - in one hour, maybe two. When the first one reaches the corner...' he punches downwards.

'You understand? If this was not school day, we would entrust this to Ahmed.' His voice hardens, 'As it is... you are honoured.'

* * *

It is a long time to wait, a long time to think. She kneels by the window, her eye pressed against the slit, focusing on the strip of wall that is her marker, her finger hovering over the plunger. She remembers yesterday: the old woman, the single tear that tunnelled through the dust on her cheeks. The fading newspaper pictures of Panjwai tacked to the schoolroom wall: the first, of a bare room, a lone figure hunched over a charred circle on the floor; the next, a child's foot protruding from a blanket in the back of an open truck; in the last, an impotent crowd filling a narrow street, silent, though screaming. She nurses the mother and baby-shaped hole in her heart, says, 'I can do this.'

* * *

Her knees are aching, her back stiff, but she doesn't move for fear she will miss her moment. Off to her left the unmistakable scrape of a ladder against a wall, the metallic creaking as someone climbs. There is a shouted question, a pause, an indistinct reply, then the soft thud as the climber returns to ground level. She knows now where they

are, that it is a matter of minutes only. The first soldier appears, his clothing and skin sand-coloured, his face beardless. - Because he is a foreigner? Or because he is too young? She cannot tell. He steps slowly, deliberately, as the old do, swinging a metal circle attached to a long pole from side to side in front of him; each following soldier stepping carefully in his tracks. They have the look of youth, of her cousin Sahid. She fixes her eyes on the bend in the road, rests the palm of her hand on the plunger, tries to make her mind blank.

The line falters, the soldier nearest Ayisha hunkering down, hand outstretched. The following soldier calls out and she doesn't need to understand the words to sense his fear. She squints through the gap, sees a dog nosing along the opposite wall. Catches her breath. But this dog has four good legs, walks straight. The hunkering soldier steps out of line, strokes the dog's head, slides one arm under the belly and scoops him into his arms. He stands up, his breathing shallow, and adjusting the dog to a more secure position, inches forwards. The dog barks once, settles in the soldier's arms and she hesitates, her eyes darting along the line, allowing the first soldier to pass beyond her line of vision. The second also, and the third, her uncle's voice hammering in her head, 'Panjwai ... we do not abandon ... you are honoured.' The one cradling the dog is half-way to safety, so still she waits, until he too has disappeared. There are only three soldiers left. She sees the face of the turbaned stranger who accompanied her uncle, his mouth a snarl, and belatedly presses the plunger, shutting her eyes against the succession of flashes, the choking clouds of dust. Small flames, like spent fireworks, flicker in the line of blackened holes threading the road. One soldier is being supported towards the

corner, dragging his leg. The final one staggers behind, clutching his ears. From beyond the corner Ayisha hears a soft 'shush, shush', the dog's high-pitched yowl fading to a whimper. She imagines him wriggling up the soldier's chest, their faces touching, a pink tongue licking thanks. She disconnects the plunger, and careful to follow her final instructions, stuffs it into the sack, coiling the ends of wire and burying them in the dust floor. Waits.

As the heat bleeds out of the sun, silence settling over Wishtan, she slips home, rehearsing her report: exaggerating injuries, practising an apologetic shrug.

Margaret Skea

THE SECRET

A spring sun shimmered over a pretty array of assorted china ornaments sitting on the low windowsills on either side of the front door. The hand-painted 'open' sign trembled slightly as the door was opened by a slim, pretty, young woman accompanied by a waft of distinctly chilly air. "Morning Sophie, close the door quickly dear you're letting all the heat out," greeted an almost elderly, but still glamorous woman in a colourful floral print frock.

The Lavender Lake Tearoom sits quietly up a side street off Clapham Junction, near Lavender Hill. The exterior is painted in a light blue purplish colour with the name in faded red above the entrance. Crystal-clear windows are framed each side by a gathered pelmet and curtains in scarlet with cream polka-dots a bit like a dolls' theatre. A few passers-by go up the street and now and again some tourists go into to the tea room as well as the regular customers. The interior is decked out with a selection of

wooden tables, some with gingham cloths and others with decorative Formica tops, together with an odd assortment of chairs painted to match. Owned and run by two sisters, Ginger and Rita, the tearoom has been in their family for decades.

Sophie pushed a lock of hair into her headscarf with paint-splattered fingers as she approached the counter. "Good morning Ginger, spring is here at last." "Still a bit parky though" replied Ginger pulling her cardigan around her, "your usual dear or can I tempt you with a freshly baked scone?" "Oh go on then" smiled Sophie and she turned to take her usual seat and pulled out her iPhone. Rita, the older of the two sisters, bustled over with a tray of tea things: a dainty milk jug, matching cup and saucer and china teapot all delicately decorated with pink roses. The scent of Earl Grey wafted from the pot as Sophie poured and glanced around. She nodded to Bill who was tucking into Welsh rarebit which he had liberally doused with Lee and Perrins. Bill, a muscular Jamaican, used to drive underground trains but now in retirement he is a baritone in a gospel choir.

On the walls there are framed black and white photographs of Fred and Ginger, Bob and Bing, Gene Kelly, Ol' Blue Eyes and the rest of the Rat Pack. Underneath them sat a garishly dressed couple studying a crumpled map and a guide book. They had finished their frothy coffees and Chelsea buns. Sophie thought they looked like Americans. "John not in yet?" she said as Ginger brought over an enormous warm scone with some curls of butter and a tiny pot of jam.

"Not yet dear, I think he might be getting the bus, I heard on the wireless there has been some

hold-ups with the tube today" said Ginger.

The tourists were talking to Rita who was helping them with their guidebook. They thanked her and waved cheerily goodbye promising to come back again soon. As they opened the door to leave, an upright man with greying hair and beard held the door open for them before he entered. The newcomer was wearing a grey herringbone tweed overcoat; it had fraying cuffs and looked a bit tatty. His trilby hat was scuffed and crumpled with years of use. He sat down at the largest table, greeted his fellow customers and took out his copy of the Times.

"Hello John" said Ginger and Rita together.

"Hello ladies" said John returning the greeting, looking up from his paper, "A cappuccino and a Chelsea bun please Ginger".

John might be in his late sixties but had the build of somebody a bit younger. He was of average height but held himself and walked as if he was taller. His hair was collar length and greying and his bristly beard was a bit uneven. He wore a white shirt and Paisley printed silk cravat. Almost every day the café was open, which was six days a week, come rain or shine, John would come in at around 10:30 and stay until 4 or 5. This had been his routine for eight years or so. He always brought his copy of the Times and usually a bundle of letters. Most days he read the newspaper before lunch and the letters after.

Today Ginger brought him his usual cappuccino with a swish of her petticoats, and he sat and drank it while reading his Times paying particular attention, as usual, to the announcements, obituaries

and the personal columns. After finishing the paper he started on his correspondence opening each one carefully looking at the postmark first. He made two piles; the left-hand one for recycling and the right-hand pile he would keep. He opened a brown envelope with an American postmark. In it was an A4 print-out of a photograph with a phone number written underneath it. He took out his wallet from his inside jacket pocket and extracted a dog-eared black and white photograph and laid the two pictures side by side. Bill by this time had finished. He came up to the counter to pay, and called cheerio and sees you tomorrow as he left. Sophie was also ready to leave.

"Well ladies I had better get back to the studio, and get finished before the weekend" Sophie said to Ginger at the till.

"What's on at the weekend?" asked Ginger.

"An old pal from Art College has asked me to go with her to a film festival in Birmingham. It's to celebrate a long forgotten British film studio called 'Blighty Pictures'; they are going to show some of their old movies that have been rescued". She said still trying to control that wisp of hair.

"Oh how lovely dear, me and my pal Jane saw all of them at our local pictures. A few of the leading men were very good looking you know. I remember one who came from round here; he was called Radcliffe Fisher" gushed Ginger "Look there's a picture of him here leaving the Savoy with a lady friend" she gestured to a wall of framed magazine cuttings. "I hope you enjoy yourselves, I wonder if any of the old stars will be there. Do come and tell us all about it on Monday".

Just then two young shop-girls entered the café. "Two BLT's, and two ginger beer floats please Rita love" said the one with the pink and blue streaks in her hair. Her friend with the bright brassy blond hair, who had her dark roots showing, said; "Make mine a cheese and chutney, I don't fancy lettuce today."

"Right you are girls" Rita said preparing the sandwiches, from a pile of buttered bread being heaped up by Ginger. The girls sat at a table near the window, and carried on chatting while messaging to their other friends.

"Hey Rita, what's that guy's name again?" said the girl with the pink and blue hair, as she pointed to a photograph on the wall. "That's Fred Astaire dear" she replied "He was a famous dancer in the past".

"My Gran loves all them old black and white films an' that" said the other girl.

"Yes dear, all the people in the photographs were famous film stars" said Rita turning over some bacon rashers.

"Yeah Rita and Ginger are named after two of the leading ladies, ain't that right Rita?" said the first girl sucking up a mouthful from the tall sundae glass delivered by Ginger.

"Yes dear. Our parents were big film fans, so they named us after Rita Hayworth and Ginger Rodgers." She said as she pointed to the other photos on the opposite wall, which had only female stars. "Ginger Rodgers was well known for being a co-star in lots of films with Fred Astaire."

"Dancing?" enquired the blond girl.

"Yeah, just like they do on 'Strictly' said her friend.

"Oh yeah ok I see" said blondie.

"Rita dear is their order ready yet?" called out Ginger, who had been busy serving a couple of taxi drivers with filled rolls to take away.

Rita fetched the girls' food and set it on the table. She returned to wipe down the counter and help serve the growing queue.

"John, are you ready for your lunch?" Rita called over to him. "Yes, thanks" he replied but his mind was elsewhere. He waved goodbye to Sophie and he glanced at the faded cuttings on the wall. Rita served John with his lentil soup and ham roll. She laid them down on the table as John put the photographs and letters away to eat his lunch. The two sisters busied themselves behind the counter serving the lunchtime sandwich customers.

"John is in a quiet mood today", Rita spoke softly to Ginger.

"Is he? It's not like him" Ginger replied, still battling with the stack of buttered bread. Lunch time came and went and Ginger had by now finished her herculean task of bread buttering. The pile diminished rapidly as sandwiches were ordered, made, wrapped and paid for. Later on the tea time customers munched and slurped their way through more sandwiches and rolls, cakes, buns, meringues, coffees and teas. The last customers left for the day and then John stood up. He folded his sheet of paper with the picture on and slotted it in his jacket pocket, put his hat and coat back on, lifted his Times which he folded under his arm, and after he paid Rita, he left just like all the rest, back into the darkening street.

"I was reminded today of Radcliffe Fisher" said Ginger washing her hands.

"Who?" Rita asked, as she wiped down tables and collected the last of the cups.

"You know, local lad, in the 70s he was big in British films" said Ginger, "and furthermore he was a big dish!" she added.

Rita thought for a moment then said "I remember you and Jane both had a crush on him. He was a bit young for both you though. Wasn't Radcliffe Fisher his stage name what was his real name?"

"I don't remember his real name off-hand. He was a bit younger than us, but we were only slips of girls then too, weren't we" Ginger smiled wistfully.

"We are still girls now, don't you think?" Rita laughed "The chap in the off-license asked me for ID when I went to buy our sherry last week. I wondered if he needed new specs or something. I think we're still glam for our age though." Rita remarked as she stood with her cloth in hand. She was wearing her figure-hugging peach knee length number under her white frilly apron.

"Of course we are!" Ginger said, giving a little twirl and a curtsy.

"Anyway we haven't heard of Radcliffe Fisher for years. I wonder what happened to him?" said Rita.

"Well after the big romance with Lady Charlotte something, her family was not happy so they sent her to America to marry a tycoon. I'm not sure what happened to her next, but after that Radcliffe's film career took off, he did some big movies. Then that TV detective series for quite a few years, but I haven't seen him in anything for ages" Ginger mused "Mmm it's a shame, he was so gorgeous". The evening sun slowly slipped behind

the tall buildings opposite the café, as the ladies shut up for the night. Ginger turned the door sign to say 'closed' as Rita put out the lights.

Lewis Teckkam

REMEMBERING JEANIE

Each year, on the 4th of September I go back to Peebles with my eldest daughter, Maggie. I stay with Auntie Ann in Old Town, number 74. Auntie has been a mother to me, bless her, for mine died as I was born. She could have left me in Peebles poorhouse. I owe her a great deal.

As night falls and the air cools a little, we sit with Auntie's lodgers on the doorstep with our feet in the dust, talking about the intense heat, which began a week ago. Folk are saying that September 1906 will be the hottest ever. Couples and families stroll by, making the most of a slight breeze. Not many recognise me under that dark sky: those who do nod in greeting, or whisper gravely as they move on. We bletcher quietly until late. Then I lie down next to my Maggie on the kitchen floor, eyes open, remembering.

I wake with a start, gasping for air, and in the darkness slip outside. I long for an end to this stifling heat. Perhaps the weather will break. A good drenching to damp down the choking dust, which gets in everything.

The streets of the town are empty as I walk to the end of Old Town and stare down Biggesknowe, which twists away from me. I can just make out the shapes of the low houses. I lived here once. I turn my back and walk quickly past Auntie's house towards Neidpath castle, turning up Rae Burn road.

The loose stones slip under my feet as I stumble uphill, dust rising, the

track steep and rough. I feel my heart thumping, my skin damp. The hollowed drovers' road takes me even higher. I feel faint with the effort. High on the hill I find a crumbling stone wall, and sit down. Below me, Peebles is taking shape out of the blackness of night. Today begins.

From my pocket I take a tightly folded piece of paper, cut from the Peeblesshire News six years ago, and I carefully smooth it out on the broken stone wall. It is still too dark to read, but I don't need to, I know it, I lived it. It's a hard story to hold in your heart. A dark story in the darkness. My darling Jeanie. Rab was working as a stonemason when we met. He said he was taken with my shy and tidy ways, and I loved his strength and swagger. We married, and settled in Peebles. Maggie was born within the year and I felt the comfort of my family. I felt lucky.

He always liked his drink, but he worked regular, and kept a roof over our heads, and usually some money for food. At first, ale made him sentimental: poetry and song. Those were good times. I wish Maggie could remember them. As more bairns arrived he spent less time with us, and drank more. He got fouler of speech, fists and insults hitting out. But I never let him touch my wee ones.

It was of course a Saturday when it happened. We were lodging at 20 Biggiesknowe, with Mrs Swinton. We had the room, she had the kitchen. My Aunt had come round for company, and we talked while I got food ready and Jeanie played on the mat. Maggie and my younger son Stewart were outside nearby, playing. They followed their pa inside as he burst in with that stupid drunken smile on his face, an arm around his friend Tom Neil's shoulder for support, calling

for his food. At the sight of Aunt Annie the smile broke into a snarl: there was no liking between them. Usually she left before he got home. She took one look at him and went into the kitchen out of the way.

