Contents

3 Interview with A.L. Kennedy by Stephen Keeler
4 Poems by Stewart Sanderson
5 Grigor’s Gifts – Short Story by Liz Grafton
6 Poems by Alison Scott, Thomas Clark, Joan Lennon, Katherine Lockton and Jan Sutch-Pickard
7 Elemental – Short Story by Donald McKenzie
8 Poems by Maggie Wallis, Ian McFadyen, Pádraig Macaoidh and Jane Aldous
9 Babel – Poem by James Sinclair
10 Poems by Jon Plunkett, Gordon Jarvis and Crísdian MacIlleBháin
11 Poems by Marcas Mac an Tuairneir and Jared Carnie
12 Poems by Juliet Antill and Gill Terry
14 Watching Robert Duffin – Short Story by Connie Ramsay Bott
15 Kindred Spirits – Short Story by Paul Brownsey
16 Hogmanay On Culbin – Short Story by Martin Russell
17 Poems by Maggie Rabatski, Caoimín Mac Néill and John Quinn
18 Reviews
23 Contributors’ Biographies, Where To Find Northwords Now

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

Podcast of James Sinclair
Gaelic Poetry in translation
How to download Northwords Now to an e-reader
Subscribe to our email newsletter
Just Telling Stories

Stephen Keeler talks to A. L. Kennedy

Photo of A. L. Kennedy courtesy of Random House

The Ullapool Book Festival is about to celebrate its tenth anniversary, in some style. Novelist and stand-up A. L. Kennedy who has described it as having ‘the listeningest audiences I’ve ever met’ is high on the impressive list of literary heavyweights spending the weekend of 9-11 May on the shores of Loch Broom. Stephen Keeler asked her about book festivals, her writing and the ‘i’ question.

The Ullapool Book Festival (UBF), more than any other I know, is a writers’ festival. It’s not that the audience is taken for granted but in Ullapool the writers are at the heart of the matter. You feel they’d still manage to make a festival out of just being together, even if no one else turned up.

A. L. Kennedy wrote of UBF that it provides the ‘kind of environment (where) writers can feel they’d still manage to make a festival out of just being together, even if no one else turned up.

ALK Book festivals are something very special in a culture which doesn’t value books or readers, or listening, or real communication. As coverage of books in the media declined and access to books was reduced in the last few decades, people who love books and love what they do, and think they are important, began to found more and more festivals. They’re a fantastic atmosphere and is coming out of a culture that involves listening to each other. What’s not to like?

SK They give you an hour to play with at Ullapool — although a defining characteristic there is that the writers stay for the entire festival, attend all the sessions and mingle between times: so what is your idea of the perfect book festival session, and are you ever tempted to break into your stand-up routine?

ALK The perfect gig always depends on the audience and the time and place… Ideally, you’re always aiming to provide the best possible hour for the people there and the material you have to hand at that time. And in Ullapool, because most of the writers and audience members have had a communal experience of many sessions, that’s an element, too — and a rare one. And yes, I’ve done basically stand-up for some events when that seemed necessary. It’s all just telling stories one way or another.

ALK Short stories sell if you sell them. My publishers have been selling my short stories for decades. Why these stories? These are the ones I have. Why now? Because I had them at the time I put them together, and it took them about a year to come out.

SK On Writing has become something of a handbook for tutors and students on some creative writing courses: how much, if any, patience (sympathy?) do you have with those who say, “I read it but it didn’t tell me how to write.”?

ALK Probably none. But I would have compassion because they’re lost people, and you can’t get anywhere with writing (which is hard) if you’re that lost. No one does this for you. If they could, they would be robbing you of everything you could be. Which would be a bad thing. It would be like someone having sex with your husband for you…

SK Less than six months after this year’s UBF, Scottish residents will be able to vote on separation from the Union: the ‘i’ word is in the air, and the UBF has clearly not been programmed politely or diplomatically to avoid the issue. You’ll no doubt be asked…

ALK I can’t vote. I live in England, so it’s right that I can’t vote, although sad. It’s also sad — and wonderful — that all the voters can get enthused by is a potential new start, a virtual country, an idea of public servants who would serve the public… it chimes with the None Of The Above vote