What he was shouting? Hating words, wicked names, a mess of spitting, slurring and anger. His face was ugly with it, and his limbs seemed to have a life of their own, like a child's puppet. Tom went into the kitchen too. No one should come between husband and wife.

Maggie got Stewart out of the way, and then my brave child came back and stood by me, as she often did on a Saturday night. I put his dinner on the table and thought to leave him alone to eat, meaning to take the children out until he was sleeping, as was my custom when he was in an ugly mood. So I picked Jeanie up and started for the door.

It should have been me. He threw the poker at me. The black point hit my sweet Jeanie on the head. Hard.

I picked the poker up and looked at it. Then at him. We stared at one another, frozen, he sober in an instant. Then I carried her into Mrs Swinton's. We tried to stop the bleeding. Black blood on her red hair. Perhaps heads just bleed a lot? Why wasn't she crying with the pain?

We heard the door slam and Auntie saw Rab swaying down the road. I heard myself calmly tell Maggie to be a good girl and get my hat and boots, and the blanket. This other me asked Auntie to take Maggie and Stewart to her home.

It seemed as if I floated, still calm, to Lindores, Doctor Gunn's house, mercifully close in Old Town. I felt her warm, alive in my arms. She could wake soon. The doctor laid her on a table. He looked grave as

he bandaged her head, then made me sit down and took my hand. He asked me how it had happened. He was very kind and gentle...

A soft voice interrupts my memories and I look up. Maggie has followed me up Hamilton hill. She smiles and sits beside me, a little out of breath, her dark eyes sparkling at me like stars. I am proud of her, a handsome hard-working young woman, 16 years old. We watch the red dawn in silence. There will be no let up in the heat.

"Come on, Ma, let's get back"
Not ready to face the day yet, we follow the road up and over, past Standalane farm and down to Rosetta Road. Maggie picks the wild flowers as usual and we link arms. She distracts me gently, with gossip about friends and family here in Peebles. We have these good memories too.

Half way down Rosetta road is the Poorhouse. Its high white wall puts us in deep shadow as we walk past. Maggie squeezes my hand. We know this place.

This is where Dr Gunn bought me and Jeanie that night. He wanted a quiet clean place where she could be tended day and night, he said. Mrs Whyte, the Poorhouse matron, was a good woman, with young children herself. She would help me keep watch and pray. He would call by twice a day. It was a grievous wound, he said. But there was hope.

Later Auntie brought my other two bairns to me. Kind soul that she is, it gave her such pain that she had no means to take us from that shameful place. I didn't care. She told me that Rab had disappeared; the police were looking for him. For the next few days there was no time, just this other me doing what

I could for my dear Jeanie. Day and night I tried to comfort my child, listening to her fitful breathing amid the snoring and mutterings of the old women in the long cold dormitory.

The doctor had her taken her away from me, to the children's hospital in Edinburgh. I knew it was for the best. I slept like the dead for a full day and a night. When I woke up, unrefreshed, the other me had gone. Now I thought I would burst with the pain of parting from her. Now I fully felt my pain, my sorrow, my hate. In my chest was a black lump, hard as iron. I could not cry: if I started I would never stop. Five years later, I can still feel that endless wail waiting to rise in my throat.

Rab had been found and held. Good, I thought, let him suffer and be punished.

Penniless, with no one to support us, we were paupers. There was no escape. By now our clothes had been taken from us, and put away. We wore the poorhouse uniform. Stewart was young enough to keep by me, but they sent Maggie to the children's part. I could not eat, but I attended meals so that I could see her in the dining room, and at prayers, and they let her visit us once a day. It was a small mercy that her hair was not cut to a boy's length, as had been the custom. But what did all this matter? Just let Jeanie live.

Doctor Gunn found the means for us to visit my dear girl in the hospital, bless him. Jeanie had been my tiny, giggling, bundle of muddy fun. Not now. She sometimes cried, she often whimpered. But she lived still.

It is already too hot as we walk down Young Street, seeing people stir into daily life, and we come to

the corner of Biggiesknowe, now in day, not night, shadows, where my sorrow began. Mrs Swinton leaves her house at number 20, waves, and comes towards us. Now we are waiting for my Auntie.

Over the Cuddy I can see the courthouse, next to the Kirk: God and Justice. The trial. I have the newspaper report folded in my pocket. Rab's trial, aye, but our trial too. I turn to Maggie.

"They should'nae have made you give evidence against your ain faither. For the love of God, you were just 11 years old!"

Maggie looks at me, serious, hard. "It was a rare pleasure. I knew what I was about"

They tried Rab for assaulting Jeanie and me. Jeanie still lived. His defence was that I was drunk and had dropped her. The jury knew it for a lie and found him guilty. Sheriff Orphoot said it must be harrowing for Rab that Jeanie was getting weaker. I hoped so. He should suffer for his sins. Maggie stared him down: but he would not look at me and I would not look at him. He was sent back to prison for four months. Four months! We were sent back to the poorhouse.

My dear wee girl left us on 4 September at nine in the morning. Just after her third birthday. The hospital did their best for her, Dr Gunn said. Maggie and I were at her side as she left suffering and pain to the living. We wept and consoled one another, beyond consolation. A week later I found I had a child on the way, my youngest son. I could not be glad then, though I love him now.

As Rab's time in prison came to an end, Mr Whyte, the governor of the Poorhouse, called me into his office and told me it was Rab's

duty to provide for his family, and my duty to take him back and keep him from the evils of drink. The poorhouse was for families without means of support. I had a husband. So, on his release, Rab fetched us and took us to Uphall, his home town. A new start, he said.

We live near to his mother: she is a strong woman and Rab dare not go against her. I am grateful, for she keeps his lower nature in check. We never speak of our dead child. He still drinks, but not so often. And then he remembers Jeanie, and cries for her.

How do we remember her? Well, each year we return to Peebles, Maggie and me, to be there on the day she died. As the kirk bells toll for nine o'clock, Maggie gives us the wild flowers she has picked. Auntie, Mrs. Swinton, Maggie and me drop them into the Cuddy, and watch them float to the Tweed.

Jeanie would have liked that.

(FOOTNOTE:

Based on a report in the June 1900 Peeblesshire News, which carried a detailed account of the trial, supplemented by other research, including Peeblesshire poorhouse records and the 1901 Scottish Census.)

Sandra Whitnell

WHO AM I ?

Who am I? Well, I have a name; at least I have a Christian name - Diana - of that I am sure and a surname the same as that of my mother. However, I do have a problem with this which I will tell you about later.

I am going to begin my story with my mother because she was the whole reason for me 'being'. I look a little bit like she did with similar hair and eye colouring and perhaps the same shaped mouth. There are, of course, plenty of well meaning people out there who are keen to say 'oh how like your mother you are'. My Mum was a wonderful person and we spent many happy hours together. Here, I think, it is fair to add that she was much older than most of my friends' mothers. I never really thought about it until one day when she was meeting me from school my friend said to me, "Has your grandma come to meet you?" "No that is my mother." "Well I think she looks a bit old."

It was at that point, I realised she did look quite a bit older than most other mothers waiting at the school gates but it did not worry me particularly because she always looked good. Her hair was shiny and she wore it in a modern style; she was well dressed and while not too trendy she certainly was not a frump. She wore make - up that was always just right so I had no reason to feel out of place or, at least, so I thought.

What was clear to me from a very early age was that I did not have a Daddy.

"Mum, who is my daddy and why does he not live with us?"

Mum explained,

"There are different kinds of families, most have a mother and a father, some have just a mother, some have just a father and others

have two mummies or two daddies for different reasons. They are all family units. Ours happens to be a small unit with just you and me. Of course, brothers and sisters make the family unit much larger. Zoe your sister was born a long time before you, so she no longer lives at our home. Her daddy sadly died.”. This satisfied me for a while.

As I grew older things became more puzzling to me. We learned at school that it takes both a man’s and a woman’s eggs to make a baby. So if I have no father how did I become me and how did Zoe fit into the picture. She had a daddy so where was mine? She is my sister after all.

Zoe has a husband and two children so they are a complete family. They are so lucky. How are they related to me I wondered? Zoe is my sister, so my mother told me, but how strange because she is so much older. That means Graham, her husband, is my brother - in-law and their two children Sarah and Cathy are my nieces. When we were together they seemed to be more like my sisters than Zoe.

They lived a long way off and we did not see them often but when we did meet Zoe did not talk to me very much. She tried to make sure that my mother paid a lot of attention to her and her children. My mother tried to please them too and I must admit on these occasions I did feel a little hurt although I tried not to be upset. “Can we go to the park to meet some of my friends,” I would ask. “They would love to see Sarah and Cathy. “Oh no, Zoe does not like them to go too far on their own” I thought how silly. “Well can I bring them here then?” “No, dear. I prefer to see them on their own. We do not see one another very often as you know.”

Well, whose fault is that I thought, not mine. True, I do know

and it is Zoe who does not want them to meet my friends. I know it’s nothing to do with my mother. They all seem to be so jealous of me and when they are with us I seem to be pushed into the background.

I decided I would tackle Zoe the next time we met to see if she knew who was my father.

“You should know who is my father, you are my sister after all.” “Half,” sneered Zoe. She was in a particularly bad mood. “Here is a picture of mother, my father and me taken before you were born,” she said pulling out a photograph from her handbag, “But he is not your father. He would turn in his grave if he knew what mother had done”.

I did not answer but wondered if someone was dead, how they could possibly turn in their grave.

“Well I am Auntie to Sarah and Cathy”.

“Half”, she sneered again.

I felt hurt by these remarks and chose not to say anything but it really set me wondering. Why did Zoe have a daddy and not me. Why did Zoe resent me so. She was a lot older than me and she had two girls one a little bit older and the other a bit younger than me. So I am half a sister, half an aunt, I only had one set of grandparents and belong to half a family. In fact, I am and feel, half a person.

“Will you explain to me why I am only half a person”, I asked my mother one day. “Today at school we were looking at family trees and our ancestors. We all had to try to draw our family tree. I can only do half. I cannot fill in a father’s branch of the tree.”

“Never mind. Just do what you can.”

“Well I do mind. I’m sick of being half a person and what did Zoe mean by her father turning in his grave if he knew what you had done?”

I stormed out in tears. I did not like upsetting my mother because she was so special to me but I could not help wondering what she had done to me.

I worked even harder at school. I was determined to show everyone that even if I was only half a person I would do well at school. I would show them that I am as good as they are. My teachers were worried because I did not bother with friends and spent so much time working. My mother was concerned too. I no longer wanted to share leisure time with her which had given us so much pleasure before and I felt very distant towards her, which I realise now, must have hurt terribly but then so what, she had hurt me.

Now that I am older I understand why Zoe resented me so much. Her father died when she was small which meant that her mother, my mum, had to work to earn money to keep them. Her mother or my grandmother looked after her. This meant that mum could not spend a lot of time with Zoe like she had with me. I did not know either of my grandparents. Soon after Zoe was married grandmother died and left my mother quite a lot of money. Mum was able to give up work. Then came Sarah.

“I looked after Sarah while Zoe went to work. I loved doing this and just adored Sarah,” mother told me one day. “Then they moved away and I missed Sarah so much. Soon after I met a very nice man called Simon and eventually he came to live with me. We decided that we would like to spend the rest of our lives together”

My ears pricked up at this, perhaps I was at last going to find out who was my father, “So he was my father then. What happened to him and why did you not tell me this before?”.

“It is not quite as simple as that,” my mother answered. “You see I told him I desperately wanted another child but he could not understand that and said I was much too old. Besides which we had each other and that should be sufficient. He was not going to be the one to satisfy a whim of mine. So I told him that I would find a way.”

I began to feel even worse by this time. Now I was not only half a person living in half a family but I was brought into the world to satisfy a need or a whim. It was beginning to look as though my mother had slept with someone else just to have a baby but this did not seem to be the sort of thing I would expect my mother to do. There was one other possible way though. I knew a little bit about IVF but not very much so I decided to look it up on the internet before I broached the subject to my mother again. Whatever she had done it seems as though she had alienated her family and possibly friends, although, they probably thought that Simon was my father. Who knows and as I said before it does not matter what anyone else thinks. It has become quite urgent to me now to get this matter unravelled.

I found out, that before I was conceived it was possible to have a donor father who remained unidentified. This seemed to me to be abhorrent. It meant that not only did I become to satisfy someone else's requirement but also I was paid for. Perhaps, this was the reason that my mother was so reluctant to tell me. Was she ashamed of what she had done? Somehow I think not because she remained very loving towards me. At least she tried. It is me who has distanced myself from her. “Mum did you have IVF to conceive me?” I came straight out with it one day when I was feeling quite aggressive. What sort of man

would sell his sperm and if you had IVF do you know the identity of the donor? There is no knowing what kind of genes I could have inherited.? What happened to Simon?”

I could see that my mother was taken aback and was surprised that I knew so much about it.

“Yes Diana, I did have IVF. One of my eggs was fertilised from a sperm bank where donors remained anonymous. Now the Law in this country says, the donor must be registered and a child, born by IVF, at the age of eighteen can visit the father. You really were wanted and are truly loved. I intended to tell you but you must understand that it was a very difficult thing for me to do and I suppose putting it off has made things worse for both of us. Please, do not judge me too harshly. Many men who donate sperm have a genuine desire to help someone in a similar position to me. It does not have to be a financial reason. Women donate eggs too you know. Perhaps, when you are older you will understand a little better. I do hope this is not going to spoil our relationship. You are of course free to make up your own mind and perhaps we can discuss these things that are worrying you when you have had time to think about it. I could get someone qualified to talk to you. As for Simon he walked out because he was so unhappy about the situation.”

She looked so sad and I do not think this was the whole story. It was hard not to judge and I did try to look at it from my mother's point of view but could not really understand. If she had never had a child it would have been easier. Things did begin to fall into place now and I could see why Zoe felt as she did and was obviously so jealous of me. Mum was able to give up work which explained why we were able to have holidays. I could have good clothes and follow

all the latest trends. Money was not a problem. It was my not my fault, although, Zoe obviously thought so. I certainly had had things a lot better than she had throughout her childhood.

“Hm! Seems to me a pretty easy way for a man to make money though and being anonymous means he does not have any of the responsibility. I'm not sure I agree with it. Any way, I will go away and think about it.” I was really angry and upset.

I am quite concerned about the fact that my father is unknown because there could be more of his children out there somewhere and it could be possible that I could perhaps meet and fall in love with one of them and would not know that he was my half brother. The result of that could be catastrophic. My mum had lost another man too in order to give birth to me so I must really have been wanted.

I was thinking about all these things and trying to come to terms with them when I heard a bump. I ran downstairs to find my mother on the floor. She had had a severe stroke. She was rushed to hospital but never recovered consciousness. I was broken hearted. Was this my fault for being so angry with her? There had been no time to say sorry or goodbye. I was distraught. Now, I had no mother or father.

Of course, Zoe blamed me and said she never wanted to speak to me again. They say time will heal the hurt I carry in my heart. Perhaps so, but I will never know the answers now and I remain, half a person.

Patricia Watts

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Festival at a Glance

Thursday 11 June

5.45pm	Keith Partridge: The Adventure Game	£12, £10
6.00pm	Peter Snow: The Battle of Waterloo	£14, £12
6.00pm	Walter Elliot	£10, £8
7.00pm	Gin Is In (gin tasting)	£15
7.15pm	James Holland: The War in the West	£12, £10
7.30pm	Michelle Mone	£14, £12
7.30pm	Rosemary Goring	£10, £8
8.45pm	Irma Kurtz: My Life in Agony	£12, £10
9.00pm	Andrew Marr	£14, £12
9.00pm	MacArts Presents: AI & Sue	£8

Friday 12 June

1.30pm	Where's the White Rabbit?	FREE
1.30pm	Waverley Lines Poetry Workshop	FREE
1.45pm	How to Get Your Children's Book Published	£15
3.00pm	Scottish Opera: Puffy Macpuffer	£5
4.00pm	Waverley Lines Short Story Writing Workshop	FREE
4.15pm	The Fabulous 4 Fish Fingers / Jason Beresford	£8
5.00pm	Scottish Opera: A Little Bit of Carmen	£8
6.00pm	John Bercow	£14, £12
6.15pm	Terry Waite	£12, £10
6.15pm	Kirsty Logan	£10, £8
6.30pm	Scottish Opera: A Bit of The Barber of Seville	£8
7.30pm	Alex Salmond	£14, £12
7.30pm	Nikki Welch: The WineTubeMap (wine tasting)	£15
7.45pm	Dom Joly	£12, £10
7.45pm	David Nobbs	£10, £8
9.00pm	Prue Leith	£14, £12
9.15pm	Alex Norton	£12, £10
9.15pm	MacArts Presents: Rory McLeod	£10

Saturday 13 June

10.30am	Hugless Douglas with David Melling	FDP £5
10.45am	Most Wonderful Thing / Viv French	FDP £5
10.45am	Making History Come Alive!	FREE
12.00pm	The World of Bob with Simon Bartram	FDP £5
12.00pm	Bookbug Rhyme Session	FREE
12.15pm	David Almond	FDP £5
12.15pm	Words About Eating	£12, £10
12.30pm	Alice in Wonderland Publishers' Workshop	£5
1.00pm	Bookbug Rhyme Session	FREE
1.00pm	Scottish Opera: Puffy Macpuffer	£5
1.45pm	Knight in Training Viv French & David Melling	FDP £5
1.45pm	Alice in Wonderland Family Workshop	£5
2.00pm	The Really Terrible Orchestra	£14, £12
2.15pm	Afternoon Tea with Sue Lawrence	£15
2.15pm	Storytime	FREE
3.15pm	The Walter Scott Prize Shortlist	£12, £10
3.15pm	Sixteen String Jack with Tom Pow	FDP £5
3.15pm	Scottish Opera: A Little Bit of Carmen	£8
3.30pm	John Bird & Rory Bremner	£14, £12
3.30pm	The Dreamsnatcher with Abi Elphinstone	£5
4.45pm	John Lister-Kaye	£12, £10

■ Family Book Festival Event FDP Family Day Pass Event

4.45pm	Gordon Brown & Hector Chawla	£10, £8
4.45pm	The Rhino Farm with Annabel Claridge	£5
4.45pm	Scottish Opera: A Bit of The Barber of Seville	£8
5.15pm	The Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction	£10, £8
6.15pm	Sally Magnusson	£12, £10
6.15pm	Gavin Francis	£10, £8
6.30pm	Gordon Brown	£14, £12
6.30pm	Thirty Years of The Three Chimneys	£12, £10
7.45pm	Owen Jones	£12, £10
7.45pm	Ian Fraser: Shredded	£10, £8
8.00pm	Alexander McCall Smith	£14, £12
9.00pm	MacArts Presents: The Bevv Sisters	£12
9.15pm	Magnus Macfarlane-Barrow	£12, £10
9.30pm	Patricia Hodge	£14, £12

Sunday 14 June

11.00am	Mac and Bob: The Party Problem	FDP £5
11.30am	Waverley and Other Railways	£6
11.30am	Storytime	FREE
12.00pm	MacArts Presents: Afternoon Jazz	£10
12.15pm	Gill Arbutnot	FDP £5
12.30pm	A Feast of Fun / Nick Sharratt & Viv French	FDP £5
12.45pm	Waverley Lines Poetry Writing Workshop	FREE
12.45pm	Scottish Opera: Puffy Macpuffer	£5
1.45pm	Polly and the Puffin with Jenny Colgan	FDP £5
1.45pm	Dindy and the Elephant with Elizabeth Laird	FDP £5
2.00pm	James Naughtie	£14, £12
3.00pm	Storytime	FREE
3.00pm	Scottish Opera: A Little Bit of Carmen	£8
3.15pm	Borgon the Axeboy with Kjartan Poskitt	FDP £5
3.15pm	Afternoon Tea with Jenny Colgan	£15
3.15pm	Holly Sterling	£5
3.30pm	Alice in Wonderland	£14, £12
4.00pm	Waverley Lines Young Writers' Workshop	FREE
4.15pm	Scottish Opera: A Bit of The Barber of Seville	£8
4.45pm	M C Beaton	£12, £10
4.45pm	Alan Cochrane	£10, £8
5.00pm	Jonathan Miller	£14, £12
6.00pm	Matt Haig: Reasons to Stay Alive	£10, £8
6.15pm	Borders Railway	£12, £10
6.15pm	David Crane	£10, £8
6.30pm	Celia Imrie	£14, £12
7.45pm	Chris Brookmyre	£12, £10
7.45pm	MacArts Presents: Blueflint	£10
8.00pm	Rory Bremner	£14, £12

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Family Day Pass: Buy a Family Day Pass for either Saturday or Sunday and enjoy lots of family events at a special rate! A Family Day Pass costs **ONLY £35** and permits entry for up to five family members. The passes are valid for all events displaying the FDP logo.

Main image: Celia Imrie. Top row: Jenny Colgan, John Bercow, Dom Joly. Middle row: Kirsty Logan. Bottom row: Rory McLeod, Peter Snow



©John Savage

INTERVIEW WITH COLIN WILL

Poet, Publisher and Editor of *The Open Mouse*.

“A lad o’ pairts” is what they might have called Colin Will not so very long ago. A hugely successful poet in his own right, Colin has contributed to the life of letters in Scotland in many and significant ways; as editor of *The Open Mouse*, publisher at Calder Wood Press, and long-time Chair of the Board at Scottish poetry festival StAnza, to name but a few of his past and present roles. Colin’s poetry has graced the pages of *The Eildon Tree* on many occasions, and so we were delighted to take the opportunity to speak in much greater depth with one of Scottish poetry’s most engaging and influential characters about his life and career in writing.

You keep a blog at sunnydunny.wordpress.com. Does it benefit you in your writing? Would you recommend the keeping of a blog or journal to writers?

Writing a regular blog – and I try to write a new post at least every fortnight – reinforces the writing

habit, and it’s good to try to write acceptable prose as well as poetry. The Sunny Dunny blog is where I write freely about anything I fancy, whether it’s things happening in my life, thoughts on writing, or anything else. I have another blog – cwwdrafts.blogspot.com – where I post some of my older published poems, with comments and back stories.

What advice would you give to poets just starting out on the often long road to publication?

Read as much poetry as you can. Use the Scottish Poetry Library – it’s free to access its large collection of poetry and magazines. Go to readings and listen to other poets. Develop a critical sense, and apply it to your own work. Start sending poems to your favourite magazines. Be prepared for rejections, but don’t be too downhearted by them. If you have talent, sooner or later it will be recognised.

How did you first get started writing poetry? What made you decide it was the right medium for what you wanted to say?

I first started writing poetry in the early 1960s, influenced by the American Beat writers, especially Kerouac and Corso. Then I stopped for around 20 years, didn’t even think about writing. In the mid-1980s I started again, had my first poem published in 1989, and I’ve never looked back. For me, poetry is an act of communication. I want to share my words and ideas, using my own particular modes of expression.

You’ve been heavily involved in Dunbar’s CoastWord Festival since its inauguration a couple of years ago. How did the festival first come about, and how do you see it continuing to develop?

I love the CoastWord Festival. Hannah Lavery started it in 2013, and I’m delighted to be part of the team. The Festival is rooted in Dunbar’s talented community of writers, but we’re also now able to bring in established writers from elsewhere. It has a strong following, and in the absence of other major literary festivals in East Lothian, it has the potential to grow and to extend itself to other local centres.

You’re something of a well-known face on the poetry scene nationally in Scotland. What would you say are the benefits of getting out and about to festivals, readings and so forth?

Hearing and seeing other poets, whether at festivals or readings, should be an essential part of every writer’s development. It gives you a kind of external yardstick,

a standard to aim for, and you can learn technical things, such as how to construct a set, and how writers should and should not interact with an audience, which can help you with your own work. Besides which, I'm a social animal – I enjoy the company of writers.

You've published several collections of the course of your long career. How would you describe your progress as a poet over this time?

I've had eight collections published so far. I've been lucky in being able to work with two very fine publishers; Sally Evans of Poetry Scotland and Diehard, and Sheila Wakefield of Red Squirrel. I've always been keen that each collection should be different from the previous ones. My first collection – *Thirteen Ways of Looking at the Highlands* – was largely environmental poetry. My latest – *The Book of Ways* – is a collection of over 100 haibun, a Japanese form consisting of poetic prose with haiku. Ezra Pound said a lot of things, some best forgotten, but his most famous saying, 'Make it new!' is something I try to live by.

As a competition judge, editor and publisher, you must have read hundreds of submissions over the years. What are the things that are most likely to make you reject a piece of work?

What I like is freshness – a writer with something new to say, or an effective and original way of saying it. I like to be startled. What I reject is the mundane, the humdrum, the obvious. I don't like poetry which requires the reader to have a degree in classics or semiotics to understand it. That kind of academic poetry passes me by. A poem has to connect with me on an emotional level.

You were one of the original Edinburgh beat poets back in the day. Can you describe what the poetry scene was like at that point?

It was fairly chaotic, but so was my life at that time. Writers, artists and musicians used to hang out in cafes, and in each other's flats. I was playing jazz saxophone in those days, and I'd sometimes play in clubs, or read poetry. I met the wonderful Jim Haynes, who ran The Paperback bookshop in Charles Street, and that introduced me to American writers, who have always influenced me. I was at the infamous Edinburgh Writers' Conference in 1962, and heard MacDiarmid denouncing Trocchi as 'cosmopolitan scum'. I was always an internationalist myself, so I wasn't convinced. The panel on stage in the McEwan Hall descended into chaos, as the water in the carafes had been switched for Glen Grant whisky.

What's your writing routine like? Do you have a fixed place you like to write, or particular time of day you prefer?

I don't have a particular routine. Sometimes, for no particular reason, a line will pop into my consciousness, and I work on it mentally, maybe even completing a whole poem in my head, before I can write it down. First drafts are always longhand, then I do the first edit as I type them into the computer. I usually set them aside for a few days, then see if they need a bit of polish. About two-thirds of my drafts turn into finished poems.

How have you seen the poetry scene in Scotland changing over the last few decades? Do you have any ideas about the direction it's going to take in the future?

Going back to the 1960s, the poetry scene was dominated by a group of established white, middle-class, mostly male poets who published books. By the 1980s and 1990s there were many more poetry magazines in Scotland, although several haven't lasted. The magazines now publishing cast their nets wider, attracting new poets and readers from all parts of society. Long may they flourish. Pamphlet publishing has taken off, as has self-publishing, as more folk discover they can do it themselves. Internet-only publications, poetry blogs and e-zines are now a huge part of the publishing scene, and they've helped to democratise poetry publishing. There's still an issue with quality control, especially among the self-publishers. A lot of them would benefit from strong editing, and some need additional coaching and mentoring. I particularly like women's voices in poetry, but in the past, too many women poets were patronised or ignored. That's changing, but there's still some way to go.

Many poets lose interest in being published in magazines once they feel they've established themselves. You're clearly a hugely respected figure in Scottish poetry, but your work continues to appear regularly in magazines up and down the country. Do you feel that there is still value in continuing to submit your poetry to what some people might think of as smaller publications?

Oh yes, the magazine world is very important. If you add up all the magazine subscribers and readers, plus the internet magazine readers, they probably outnumber the buyers of printed poetry books. And they're spread geographically. Poets can access a wider readership if they submit to different magazines, from different parts of the country and internationally. And each time an editor accepts a poem, it's a peer assessment of your work. When I want to publish a poetry pamphlet by a new poet, I always look for a sprinkling of poems which have previously appeared in magazines. It means they have a potential following, and they've jumped one of the first hurdles successfully. As for myself, I enjoy the challenge of sending poems to magazines who haven't published me before.

Before retiring you worked principally as a librarian and, later, at the Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh. How, if at all, have these roles impacted on you as a poet?

After my Beat period, I got a proper job as a librarian, got my professional qualifications and began to develop my career. Then the Open University started up, and I did a degree in science and maths while working in West Lothian Libraries. That led to me to work as a librarian in the British Geological Survey. I went from there to be Chief Librarian in the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh – a lovely job. I had started a research project on scientific communication with the University of Strathclyde while working at BGS, and I was awarded a PhD in information science in 1991. Later I moved into senior management roles at RBGE. So my academic background is in science, not literature, and

that's had a huge impact on my writing. My scientific insights and knowledge often influence my choice of subjects for poems, and that's been entirely positive.

You're a seasoned performance poet. What do you get, on a personal level, out of giving live readings of your poetry?

It's part of the communication process, and a very direct one. Learning performance skills is very important to all writers these days. For instance Larkin did very few public readings in the course of his career, but you can't imagine a poet today working that way. Of course, not all poets are good readers of their own work, but there are techniques which can be learned.

Calder Wood Press, the independent publisher you run, is going from strength to strength. How do you go about choosing your authors?

That's kind of you to say so, but actually it feels like I'm now in a running-down situation with the press. I'm getting on a bit, and I should probably be concentrating more on my own work. I never had an ambition to be a publisher; I just wanted to help some people whose work I liked to place it in front of a readership. I'm very proud of the 50+ collections CWP has published, but I'm a poet who publishes, rather than a publisher who also writes. Both of the pamphlets I'm publishing this year are by award-winning poets, Nuala Watt and Lindsay Macgregor, and I admire them enormously.

And finally, which poetry collection would you take with you to a desert island?

That's an easy one: Norman

MacCaig's *Collected Poems*. I love his work. There's a deceptive simplicity about it. You may think he's writing a wee poem about frogs, but it turns out to be a poignant reflection on the human condition.

Sara Clark



YARROW | ETTRICK | SELKIRK ARTS FESTIVAL

POETRY CHALLENGE 2015 THE JAMES HOGG BALLAD AWARDS

Over £1000 in prize money sponsored by Richard, Duke of Buccleuch.

One prize £500 to be judged by Rab Wilson, Gerda Stevenson, Luke Wright and Stuart Kelly.

One prize £500 to be awarded by voting in YARROW, ETTRICK AND SELKIRK.

Prizes £100 each for:

- . Best poem in Festival area (postal district TD7)
- . Best poem by unpublished poet.

The winners will be announced during the Festival in September 2015 at Bowhill, near Selkirk

THE CHALLENGE

The valleys of Ettrick and Yarrow were the cradle of many of the finest of the great Border Ballads. The challenge for poets in 2015 is to bring that tradition into the present day, with the making of ballads set within fifty years of 2015.

THE RULES

All ballads will be judged anonymously and the name of the entrant must not appear on the original.

There is an entry fee of £5.00 per ballad

The challenge is open to anyone throughout and outside Scotland.

Entrants must be 16yrs or over.

Ballads must not have been previously published, accepted for publication, or currently entered in another competition.

Entries cannot be returned.

No more than 3 entries per person

The ballads should

- . Adhere to the convention of telling a story,
- . Be written in regular metre and rhyme.
- . Be between 20 and 200 lines in length.
- . Be written in contemporary Scots, including Border Scots, Teri, or Dumfries and Galloway dialect, or English, including Northumbrian and Cumbrian dialects.
- . Use subject matter within last 50 years

HOW TO ENTER

- 1) Two titled but unsigned copies of your poem.
- 2) A separate sheet listing your name, address, postcode, telephone number, email address and title of your poem.
- 3) Cash/cheque(made out to YES arts festival) to cover your entry fee of £5 per entry

It should be delivered:

By post to:

YES Arts Festival,
Selkirk Library
Ettrick Terrace
Selkirk
TD7 4LE

CLOSING DATE 30TH JUNE 2015.

SCOTT'S TREASURES

Contemporary Writers engage with the collections at Abbotsford House through a series of workshops and events



Sir Walter Scott addressing the audience

Scott's Treasures was an exciting partnership project between the Abbotsford Trust and the Creative Arts Business Network (CABN). The project, which ran through 2014, built on a Borders Poets' Showcase held at Abbotsford in November 2013 which inspired both partners to develop further opportunities for contemporary writers to engage with the eclectic collection at Abbotsford.

The concept of the Scott's Treasures project was developed by Dr Sandra Mackenzie of the Abbotsford Trust and Jules Horne (CABN Advocate for Literature), and led to a successful funding bid to The Scottish Book Trust (Live Literature Funding). On the launch of the project early last year, Dr Sandra Mackenzie said: 'Sir Walter Scott described Abbotsford as "a museum for living in" and filled his home with an astonishing collection of artefacts, objects and treasures from home and



Kirsty Archer -Thompson of Abbotsford Trust welcomes the audience

abroad which inspired his writing. Following the success of our first Poetry Showcase event last year, we are delighted to work with CABN again and encourage local writers to follow in Scott's footsteps as they take inspiration from our fascinating collection.'

Poets interested in Sir Walter Scott's magnificent collection of quirky treasures were invited through a national call to take part in three workshops at Abbotsford House in June 2014 to inspire new poems around the collections. The workshops were run by Borders based poets Julian Colton, Anita John and Dorothy Alexander who led the poets through different approaches and forms of poetry. Dr Sandra Mackenzie of the Abbotsford Trust illuminated the stories behind the individual objects, or 'treasures' and these formed the starting point of new writing over the summer. The three lead poets – Julian, Anita and Dorothy – provided valuable feedback and review over the summer to the individual workshop participants. All poets were then offered the opportunity of reading their work alongside the three lead poets at a Showcase in the Library of Abbotsford House



Edwina Lugg

in November 2014. The event was structured as a 'virtual tour of the house through poetry'. Each of the 16 poets who took part had been inspired by different objects in different rooms of the house, including: the head of Robert the Bruce in the Hallway, a Toadstone amulet in the Study, Gasoliers and portraits of Scott and his French wife Charlotte Charpentier in the Chinese Drawing Room. In the week before the Showcase, poets attended a skills performance workshop with Ellie Zeegen and Janet Coulson from Firebrand Theatre Company, who sensitively led them through various warm up and performance techniques which were invaluable for building the confidence of those who had less experience of reading their work in public. Ellie and Janet also provided support and staging of the event on the evening of the Showcase itself. An added surprise for the audience was the appearance of Sir Walter Scott himself (played by John Nichol) who led the audience from the Hallway to the Library, and introduced each poet in turn. It was an unforgettable experience for the audience who assembled that night in the candlelit atmosphere of the Library to listen to the range of voices and poetry forms – which also included a sung poem and

two performance poems.

It is hoped in the longer term to produce an anthology of poems and images from the project, and there are already further ideas for new writing projects, continuing the vibrant partnership with Abbotsford Trust.

Many thanks to Dr Sandra Mackenzie, Kirsty Archer-Thompson and staff at Abbotsford Trust, to Jules Horne, Stuart Delves, Ellie Zeegen, Janet Coulson, John Nichol, Kevin Greenfield and to Julian Colton, Anita John and Dorothy Alexander for inspiring and supporting the poets through the process. And... of course to the individual poets who took part in Scott's Treasures, for their wonderful new work.

*Mary Morrison, Creative Arts Business Network
(Scottish Borders Council)*

Scott's Treasures was made possible through Live Literature Funding from the Scottish Book Trust (Live Literature Fund), Scottish Borders Council and the Ronald Duncan Literary Foundation.

A selection of the poetry which was generated through the workshops was published in the previous edition of the Eildon Tree. Reprinted to accompany this article are poems by the 3 Lead Poets from the Scott's Treasures project – Julian Colton, Anita John and Dorothy Alexander.

www.scottsabbotsford.com
www.cabn.info

SCOTT'S TREASURES POEMS



©Kevin Greenfield Photography

Julian Colton

**Lady Scott, née Charlotte Margaret Charpentier (1770-1826):
Portrait by James Saxton (fl. 1795-1828)**

They have hung me back in the House again.
Such a relief after Visitor Centre heat.
Here I can breathe, in this airy, light-filled room
Amid the beautiful, green Chinese wallpaper
Pneumatic pump, gaslight and chandelier.

The great man himself on the central wall
Watches, weighs, my every move
Quiet, kind, but proprietorial.
With my wary black brown French eyes and tastes
An exotic fish in alien Tweed water.

Broken English grates against gauche Border accents
Suspensions of a warring British nation.
Despite my lovely view to the Northwest
How I sometimes miss my homeland France
Crave excitement, artifice, refinement.

Oh, these *petites-bourgeoisies*
Abbotsford is grand, but a construction
A bold statement wrapped in la mystique.
Scots Baronial bricks and mortar transcends
Buttresses the personal, the social, political.

The writer, controller, auteur
His portrait will always be larger than mine
My ever changing face frozen in this dark picture
Saxton – not renowned Raeburn or Landseer
Expression lacks natural youthful flamboyance.

Oui, he observes me now
Senses, feels my unease
Knows I'll surely put him and the children first.
How he disregards our constant fears and worries
His mushrooming debts, fame and reputation
Is slowly killing us all– Anne, Sophia and me.

But the loyal distaff, female line
Will endure, hold everything together
Carry him into the glorious future
Support his legacy beyond time's clouded horizon.
Oh, the irony, the paradox
We ghosts persist by mutual association.

Julian Colton

**Raeburn's Scott Portrait's Response to
the Return of Charlotte's Portrait to the
Library (In Haiku)**

Ah, so there you are
They managed to bring you back
I missed you, my dear.

And the dogs they too
Wondered where Charlotte had gone.
Camp regards your face

With dog affection
Sitting, hiding my club foot
For all of this time.

I did some writing
And more deep contemplation
While you were away

You know I'm thankful
You were a very good wife
And fine mother too.

Yes, I know, I know
The things that I put you through
It has been a trial

A man has one life
He grasps opportunity
Or falls by wayside

He has his deep drive
Or he has nothing at all
This I do believe.

So many questions:
Did you enjoy the journey?
And did you love me?

Ah, yes, I suppose
I always put myself first.
But then, don't all men?

My womb-like study:
Did debt and books shut you out
For eternity?

Julian Colton



©Kevin Greenfield Photography

Anita John

The Wallace Chair

Read the oak chair in Walter Scott's close room,
that one man, *done to death by felon hand*
was guarding well his father's land. Wallace,
Elderslie Knight, born of a common bond
to break the cords of Lion's rule
and bring such wrath upon himself
as no-one would wish on anyone else.
Trace the carve of thistle, heather, leaf, rock,
all that remains now of Robroyston House.
Stirling keeps his sword, Scotland his heart.
His death place is scarred by Smithfield Mart.
All men adored must also endure hate;
alive must also die. For all who fall,
which man can full forgive while he still cries?

Anita John

Italicised words are taken from part of the inscription
on the Wallace Chair at Abbotsford House.

Ward Against Witchcraft

(Toadstone Amulet)

For one thousand merks you may borrow me
to place around the sweet, plump neck
of your new-born babe.
I will protect her from fairies, for I am toad
and what is toad remains toad. I will not
allow spite and sadness to enter her cradle.
Wear me and she will not prick her finger,
eat the poisoned apple,
be sequestered away in the secrecy of night.

One thousand merks, you say?
Am I not worth it? For I am *bufonite*,
cast from the head of a living toad,
placed in ritual on the red-cloth bed.
You have your doubts?
Oh, but I will smooth your brow,
watch over your whelp while crows clamour.
Look! See how they caw, caw overhead,
call for a change, a changeling?

Anita John

Georgian Armchair in Scott's Library

You're different.

The arms and feet of other chairs
turn inwards: enclose and shield.

But you! Your arms stretch away
in *padmasana*, open the heart and lungs
to send breath to those you love,

transform into the sure necks
of eagles, ready to face whatever may come,
watchful both left and right.

Below your feather-dressed seat
your four clawed feet
hold gently onto four round eggs.

Were you Charlotte's chair?

Anita John



©Kevin Greenfield Photography

Dorothy Alexander

Mary

cum plurimis aliis

killed on wood

skull bound with gold thread

the blade-smith's axe

translating, by his own hand, sovereign relic

hair bone heart-string

torn

eye-witnesses salvaged impressions

circumstance mechanism history

all human ornament destroyed at the execution

beads cross wound-colour velvet

black satin adorned with day's recess

Dorothy Alexander

cum plurimis aliis as with many others
[Words of poem all found in Scott's Treasures poetry
workshops handout.]

HUGH MACDIARMID AND THE BORDERS OF SCOTLAND

Scotland is made out of cities and the country and the sea, which means it is so much more, as an imagined space, a geography of the mind, than its centres of population. This is why demographics are never enough. And the way in which this might best be imagined is there in the work of Hugh MacDiarmid.

Coming from Langholm, MacDiarmid might be considered a son of Dumfriesshire, but he always claimed that his identity as a Borderer was paramount. He reimagined and revitalised this identity in his poetry, supremely. That he also did this in polemical prose essays, politically determined and inflammatory, need not concern us so much here as the quality of his poems, which remains. He rejuvenated the Scots language, giving it literary authority of immense reach. He reinvented the Scottish character as multiple, diverse, not to conform to any single stereotype or set of stereotypes. In this sense, he opposed caricature. This set his work against lazy thinking, and continues to make it a challenge to readers.

For MacDiarmid, the Borders extended all along the line, from Solway to Tweed, and his writing is imbued with the sense that the enemy – not a physical threat of bloody violence, but a far more insidious threat of intellectual and ideological difference – was never far away, and had to be resisted, self-consciously and forever. This enemy was not simply to be defined by national identity but by intellectual and cultural authority, and exists anywhere, and at all times, within Scotland as much as outwith the Borders, and all through human history. The magnitude of his work is of this scale.

His quality as a poet connects him to all the great writers of the world, and in that sense, his art is universal, about deeply human things, both qualities and failings. Yet at the same time it arises from his own time and place, and is unimaginable coming from anywhere other than Scotland, and could not have originated anywhere other than the Borders.

He writes about the Borders so lovingly it is surely impossible to resist. In his essay, *Growing up in Langholm*, he wrote:

After journeying over most of Scotland, England and central, southern and eastern Europe, as well as America, Siberia and China, I am of the opinion that 'my native place' – the Muckle Toon of Langholm, in Dumfriesshire – is the bonniest place I know: by virtue not of the little burgh in itself (though that has its treasurable aspects, and on nights when,

as boys, we used to thread its dim streets playing 'Jock, Shine the Light', and race over the one bridge, past the factory, and over the other, with the lamp reflections wriggling like eels at intervals in the racing water, had an indubitable magic of its own), but by virtue of the wonderful variety and quality of the scenery in which it is set. The delights of sledging on the Lamb Hill or Murtholm Brae; of gathering hines in the Langfall; of going through the fields of Baggara hedged in honeysuckle and wild roses, through knee-deep meadowsweet to the scrog nut wood and gathering the nuts or craband-apples there; of blaeberrying on Warblaw or the Castle Hill; of dookin, and guddlin' or making islands in the Esk or Ewes or Wauchope and lighting stick fires on them and cooking potatoes in tin cans – these are only a few of the joys I knew, in addition to the general ones of hill climbing and penetrating the five glens which (each with its distinct character) converge upon or encircle the town – Eskdale, Wauchopedale, Tarrasdale, Ewesdale and, below the town Carlislewards, the Dean Banks.

*I had the fortune to live as a boy
In a world a' columbe and colour-de-roy
As gin I'd had Mars for the land o' my birth
Instead o' the earth.*

*Nae maitter hoo faur I've travelled sinsyne
The cast o' Dumfriesshire's aye in me like wine;
And my sangs are gleids o' the candent spirit
Its sons inherit.*

As a boy, MacDiarmid had an insatiable appetite for books and an intellectual curiosity to find out about everything. He read all the writing he could get his hands on, including the contents of the Langholm town library. And yet he also had a marvellously sensual appetite for the natural world – he loved the seasons, the hills and the rivers of his native place, and once said that as a young man he could tell exactly where he was in Langholm by the different sounds of the running water of the three rivers, the Wauchope, the Esk and the Ewes. This bringing together of intellectual strength and sensuality, thoughtfulness and the physical world, was at the heart of his vision.

Then there was the First World War.

He had been a reservist since 1908 and was called up to join the British army in 1916. He came to see the conflict as the inevitable outcome of the innate self-destruction embodied in imperial values. However, two events which occurred during that war, the Irish uprising in 1916 and the Russian Revolution in 1917, provided two co-ordinate turning points in his life. His vision and creative output became fiercely driven

as he witnessed the scale of violently wasted human potential in the war. This was amplified in terms of the sheer number of lives squandered, and this, in turn, increased his awareness that there is always more than one way of telling the story. Different stories, he understood, were beginning in Ireland and Russia. So he asked himself, what might be started in Scotland? This realisation of what has been wasted, what is at stake, and what might be made of the world, is at the heart of his work and vitalises his poetry.

Almost every one of MacDiarmid's best poems is structured through an enactment of dramatic tension, beginning with a moment of piercing personal isolation, revealing human vulnerability, loss, grief, risk taken, cost demanded, price paid, followed by a greater vision of what this signifies in the global or cosmic totality, the worth of such risk, its consequence of tragedy or gain, its delivery of fulfilment of potential or devastation of possibility. Consider a selection of poems and see how this structure applies.

In *Empty Vessel*, the young mother's song of grief at the loss of her child is more meaningful than all the world, the winds that blow over it, the light that curves round it. In *The Eemis Stane*, the midnight earth in the cosmos is rich with human stories and truths that cannot be read from a distance; they are like words on a gravestone, covered by moss, lichen and snowdrifts of time and false rumour. A similar structure pertains in *The Watergaw*, in *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* repeatedly, in *To Circumjack Cencrastus* and throughout his career.

In the 1930s, Lenin was crucial to MacDiarmid as he seemed to deliver a kind of liberation that at the same time opens and closes possibility. MacDiarmid demands that we think about what such a moment might lead to, if it were to succeed. This is all the more difficult for us to read now, a century later, knowing how badly it failed. But a poem like *The Dead Leibknecht* gives us the argument in miniature: working people are depicted, liberated from factory regimentation (for industrial dehumanisation, we might substitute military uniformity of mind, the deadened imagination, religious fanaticism, capitalist indifference or numbness to history), but is the result of the revolution freedom to build better lives or destruction of all that might be? The skull lies smiling under the earth. The memento mori is sinister, mocking, or maybe rather a permanent reminder of the value mortality places on each one of us, insists that we recognise and act upon.

It is a sense of the value of human life in the actual world that connects him most profoundly with the Border Ballads, and by virtue of that, also to Burns and Scott, and all the great Scottish writers – including contemporary novelists and playwrights – who have

drawn directly from the Ballads, such as Andrew Greig's novel *Fair Helen* (2013) or David Greig's play *The Strange Undoing of Prudencia Hart* (2011). These authors draw on the Ballads not only for thematic inspiration but also for philosophical understanding. Long before them, that understanding stood MacDiarmid in good stead, and is at the heart of his greatest later works, *On a Raised Beach*, *Lament for the Great Music*, *In Memoriam James Joyce* and *The Kind of Poetry I Want*.

In 1967 MacDiarmid wrote a poem simply entitled *The Borders*, in which he describes and praises his native place:

*This is the land I love
Whaur I was born and bred
And I come back to it noo
As a man micht come back frae the dead.*

He begins with acknowledging the *faur fuller and richer life / The Borders had when I was a lad* with 'a routh o' sang / And prose and all the great writers, from Burns and Scott to Hogg and Stevenson, the anonymous authors of the Ballads, Thomas Carlyle:

*The hert o' mankind is naked here
As naewhaur else and access gi'es
To the haill range o' human passions,
Joys, sorrows, triumphs, tragedies.*

*You meet them at ilka turn – there's no'
A bend in the road that disna disclose
A glimpse o' King Arthur yet, or the soond
Some horn o' Elfland blows.*

And in the people of this part of Scotland he invested his greatest hopes:

*Here whaur the Romans were halted
And the Angles thrawn oot
The bulwark o' Scots independence
Is still as pooerfu' and resolute.*

He draws his poem to an end deploring the *atomic lums at Chapelcross*, prophetic of the hopes to end the nuclear presence imposed upon Scotland, but he also draws attention to something ineffable in the Borders and in Scotland generally:

*And weel may it be remembered
England's doon there but as True Tammas fund
To the Nor' East the Borders slide into Fairyland.
There's nae divide 'twixt Scottish and magic grund.*

Yet MacDiarmid was also well aware of the practicalities of day-to-day politics. After visiting

Ireland in 1928, he wrote: *What are needed now are not poets and fiery propagandists and rebel leaders, but administrators, economists, and practical experts.* He spells it out: *autonomy is a delusion as long as there remains financial over-control by a junta of international financiers.*

Such considerations are as pertinent in the early twenty-first century as they were when MacDiarmid wrote them. We all still ask ourselves, and must continue to ask ourselves: What might be done, and who cares enough to try to do anything worthwhile, to take the risks, win the triumphs, recognise the differences and make the most of them?

Towards the end of 2014, the writer and broadcaster Billy Kay produced and narrated a series of programmes for BBC Radio Scotland on the history of Scottish literature, calling on many contributions from writers, scholars, artists, commentators of all kinds. Yet he would be the first to confirm that it only touched the surface of a vast store of material broadcasting rarely deals with at all. How many hours on BBC and STV are given to writers, artists, composers, and specifically, we might note seven acknowledged greats from each area: Burns, Hogg, Scott, Stevenson, MacDiarmid, Grassie Gibbon, MacLean; Raeburn, McTaggart, Fergusson, Johnstone, Gillies, Eardley, Redpath; Carver, Mackenzie, MacCunn, McEwen, Scott, Stevenson and Beamish.

Note the Borderers in those lists: almost all the writers, the artists, major figures in any history of modern art in these islands, William Johnstone and William Gillies, and Joan Eardley and Anne Redpath, both painters of remarkable Borders landscapes, and the composers John Blackwood McEwen, whose *Three Border Ballads* and *Solway Symphony* are wonderful works for full orchestra, F.G. Scott, whose song-settings of Burns, William Soutar and MacDiarmid are unmatched, and the astonishing Ronald Stevenson, one of the greatest of modern composers, who died on 28 March 2015. Stevenson left a legacy of major work, utterly unique in its range, variety and scale, which deserves full exposition to the public. Many more people might be enlivened by knowing it than anyone suspects. Stevenson is famous for the epic *Passacaglia on DSCH* (1962), but he also wrote some of the most perfect miniatures. *A'e Gowden Lyric* is one of the most adult, prayerful, secular, heartfelt songs, the simple text from a longer poem by MacDiarmid, sings out clearly:

*Better a'e gowden lyric
Than the castle's soaring waa
Better a'e gowden lyric
Than onythin' else avaa!*

All militarist authority, all imperial power, is worth nothing compared to the piercing beauty of this exquisite theme, and when heard, even without the words, played on a fiddle, only, it is, like the tune of the third movement of Sibelius's third symphony, something everyone should give themselves a present of, and keep in their heads forever. More: Stevenson's song-cycle *Border Boyhood* sets MacDiarmid poems for tenor and piano accompaniment, was commissioned and first performed by Peter Pears with Stevenson at the piano in 1971, and remains wonderfully evocative, ideal for concert performance. And *A Wheen Tunes for Bairns tae Spiel* (1963) is a set of three miniatures for solo piano, perfect for piano practice for all children everywhere, for its contrapuntalistic glee, challenge, and tonal range, from poignancy to wildness, from sorrow to dance. When our oldest son was learning piano, I asked his teacher about it and she got it and he practised, and got better, and felt the achievement of it because of the challenge. These things are good. But how many hours are given to any of these writers, artists, composers, on Scotland's TV and radio, broadcast into all homes as natural to the birthright of all of us, regardless of specialist subscriptions and personal preferences?

Until recently, no school in Scotland was obliged in any way to teach Scottish history or Scottish literature. No wonder MacDiarmid felt lonely.

The culture itself extends beyond any individual through time and across geography, but without MacDiarmid our ways of approaching and interrogating the culture, and matters of cultural value, would be seriously diminished.

What MacDiarmid allowed us to understand deeply was the counterpoint of diversity and dividedness. Scotland, he insisted, was multiform, plural, rich in possibility, but in fact, often and in many places, divided and sectarian, violent and self-destructive. How should the potential be realised for the benefit of people?

The next generation of Scotland's poets responded to and extended his vision. From MacDiarmid to Edwin Morgan, the evolution is clear: the comprehensive, changing idea of the process of becoming that Scotland has always been engaged in was MacDiarmid's provenance, then a particular loyalty to local attachment was evident in the poets who were writing through and after the Second World War. Sorley MacLean, Norman MacCaig, Edwin Morgan, Iain Crichton Smith, George Mackay Brown, Robert Garioch, Sydney Goodsir Smith were pre-eminent; then since the 1970s, confidence grew and was evident among women, especially Liz Lochhead, Kathleen Jamie, Meg Bateman, Sheena Blackhall, Jackie Kay. In every poet's work, local

attachment and personal voice were in changing alliance with international forms of address, the widest possible readership. And between these identities, international, gendered, geographically local, linguistically specific, the national provenance was crucial, still to be constructed in political statehood, still to be riskily fought for, a triumph still to be won.

MacDiarmid's practice was to take any situation – wherever you are – and drive it to the furthest extremes of possibility, where it starts to break down – and then to break it down. It breaks down and you fall through to deeper ground, more secure ground, the foundation ground at a deeper level. And then his practice is to take *that* situation to where *it* starts to break down. That was his methodology. That was his habitual, characteristic practice.

Now, anywhere along that route you can drop in and say, he was an extremist, a nationalist, a communist, he was advocating the Scots language, he was advocating the Gaelic language – but none of these are conclusive priorities. His job, as he understood it, was to imagine all these things, to write them, in works of art, and thereby allow others to imagine them. That is to say, he was a writer, a poet, and intrinsically opposed by practice to the failure that is physical conflict or bloodshed. That was what he did.

*There's mair in birds than men ha'e faddomed yet.
Tho' maist churn oot the stock sangs o' their kind
There's aiblins genius here and there; and aince
'Mang whitebeams, hollies, siller birks –
The tree o' licht –
I mind
I used to hear a blackie mony a nicht
Singin' awa' t'an unconscionable 'oor
Wi' nocht but the water keepin't company
(Or nocht that ony human ear could hear.)
– And wondered if the blackie heard it either
Or cared whether it was singin' tae or no!
O there's nae sayin' what my verses awn
To memories like these. Ha'e I come back
To find oot? Or to borrow mair? Or see
Their helpless puirness to what gar'd them be?
Late sang the blackie but it stopt at last.
The river still ga'ed singin' past.*

He was a Borderer in more than one sense. His poetry performs or enacts possibilities, lacks inhibition, offers the challenges and self-extensions all people might healthily take up. It demands that you think things through, seriously. It demands more than many readers in Scotland have ever given him. But it flows into the carrying streams, each of the three rivers that come to a confluence in his native Langholm, as he noted, and that he could identify simply by the sound

of their running. As a Borderer, he knew about the differences between things, even between these rivers. But he also knew the larger song they all are part of. And still, that river goes singing on.

Alan Riach

LIFE EXPERIENCE AND MEMOIR WRITING

Having a penchant for reading books translated from other languages, and hence of different cultures, I recently devoured a nearly four-hundred-page book translated from Swedish. The book, *The Wandering Pine*, by the Swedish writer Per Olov Enquist, is written elegantly as his first life novel. A memoir, in fact.

It was an enjoyable read. The thought of writing a few more chapters for my ongoing memoir project stayed in my mind unrelentingly for several days. I was not disappointed. Within a fortnight, I was able to write two more chapters. I had not comprehended that someone else's memoir could be so enlightening, instructive and inspiring.

That neatly brings me to the subject of life experience, the linchpin of every form of writing, not least memoirs and life novels. We keep on accumulating life experience throughout the years – from childhood to the time when we are in our eighties and nineties – even if we are not really aware of it. There are a hundred-and-one different sources of achieving this invaluable gift. But parental mentoring, our roots, our education, our place of work and our travels are the main fountain-heads.

To put life experience in perspective: there are three important elements of literary writing. One, your passion for writing – the unquenchable impulse (*demonic compulsion*) to keep on writing. Two, life experience itself and lastly, your ability to spin the information or knowledge acquired through life experience.

But why is life experience such a useful ally for writers? It's because the experience is natural, as it has been acquired in a practical way, i.e. first hand: you have interacted with people in their natural environment; you have conversed with them face to face to know the facts and the issues, taken in their emotions and have empathised with them. The overall information gained, therefore, is broad-based and all-encompassing. This is crucial – a mark of good writing.

This article now explores my theme in some detail through the prism of the following two chapters of my memoir, alluded to above. They pertain to two different environments and cultures – India and England.

ONE – IN STITCHES

Early 1960. I had recently graduated as a doctor from Patna University in India. It was a moment of great joy, not least a door-opener for my future journey (1969) to London. By mere coincidence, the occasion turned out to be cause for a double celebration: my latest academic achievement and the celebration of Holi.

Holi is a colourful Hindu spring festival celebrated in honour of Lord Krishna. It's equivalent to Christmas in importance on a Hindu's yearly calendar. Colourful? It's because during the festivities, people customarily apply coloured powder to the faces of their families, friends and relatives and sprinkle coloured water on one another. At home and at friends' houses too. The family reunion during Holi, like all other religious festivals, is also the time for indulging in sumptuous food and drink.

While visiting a friend's house in the village, I was persuaded to have a cold drink mixed with bhang (leaves and flower-tops of the Cannabis plant). It's usual to have such a drink during Holi and is not considered illegal in India – not at that time, anyway. I had no previous experience of taking that sort of cocktail. Within a few minutes I felt euphoric. My euphoria soon reached a crescendo, resulting in continuous loud laughter, as if I had inhaled laughing gas (nitrous oxide). I became hyperactive and shouted: *I must see my doctor now.*

I started sprinting towards my hometown, Daltonganj, where our doctor practised. I was being followed by two of my village friends, possibly to ensure my safety. Apart from the marked euphoria, I was more or less in control of my senses.

By the time I reached the doctor's surgery, breathless and exhausted that spring afternoon, my laughter was already on the wane. The doctor was relaxing in his surgery, reading his newspaper.

You seem to be very weary, he said, with a degree of apprehension. *Have you been jogging? And, congratulations.* He was aware of my recent success at the finals of my medical examination. I was too drained to answer his query. By then my two friends had caught up with me. They too looked worn out, but they told the doctor the whole story in chapter and verse. It was quite humiliating to listen to their account of my uncalled-for adventure. I was soon back to my normal self. What an experience.

It was my doctor who stole the show. A loquacious, worldly-wise man in his mid-sixties, he nodded slowly a few times and pronounced his version of events in his characteristic convoluted style: *A doctor's job is to heal others and make*

them comfortable and happy. In keeping with that ethos, today you have been a powerful source of entertainment for the village folks and all those people along the way during your four-mile race. A good start to your medical career.

Words of wisdom – who could argue with that?

TWO – MICROCOSMIC VISION

Married?

No, doctor.

Children?

Three.

What a blunder, I wondered.

I looked at the patient sheepishly and promptly apologized for my reckless way of questioning. The patient, an urbane and lively woman in her early thirties, looked puzzled.

There is nothing to be sorry about, she said. *I don't have to be married to have children. It's as simple as that.* She was trying her best to pacify me. Somehow, I was not convinced by her clarification. Having arrived in the UK not long before – at the tail end of 1969 – I was not in tune with local customs.

The following morning, as soon as I arrived in the ward, the ward sister asked me to have a word with the patient.

I am in trouble, I muttered. I went straight to see the patient, pondering over the ward sister's wry smile.

I was expecting the patient to be on her own. To my surprise, she was surrounded by a gentleman of her age and three bustling children aged between four and ten years.

Ah, sorry to bother you doctor, and thanks for coming to see me.

She then introduced me to her partner and their three children – now standing to attention and looking puzzled. They must have been wondering what the fuss was all about!

There is no need, then, to worry. So could my partner now take the children to school? she said, awaiting my approval. I was too embarrassed to look at her, let alone say anything. I just nodded.

It was my first glimpse of the tolerance and understanding of people in this great country. My patient, uncomfortable as she was, by seeing me upset, went to that length to convince me that I was not in the wrong. Incredible.

All in all, the event provided me a microcosmic illustration of admirable British character and resilience. That fine spirit, happily, continues unabated to this day.

How is that for meticulous delineation of facts, for showing emotions, utilizing senses and the overall credibility of the narrative. If further proof is needed concerning the importance of life experience, the works of the novelist Hilary Mantel are shining examples. Her varied pursuits – studying law, becoming a social worker, travelling and working in Botswana and Saudi Arabia – speak volumes for her life experiences. Going by her past and current literary achievements, there is every indication that her writings will endure. Not a ten minute wonder by any means.

The attraction of a memoir is that you don't need to place events chronologically, unlike an autobiography. In a memoir, the events could be discussed in any order as long as the narrative is convincing, inspiring and written with passion. As the readers are the best judges of our work, they would ponder: that's how they would deal with a problem if it comes their way. That's the key message to convey in a memoir or a life novel: you equip them – the audience – with confidence and a sense of dependability.

A fact worth noting if you are in a quandary as to how to go about writing your memoir: go to your roots. Most likely, you won't be disappointed. You will have a sporting chance of success in your endeavour. Every family has its own reservoir of events and secrets. You need to delve into it. No wonder there is now a great interest in writing memoirs and life novels – an important genre in itself.

Something else. When I finish writing my memoir, I would try my best to get it published through a traditional publisher. I am not against the new technology. But, if for some reason the technology fails – and it's not beyond the limits of possibility – the entire account of my life would just evaporate. No, it won't be available to anyone else including the future generations.

So there you have it. My message is loud and clear: do not waste your life experience. You have it in your head. Use it. The memories on paper are bound to give a sense of fulfilment. And, who knows, if you write it with confidence and passion, others may like to emulate your handiwork. As I did Enquist's.

Raghu B. Shukla



A SCARLET THREAD

By Elizabeth Burns

Poetry Pamphlet

ISBN: 978-0-9928946-2-7

A short pamphlet of ten poems centred around the life and work of one-time Borders-based artist Anne Redpath (1895-1965) and the sometimes strange interactions with Burns' own life. There's lots of reflected and nuanced colour in these poems and though they strive to catch the essence and style of the painter it's a little lost in the details rather than locating her true spirit. Still, by the penultimate poem, *Spain*, the vagaries and subtle shifts in her life and work are beginning to shine through:

*A harsher, starker country,
sometimes sinister.
The blacks and whites of it, the
gold barque.*

*Spain, says a critic, has done
something to her.*

(*Spain*)

A Scarlet Thread is successful in that it makes you want to learn more about the life and art of Anne Redpath. Perhaps this is a project waiting to be expanded into a larger collection?

Julian Colton



HOW TO DESTROY

By Sara A Clark

FeedARead.com Publishing

Poetry

109 Pages

ISBN: 978-1-78510-478-7

This is Hawick-based poet Sara Clark's first poetry collection. Containing a rich array of sestinas, sonnets, villanelles and all manner of free verse pieces which accentuate rhythm and a marked vocal style, you can imagine the poet reciting in her kitchen or at her one-time workplace in Hawick's Subway as she constructed the poems. This invocatory tone lends the collection an immediate and appealing feel. This is poetry in the strictest poetic sense and you have to admire Clark's ambition as she gets to grips with the daily circumstances of life – work, growing up, the vicissitudes of love and relationships and, curiously for such a young writer, a preoccupation with death. Actually, there's a lot of death in Sara Clark's work and she often brings to mind mature male writers such as WH Auden, Louis MacNeice and Dylan Thomas. No bad thing in this reviewer's opinion. Sometimes in Clark's desire to write 'large' she falls into the realms of the abstract or in other set pieces into a black and white world of the rich versus

the poor such as in *Refugees and Billionaires*, for instance. Clark is much more astute an observer when the poetry is driven by a particular setting or equally by a personal situation experienced at first hand. For example, in *Ward 52* the poem is all the better for the intrusion of the poet's twelve year old self and in *Whilst Working at Subway* the setting alone gives the reader more to cling on to as opposed to the emotionally distanced 'we shoppers' of *Pink Cashmere* despite the capitalised 'Me'. What I really like about Clark is that she greatly appreciates the poetic genre and its potential and is looking for consolations beyond mere material wealth, as in the humorous *Take What's Yours*. This isn't the finest piece in the collection by a long way, but it shows Clark's writing heart is in the right place which will stand her in good stead in the future, as will focusing her obvious writing talent into stricter structures. It's no surprise that three of the strongest poems in the collection are sestinas. A difficult form to grapple with at the best of times, Clark manages to do so with a degree of success this reviewer can only admire. Perhaps with such young talent to burn Clark needs the structural discipline such forms offer. Concluded by the engaging extended piece *Faust: A Dramatic Poem*, *How To Destroy* showcases a poet who clearly has much to say about life and the world. Given time and application to her craft, and that Clark can avoid the pitfall of writing what she thinks others would like her to write, an easy temptation in the Borders where folk like to celebrate place and the status quo rather than deconstruct or show the area's less flattering aspects, Clark has the potential to develop into a leading poetic light in the Borders and beyond.

Julian Colton

TUMOUR RUMOUR

By Kathleen Mansfield

£6

Available from:

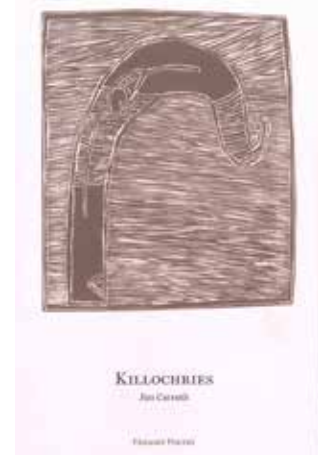
Whitie's Book Shop, Peebles
Maggie's at Western General
Hospital (Contact Mark Cooper
0131 5373131)

Author: kathleenmansfield8@
gmail.com

This remarkable little book takes us on a journey that is at times frightening, for we all fear cancer, at times hilarious, but always thoughtful and deeply moving. The author, Kathleen Mansfield, was diagnosed with breast cancer in October 2013. She took to writing ('musings') for herself, to herself... about herself, elements that bring out the best in a writer, as a way of coping with the maelstrom of emotions she was experiencing. Far from feeling *burdened* by internal monologue, as Kathleen alludes to in her preface, this reader felt privileged to witness the strength of human spirit that comes across in this diverse collection of prose and poetry written whilst the author confronted despair, grief, fear and uncertainty. Despite what she was going through, Kathleen wrote on and at times allowed humour to take over in riotous bursts. I couldn't top chuckling when reading *Confusion*. The opening stanza asks *Who do I begin?... Who are you?..* perhaps, we learn, *Some sort of virus on the Computer? Being Too tired to really think* the author then bids *Goodnight to grumpy knickers*. Yes, as she says, *Thank God for a sense of humour*. God? There is reference, too, to a Catholic *Upbringing* ('unbrining, Whoops') but it is human relationships, and above all the love shown by her son and daughter, that shine through. The short poem *I Want* says everything, starting

with *My children and my dad, My brother and my cousins...* Gratitude is shown with *I want those caring nurses, I want those clever surgeons, I want that team of healers' and need of closeness by 'I want a lover fully formed.* Later comes *How do I feel?... in two parts. Emotions: rubbery, rough, broken orange peel.* Terrific imagery! Not surprisingly, past and present often merge in the writer's 'musings', but I was particularly moved by *Holy Water*, Kathleen's description of her mother's death in a hospital in Billericay. Having worked there as a medical student maybe gave it an emotional edge for me, but this is a powerful piece of writing that conveys that feeling of utter helplessness on the loss of a loved one without even a whiff of sentimentality. Plus the love for her mother lives on through her writing. By contrast, reference to lovesick *Jeremy E. Johnson*, at the end on the book, is a hoot. Whatever happened to Jeremy, who read Plato and who looked liked Woody Allen, I couldn't help wondering on closing the book? But above all else, I also felt I'd been taken on a meaningful journey. As a doctor, I have known thousands upon thousands of patients who have been through what the author has had to go through; never before have I been taken to the emotional places visited in *Tumour Rumour* in quite the same way. This is a unique collection and will be treasured by those who buy it. They will also know that all proceeds go to Maggie's Centres, started up in Edinburgh in 1996 but now with seventeen centres across the country attached to cancer units. Maggie Keswick Jencks, also a victim of cancer, believed fellow sufferers should *not lose the joy of living in the fear of dying. Tumour Rumour bursts with the joy of living.*

Oliver Eade



KILLOCHRIES

By Jim Carruth

Freight Poetry, Freight Books
131 Pages
ISBN: 978-1-908754-91-2

Glasgow Laureate Jim Carruth's first full poetry collection is part rites of passage, part lament for a disappearing, or fast disappearing, way of farming life before the Euro millions and quotas roll in. Killochrie is a ramshackle Scottish farm overseen by a God-fearing, Bible quoting old farmer into which intrudes a long lost younger non believing relative trying to escape the modern world and his own cares and tribulations. Predictably the book is about the coming together of the two opposing views of life to reach a shared empathy and understanding. Still, this is an immensely enjoyable and profound read. Carruth draws his two main characters, and attendant farm life and surrounding nature, totally in the round reflecting with great insight on the four seasons in the process. A simple plot and structure interwoven with snatches of gospel works to great effect as Carruth writes surely in spare, compelling prose-verse which flows burn freely and makes for an easy, undemanding read. But it's the depiction of the older farming man which dominates this

collection. There are twelve poems focused principally on various aspects of his work and personality as he strives to keep the farm going and attend to his blind, bed-ridden mother, while coming to terms with his younger relative's urbane world view:

*Today I lecture him
on sonnet construction,
compare it to the dyke
we are building back up.*

*As he seeks out
That elusive right stone
I talk of fit and position,
Metre and line-length.*

*He points to the hole
left at ground level.
It's the weygate spaces
that lat in the life.*

Viii poet

This is a collection which brings to mind RS Thomas among numerous others and will probably seal Carruth's burgeoning reputation.

Julian Colton



COLD LIGHT OF MORNING

By Julian Colton

Poetry
Cultured Llama 2015
74 Pages
ISBN 978-0-9926485-7-2

A MA in American Literature, an editor and educator of all aspects of writing, widely published in a huge array of journals, magazines, and with three other poetry collections to his name, poet Julian Colton has every reason to rest on his laurels. Fortunately for us, it seems he has been restless these past few years, during which time he has somehow summoned into existence his magnificent fourth collection *Cold Light of Morning*.

I use the word "summoned" only because, as with all important works of literature, it is difficult to imagine this collection actually being *written*. First and foremost this book is a work of art. The sleek, intriguing cover – featuring photography by the poet's daughter, Rozee Colton (a talented artist in her own right) perfectly captures the essence of these poems taken as a whole – honest reflection on the evening's musings in the cold light of morning. The cover itself is expertly suggestive of the poet's special style of gazing

outward. It has us peering from a safe place, through a wet mist of breath on a cold pane of glass into the vague warmth of another human form, determined to focus on the humanity of its subject. What a perfect tribute to his poetry it is.

Individually, the poems which make up this collection are windows with unparalleled views of their subjects – that they happen to be built into a pristine fortress is no accident. Whether misty or clear, closed or open, these windows offer exceptional views of the streets, hospitals, gardens and graveyards which form the perfectly-lit landscapes of the poet's memories.

And what landscapes they are. Taken as a whole these poems offer the reader an incomparable vista – taking all who turn the book's pages on a unique journey which starts in Manchester and soars through Scotland with apparently effortless grace.

"Taken as a whole" – an easy thing to say, perhaps more difficult to do, considering there are over sixty poems in this collection. You might think so – but Julian makes it easy for his readers, with meticulously selected and structured poems which flow from theme to theme with unparalleled style.

Take any three lines from any one of the poems from this collection and you have a fresh lesson in how to put into practice the age-old adage "Show not tell" – a phrase Colton perfectly encapsulates in his poem of the same name, and exemplifies in this collection. Not only does he "capture the abstract" – he holds it out for us to name as our own, despite the deeply personal nature of his subjects. And in doing so, he has made his craft into art.

The closing three lines of *Winter Walk*, for example - even taken out of the more complex context of the poem as a whole, make fresh, exquisite poetry of familiar local footpaths.

*Turn and walk back from winter
bridal whiteness.*

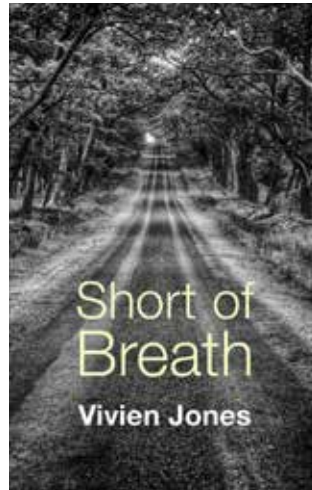
*Snow and ice will keep its own
counsel*

*As I, star-flowing, glass-eyed
river, shall too.*

But the landscapes of Julian's describing, though beautiful and literal at times, are revealed as complex and various fabrics throughout the course of the book. Motifs of motherhood and fatherhood form the warp and weft of this expertly personal tapestry, interspersed with filaments of loss and desire, knotted with unbreakable bonds of love and blood. With the skill of an accomplished Borders weaver, Julian interweaves the rough strands of life and death together with a strength, skill and delicacy which leaves the reader of this book closing it with a distinct feeling of having read not so much a collection, but a novel of no small importance.

And this is an enormously significant book – not just for Colton, who has finally emerged as an important British poet at the peak of his powers through its pages, but also for the Borders as a whole – a place often celebrated from within, but never so intimately, bitterly and tenderly as here, through the eyes of a local who was once a stranger among its hills and burns – whose poems document the lives which flicker among its landmarks with startling grace and clarity - not only as a spellbound observer, but patiently, reverently, and completely in the cold light of morning.

Sara Clark



SHORT OF BREATH

By Vivien Jones

Cultured Llama 2014

84 Pages

ISBN 978-0-9926485-5-8 90000

Three poems early on set the tone for *Short of Breath* – a strange little triptych of meditations on Pluto, “*the ninth planet, since dwarfed*”. The poems are linked thematically not merely by the subject of the dwarf planet but also by their celebration of the diminished, the marginalised, the easily overlooked. Given voice by Vivien Jones, Pluto's relative insignificance, its relegation to stature of a dubious kind; these things actually become virtues. Unlike the “*fat and gassy*” Jupiter, Pluto exists outside definition and categories, in the galaxy of potential, things yet to fully be. As its title suggests, *Short of Breath* is very much concerned with those moments of becoming, the brief interstitials between absence and presence.

Time, too, the tick of a clock from one second to the next, or the long gap between the taking of a photo and the viewing of it. Mostly we are living in the spaces between things, Jones seems to say. In *Detritus*, where she invites us to consider the distance between the end of a life and the extinction of its impact,

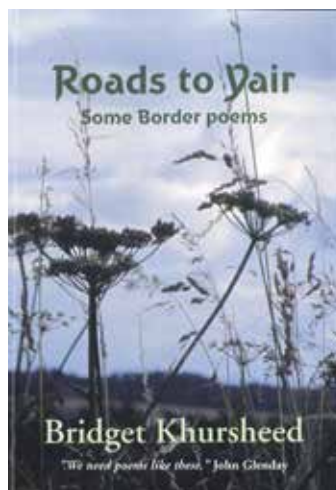
which she poignantly compares to the decay of a plucked lute string. Or in *Summer is Late this Year*, in which an idealised summer is awaited so expectantly that the real summer, wet and cold, passes by unappreciated. Or in *Maryhill Shops*, where the shop-fronts of Glasgow are still adorned with the names of long-dead proprietors. *Big Time*, the poem which most directly addresses this theme, is ushered in by an Albert Einstein quote, which could stand just as well as preface to the entire collection:

*The distinction between past,
present and future is only a
stubbornly persistent illusion.*

And this is strong poetry, incidentally, spare and unsentimental in its handling of the passage of time. Clarity is very often the first casualty of modern poetry, but these are poems which pass straight through the eye and into the mind. Not simple, I should say, but works which honour to the utmost what should surely always be the writer's primary duty – to take the reader with them as they go. Vivien Jones takes us along with her everywhere she travels, and the places we go with her are well worth the visiting.

Short of Breath is available through Cultured Llama Publishing. More information on its author can be found at www.vivienjones.info.

Thomas Clark



ROADS TO YAIR SOME BORDER POEMS

By Bridget Khursheed

48 pages.

Twinlaw Publishing.

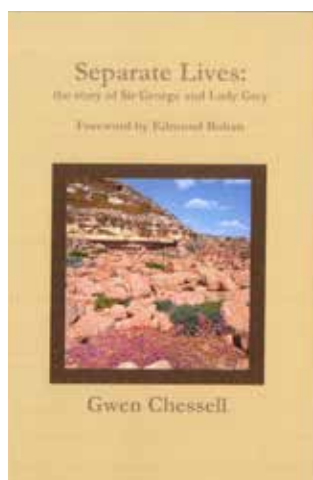
Poetry.

ISBN: 978-0-9575913-9-4

With its accompanying photographs, locational notes and preface, this never less than interesting poetry chapbook appears to have a wider audience in mind than just lovers of poetry. With poems inspired by the landscape, history and all manner of Scottish Borders subjects this is indeed a poetical whistle-stop tour of the area with one eye on instructing the uninitiated on all aspects of the Borders sensibility in, it has to be said, a somewhat celebratory, never more than mildly critical style. As the preface says this is 'our Borders' made up of 'our Border folk.' Written with Khursheed's layered, listing style the poems would quite easily stand on their own two feet without the photographs or notes and there is much here to catch the attention of lovers of good verse. Khursheed is at her strongest when she throws off her observational shackles in poems such as *Snow storm in Asda carpark*, *Jethart snails*, *Border snow* (there are lots of different kinds of snow in this collection) *The Reddle man and At*

Stichill Linn which go beyond the commonplace, find greater focus and which benefit from a sense of the poet having worked around and through her subjects. Editor of the poetry website *Poet and Geek* it will be interesting to see what this recipient of a Scottish Book Trust New Writer Award for poetry will come up with next.

Julian Colton



SEPARATE LIVES: THE STORY OF SIR GEORGE AND LADY GREY

By Gwen Chessell

Hopping Mouse Press 2014

376 pages PBK

ISBN: 978-1-326-11342-1

Colonial history has been recorded and taught almost exclusively from the point of view of men. Women have been virtually invisible in this version of history. In her biography of the lives of Governor Sir George Grey and his wife, Eliza, Chessell has attempted to address some of this imbalance and thus provide a more realistic and arguably, a more compassionate view of probable historical events.

Sir George Grey was an important and well known personality in British 19th century

colonial expansion. His life as Governor in Australia, New Zealand and South Africa has been written about extensively and his legacy as one of the history makers of these colonies, particularly New Zealand, is assured. In his lifetime he was either revered or loathed in equal measure.

History has not given his wife, Eliza any such recognition. This is the first biography to tell the story of the lives of both George and Eliza. Chessell has already published a biography of Eliza's father, Richard Spencer, another important figure in Australian colonial history. Eliza met and married George Grey when she was just sixteen. Without a doubt, marriage is one of the most complicated of all human relationships, both for those within and those without. To write about any marriage is challenging but to surmise about a marriage from 19th century Victorian times is doubly difficult. Viewed from the 21st century, the morals and sexual behaviour of our Victorian ancestors is one of hypocrisy and the restricted role that women played in that society, even more incomprehensible to our modern eyes.

An innocent flirtation which took place on board a ship bound for England between a bored Eliza and a naval officer, Henry Keppell resulted in a very Victorian display of misguided anger from her husband. His ultimate revenge was to lead to the couple's separation. A separated woman in Victorian times had no rights. Chessell has written of the 'affair' with compassion and attention to detail. Nor has she fallen in to the trap of judgement of either George or Eliza and has recorded the events as dispassionately as it is possible from this distance in time.

Chessell's skill as a biographer is two fold. She researches her work very carefully to provide the necessary facts and figures and she then takes these details to weave a very human story about her subjects.

Separate Lives has maps, black and white illustrations, a lengthy bibliography, comprehensive notes and an index. The Forward written by Edmund Bohan from Christchurch, New Zealand provides a thoughtful introduction into the story of George and Eliza, two very interesting people and their troubled marriage.

Iona McGregor



WIRDS FIR THE DAY

By Hamish Scott

The Laverock's Nest Press
Poetry
62 Pages
ISBN 9780992800574

Hamish Scott is something of a well-kent face in Scots literary circles, and his latest collection from The Laverock's Nest Press, *Wirds for the Day*, shows why. Though predominantly short form and wrought in Standard Scots, the poems in this collection are far from kailyard; Scott's subjects range from suicide bombers to the use of drones in war, from the

future exploration of space to the inviolable beauty of Antarctica. Throw in the usual meditations on death and life, and it's a fair purview.

I say "usual" meditations, but in fact these poems are anything but quotidian. This is a mature collection, a wise collection. Its frequent reflections upon death are authentic, not elegiac, genuine attempts to come to grips with the end of existence and what it might mean. Considered and contemplative, *Wirds for the Day* evokes that stage in life where one is no longer searching quite so ardently for the answers, but rather for the questions that make sense of everything that's gone before. Approaching death, for Hamish Scott, seems to mean being near a new beginning, rather than a conclusion.

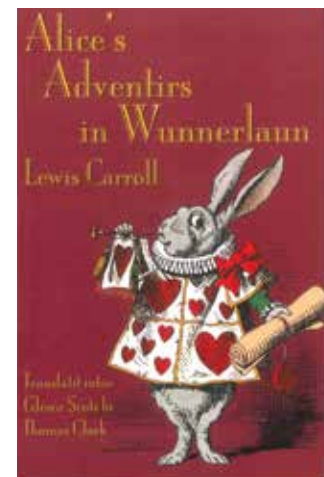
That doesn't necessarily mean, I should point out, a new beginning in a religious sense. What I mean is that these are poems of renewal. Poems about the lives which will extend on after ours, and the lives which will follow. Flowers that will still grow, hope that will be born and clung to. After we are gone, season will follow season, and the world will continue to turn. *Wirds for the Day* conveys that cycle poignantly and beautifully. The language is accessible throughout – non-speakers of Scots should have few difficulties. In Scots as natural and unself-conscious as this, the mood and music of the poems are preserved somehow in a space separate from the words themselves. Though it's the words, as the title tells us, which the collection is really about. Maybe that's just a bit of misdirection. Scott despairs repeatedly of words, our human need to use them, their inadequacy for the task in hand. Words are fluid and subjective things, as apt

to distort or stifle our thoughts as to free them. The business of naming things is a troublesome one. And yet,

*Monie's the nemm gien tae a bairn
but aa mean howp*

What's in a word? Not much but what we try to put there. In these "wirds", Scott has captured much of life's loveliness and mystery.

Thomas Clark



ALICE'S ADVENTIRS IN WUNNERLAUN

By Lewis Carroll

Translatit Bi Thomas Clark Intae Glesca Scots

Fiction
Evertime 2014
123 Pages
ISBN: 978 1 78201-070-8

*The Queen turnt rid wae fury, an,
efter glarin at her fir a meenit like
a wild beast, stairtit screamin "
Oaf wae her heid! Oaf wae— "*

One of the most difficult things to achieve is to make the familiar fresh and seem brand new. I imagine most folk would be familiar with the quotation above in its original English context especially of course 'Off with her head...' Even if you've never read

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland the characters, scenes, phrases have entered the general consciousness and are readily available to be drawn on. To achieve that freshness you have to find your own way into the text to truly re-imagine it. Thomas Clark has more than achieved that in his original and exciting use of Glesca Scots to tell the familiar tale.

There can be few better ways of transforming a well told story than using the building blocks of a different language. It makes the story live in the present and straddle the cultural landscape of Lewis Carroll himself and Thomas Clark. The quotation above is a fine example of the zest of the narrative and especially the dialogue.

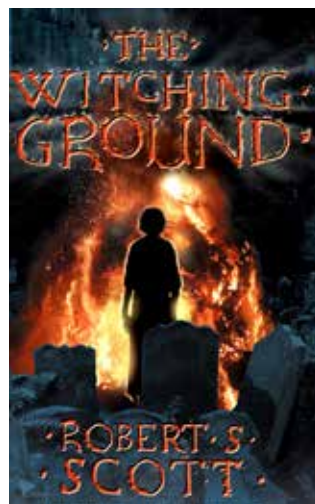
In this translation the dialogue fairly zips along.

A good translator doesn't just interpret verbatim but inhabits the story with their own language which is of course interwoven with their own experiences, background and feelings. An excellent and talented translator though doesn't lose sight of the original in the process.

What we have here is an excellent and creatively talented translator in Thomas Clark. Many times when reading this the memories of previous readings simmered away in the background providing a solid base for the Glesca Scots to soar and carry the story and this reader along.

An excellent achievement. I look forward to further volumes from this writer whether as translator or author of his own work.

Tom Murray



THE WITCHING GROUND

By Robert S Scott

FeedARead Publications, 2015
Paperback, 398 pages
ISBN-13: 978-1785105340

Sometimes a novel just grips you from the very first page and *The Witching Ground* happens to be one of those. Action, intrigue, believable characters and fast moving contemporary dialogue are all skilfully woven into this work of fiction, aptly subtitled – A supernatural thriller.

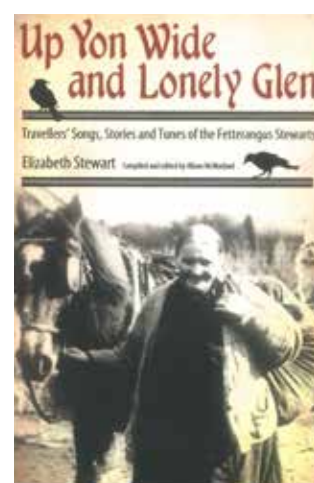
The story begins with the Prologue: The Scottish Highlands – 1597. A witch is burned alive. Fast forward to Chapter 1 – New York – the 21st century and young Archaeology Professor, Heather Bruce whose very ancestor is this unfortunate 16th century witch, finds her career in crisis. Solution – travel to Scotland with boyfriend and three of her students. Heather is fascinated by her Scottish roots and it is in the Calder Castle that she starts her archaeological dig and here the past becomes the present, dark, threatening and disturbing.

There's plenty for the local reader to identify with as well. The typeface used on the cover was taken from a group of tombstones within the Jedburgh Abbey and the inscribed stone in the frontispiece

was based on a carving in the grounds of Kelso Abbey.

The Witching Ground is a powerful, well written and researched work of fiction that will hook the reader from the beginning. It's a real page turner. Scott is a born story teller and I look forward to reading more novels from this very talented and versatile writer.

Iona McGregor



UP YON WIDE AND LONELY GLEN Travellers' Songs, Stories and Tunes of the Fetterangus Stewarts

By Elizabeth Stewart - Compiled
and edited by Alison McMorland

Univ. Press of Mississippi in
association with the Elphinstone
Institute, Univ. Of Aberdeen
2012

390 pages, 80 b&w illustrations,
145 musical scores, 1 map,
introduction, appendices,
glossary, bibliography, song
index, index PBK
ISBN 978-1-61703-308-7

A wonderful and lovingly collected book, beautifully presented, of musical transcriptions, song lyrics, memoir, stories, and lore from a matrilineal line of famed Traveller balladeers, musicians, and storytellers.

Elizabeth Stewart is a highly acclaimed singer, pianist, and accordionist whose reputation has spread widely not only as an outstanding musician but as the principal inheritor and advocate of her family and their music. First discovered by folklorists in the 1950s, the Stewarts of Fetterangus, including Elizabeth's mother Jean, her uncle Ned, and her aunt Lucy, have had immense musical influence. Lucy in particular became a celebrated ballad singer and in 1961 Smithsonian Folkways released a collection of her classic ballad recordings that brought the family's music and name to an international audience.

Up Yon Wide and Lonely Glen is a significant memoir of Scottish Traveller life, containing stories, music, and songs from this prominent Traveller family. The Title of the book is taken from the song on page 29 of the same name:

It wis up yon wide an lonely glen

*Its shade by monys a lovely
mountain*

An beyond the busy hands o men

*Twis the first time I went oot
a-huntin.*

It had been tae me a happy day

The day I met my youthful fancy

*She was herdin sheep on yonder
knowe*

*It's the first time that I spied my
Nancy.*

Five more verses then the last
refrain:

*It was her that I saw it was her
that I got*

*It was her that I mean tae keep
contented*

*Fareweel, fareweel, ye heathery
hills*

*Fareweel, fareweel, my song is
ended.*

The book is the result of a close partnership between Elizabeth Stewart and Scottish folk singer and writer Alison McMorland. The narrative, spanning five generations of women and written in Scots, captures the rhythms and idioms of Elizabeth Stewart's speaking voice and is extraordinary from a musical, cultural, sociological, and historical point of view.

A labour of love, the book features 145 musical transcriptions and song lyrics, including eight original piano compositions, folktale versions, rhymes and riddles, and eighty fascinating and evocative illustrations of the Stewart family. Elizabeth Stewart, Mintlaw, Scotland, is an outstanding practitioner of the traditional arts. An internationally recognized singer, storyteller, composer, and song writer of remarkable ability, she has performed all over the UK and made several tours of America. She and her family have been visited by musicians, singers, folklorists, and journalists for over fifty years.

Alison McMorland, Compiler and Editor, of Dunblane, Scotland, is a traditional singer, collector, broadcaster, teacher, and writer, who over forty years has forwarded the cause of traditional music in her numerous recordings, publications, and classes throughout the UK, Europe and the USA.

Women have been the great carriers of the folk songs, stories and traditions.

This is a woman-to-woman book by Elizabeth Stewart, a remarkable Traveller, singer and storyteller and her family's rich musical heritage, created in collaboration with the exceptional singer and folklorist Alison McMorland. This proves to be the perfect

combination. It is a labour of love and friendship, enriched and validated by their communal knowledge.

A relevant publication is *Herd Laddie o the Glen: Songs and Life of the Border Shepherd*, by Willie Scott which very interestingly was compiled for our own SBC Arts Development in 2006.

As the Traditional Music Scottish Association Newsletter of that year reported, *Alison McMorland needed no introduction to members of the TMSA. For forty years she had collected, performed, recorded and published Scots song and was a leading tradition-bearer of our time. Hamish Henderson wrote Alison stands out as one of the principal modern interpreters of a ballad singing tradition...uniting scrupulous traditional fidelity with versatile and resourceful creative artistry. Willie Scott died on 29th April 1989, close to 92 years of age, with a lifetime of songs and singing behind him and was a major influence on the work of Alison herself and that of many other singers who knew him. Willie Scott was a unique figure whose significant presence, at the time of the folk song revival, bridged the old world with the new. He was a masterly tradition-bearer and ambassador of the songs and lore of the Borders as recounted in his book. From the old days of herds' suppers and kirns to the clubs and festivals of the folk revival, Willie brought his songs and stories, blending the Borders traditions, stemming from Leyden and Hogg, into a repertoire that was as broad as it was long and, in the nature of the revival, adding his own creativity and style. The original edition of this book was brought into existence in June 1988, the result of ten years of deliberation and*

hard work by Alison McMorland and Willie's son Sandy, assisted by some willing supporters. Despite its importance, as recognised by the School of Scottish Studies, funding was hard to come by and Willie financed the publication himself. Somewhere along the way, that first limited edition sold out and became very hard to find indeed. My own copy was an illicit photocopy and became well-thumbed over the years. Alison acknowledges the assistance and input of many others to the making of this new edition, which contains 57 songs and 4 poems (including some additional songs) - the major part of Willie's repertoire. There is a new transcription of the music notation for each song from hand-written into printed, the original introduction by Hamish Henderson, a section based on Alison's taped interviews with Willie about his sources and his life as a shepherd, illuminating song notes by Geordie McIntyre, and a useful glossary. The book is illustrated with photographs - from Willie's early years as a child, with his family, through his shepherding days, right up to the 1980s - and includes a notated map showing the places where he lived and worked in the hills and valleys around Hawick. The story of Willie's working life as a herd, and the songs he sang, reflect not only the hard times of that way. Willie Scott, *Herd Laddie o the Glen* and Alison McMorland Sandy Scott (Willie's son) and Alison with Jan Miller's statue of Sandy and his dog. They are also full of joy, humour and humanity. This collection of songs should be in the hands of all Scots singers and anyone interested in the Scots and Borders song traditions. Many of the songs are well-known, some less so. Here, they are in the versions sung by Willie, many bearing the "clear

hallmarks of oral transmission". All deserve to be in current use. "The sheep were ma life, ma work; the songs were a by product - a song's no worth nothing to anybody unless it's expressed - it's the feeling and the expression that makes the song" This is a very attractive and well-produced edition of a landmark publication and when this edition sells out - as inevitably it will - it should remain in print. Earlier this year, Alison McMorland presented recitals of Willie's songs from the book, assisted by Geordie McIntyre and some weel-kent Borders singers and musicians. The recitals were illustrated with a backdrop of slides and DVD. They took place at the Border Gaitherin in Coldstream, Newcastleton Community Centre and the Thorterdikes Roadhouse in Hawick. Many of Willie's family and friends came along and joined in the songs and reminiscing. Alison's presentation, from the sure interpretation and crystal clear delivery of the songs, to her direct concern for the detail of Willie's life and work, made sure these occasions were a poignant memory and joyful celebration of the man and his singing. I hope Alison gets the opportunity to take this show to a wider audience. Sandy Watson, TMSA Borders Branch.

HERD LADDIE O THE GLEN
Songs of a Border Shepherd
Revised 2006 The songs of Willie Scott, Liddesdale Shepherd and Singer. Compiled by Alison McMorland with an introduction by Hamish Henderson ISBN 0-9545052-8-X (Shortlisted for the Ratcliffe Prize 2007, an annual award for an important contribution by an individual to the study of folklore and folklife in Great Britain and Ireland) This project was made possible with funding and support from Scottish

Borders Council and the Scottish Arts Council. The book is available from: Scottish Borders Council Arts Service.

Carol Norris



THE DEVIL'S TATTOO

By Brett Evans

Indigo Pamphlets
Indigo Dreams Publishing
Poetry
28 pages
ISBN: 978-1-909357-78-5

The shadow of Dylan Thomas looms large over this debut collection by North Wales poet Brett Evans. Welsh lyricism, the poet as drunken self-mythologiser, all lovelorn and isolate, abounds throughout these twenty pieces. This reviewer couldn't help but come to the conclusion that perhaps Evans would benefit greatly from escaping his hero's pervasive influence. Still, this is an impressive, enjoyable first collection. For all the wild man, hard drinking self-deprecation, the emotional stasis and craving, there is a real craftsman at work here with a genuine ear for rhythm. And yes, these poems would no doubt be heard to best effect in a crowded smoky Welsh bar with a young Richard Burton crooning the vowels to a rapt and attentive audience. Despite the clichés being hard to throw off, Evans is certainly a name to look out for

in the future. Poems such as *In Bed with Ma Rainey*, *Teaching Jesus to Dance*, *Directed by Sergio Leone*, and *Reading Sean O'Brien in the Bath*, to name just a few, are all fine, likeable pieces.

Julian Colton



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GUNTHER ALEXANDER

A chartered accountant working in practice and with Workplace Chaplaincy Scotland. A relative newcomer to the Borders which he finds has similarities to his native Austria.

NORMAN BISSETT

Born in Fife, educated in Aberdeen, Norman lives in Edinburgh. After 30 years abroad, working for the British Council, he has been writing since 1995. Featuring regularly in the small press he has to date published fourteen collections of verse.

KATE CAMPBELL

Kate lives in the Scottish Borders. Kate's work has been published in *New Writing Scotland* and *Pushing out the Boat* and she has performed at the St. Magnus Festival with the Orkney Writers' Course.

THOMAS CLARK

Thomas is a Glaswegian writer and poet now based in Hawick. His first poetry collection is forthcoming from Gatehouse Press in 2015. He writes about sport for the Hawick News, and writes about writing at www.thomasjclark.co.uk.

EILEEN CUMMINGS

Eileen lives in Selkirk, and is currently involved in making Experimental Moving Image Art. Eileen also enjoys writing songs although her main interest is in poetry with a strong structure, both rhythm and rhyme.

OLIVER EADE

A retired BGH doctor, Oliver has published five children's novels, one young adult plus a prize-winning adult novel. His short stories reflecting world-wide travels and family connections are available as *Lost Whispers* from Amazon. He also writes plays.

ALISTAIR FERGUSON

Alistair left school aged 15 with no qualifications, and worked for 50 years as a gamekeeper. He has met a lot of interesting people over the years and draws on these memories as a basis for his short stories.

SEAN FLEET

Sean gave up his day job in Sheffield and moved to Foulton, Berwickshire, in search of inspiration for his writing and other creative interests. He is an active member of Kelso Writers.

VEE FREIR

Vee is a semi-retired clinical psychologist, who lives in the Scottish Borders. As well as writing poetry Vee has written a pocket book on how to deal with stress called *START to Stress Less*. Her last poem was published in the anthology *In Protest: 150 poems for Human Rights*.

CHRISTOPHER HALL

Chris is a sculptor living near Jedburgh for 29 years. He carves stone & wood from mainly locally found materials. He particularly loves whinstone - in its raw weathered state, it is very suitable for memorials & exhibition work. Poetry is a primary source of inspiration.

ELAINE HERON

Originally from Galloway, Elaine was passing through the village of Traquair 32 years ago and has lived there since. She is the founder member of the Traquair Village Choir. Elaine is currently studying Creative Writing with the Open University.

JANET HODGE

Originally from Whithorn but now settled in Coldstream. Janet recently joined the Kelso Writers Group and enjoys meeting other budding writers from the Scottish Borders. She has had to search for a new self-discipline in time and effort, and has rediscovered the pleasure and satisfaction of writing short stories.

MARY JOHNSTON

Born and brought up in rural Aberdeenshire, Doric is Mary's first language. She is at present Scots Language Society's Makar Ben the Hoose. She can be heard reading poems and translations of Grimm's Fairy Tales on their website. Her pamphlet *The Angel and the Aipple* won the Callum Macdonald Memorial Award 2014.

BRIDGET KHURSHEED

Bridget is a poet based in the Borders; she has received a Scottish Book Trust New Writers Award for poetry and edits www.poetandgeek.com; her pamphlet *Roads to Yair* is available from Twinlaw Publishing and her work also appears in *New Writing Scotland*, *Southlight*, *The Rialto*, and *Gutter*. @khursheed @poetandgeek.

DAVY MACTIRE

Myth is history, recalled only in distant memory. Here is my history as far as I can remember. The name I write under is Davy MacTire. I was born in 1959 of Scots parents and educated mostly by my sisters.

GORDON MEADE

Gordon is Scottish poet based on the East Coast of Fife. His eighth collection, *Les Animots: A Human Bestiary*, a collaboration between himself and the Scottish artist Doug Robertson, will be published in September 2015 by Cultured Llama Publishing.

ROY MOLLER

Roy is a poet and songwriter living in Dunbar. His work has recently appeared in *Ink*, *Sweat & Tears*, *Dactyl* and *Pilcrow & Dagger*. His debut collection, *Imports*, was published by Appletree Writers' Press late last year.

RAFAEL MIGUEL MONTES

Born in Santiago de Cuba, Rafael is a Cultural Studies professor at St. Thomas University and a Cuban-American writer living and working in Miami. His poetry has appeared in *The Caribbean Writer*, *The New York Quarterly*, and a number of other academic and literary journals. His first book, *Caboodle*, was released by Prole Books in 2015.

TIM NEVIL

Having worked on TV scripts and factual features, Tim now concentrates on short story writing. *The Unadopted Road* was recently awarded the accolade of being selected for the 'Fearie Tales' event at The Pitlochry Festival Theatre's Winter Words Festival.

JAMIE NORMAN

Jamie is studying towards an MLitt in creative writing with the University of Aberdeen. Originally from Kelso, he loves haiku and concrete poetry and is primarily concerned with traumatic, Scots and palimpsest poetry. He tweets from @roflnorman.

KEITH PARKER

Keith has a Post Graduate Certificate in Creative Writing from Newcastle University. He has been published in a number of magazines including *Acumen*, *StepAway* and *The Open Mouse*. He visits Eyemouth regularly.

TONI PARKS

Toni started writing creatively two and a half years ago after moving to the Scottish Borders. Crime fiction is his usual fayre but a walk with the dog stimulated Toni to write *Still Runs the Teviot*.

JANE PEARN

Jane moved to the Borders from the Isle of Man in 2005. Individual poems, stories and articles appear in print or online from time to time and she has two poetry collections published – *Matters Arising* and *Further To*.

BARBARA POLLOCK

Barbara was born in Manchester and has lived and worked in the Scottish Borders for over thirty years.

RONNIE PRICE

Ronnie has been writing since his schooldays, poetry and prose. Two novels and three non-fiction books have been published; also poems in a recent anthology. He is now writing short stories inspired by membership of the Kelso Writers Workshops.

ALAN RIACH

Alan is the Professor of Scottish Literature at Glasgow University, the general editor of the *Collected Works of Hugh MacDiarmid* and co-author of the books *Arts of Resistance*, and *Arts of Independence*. His fifth book of poems is *Homecoming*.

JUNE RITCHIE

After many years at the chalk face, June is trying to write. She is supported in this ambitious venture by Peebles Writing Group.

HAMISH SCOTT

Hamish was born in Edinburgh and now lives in Tranent, East Lothian. His poetry in Scots has been published in numerous outlets and his third collection *Wirds for the Day* is now available.

RAGHU B. SHUKLA

Senior Editor of an internationally contributed book on comprehensive care of the elderly; short stories published in *Candis*, *Borders Writers' Forum Anthology* and *Sarasvati* (Indigo Dream Publishing); *A Writer's Handbook* awaiting publication; currently writing his memoir; writing and long walks are lifelong hobbies.

MARGARET SKEA

Margaret grew up in Ulster, but has lived in the Borders for over twenty-five years. An award-winning short story writer, she won the Beryl Bainbridge Award for Best First Time Novelist 2014 with her historical novel *Turn of the Tide*.

JUDY STEEL

Judy Steel has lived in the Borders for over 50 years. She has written poetry over this time which has been published in various periodicals and anthologies. She has also written several plays and a volume of her memoirs.

JOCK STEIN

Jock is a preacher, piper and poet, who began his working life in the Sheffield steel industry, and is now retired and living in Haddington.

LEWIS TECKKAM

Lewis lives in Hawick and has been part of Borders Youth Theatre since 2007. He has performed in many of their productions and has also been an Assistant Director. He most enjoys writing fantasy stories.

PATRICIA WATTS

Patricia has been writing sporadically for the last eight years for children and adults. She has entered short stories in competitions for both genres and at last has made it into a 'long list'. She is currently rewriting a novel and her autobiography is near completion.

SANDRA WHITNELL

Sandra lives in Peebles, having moved from North Yorkshire a few years ago. Currently inspired by local archive records, which she uses to tell the moving stories of our near ancestors, and explore current attitudes towards poverty and benefits.

COLIN WILL

Colin is an Edinburgh-born poet with a background in botany and geology. His eighth book, a collection of poems in the Japanese haibun form, was published by Red Squirrel Press in 2014. He chairs the Board of StAnza, Scotland's international poetry festival.

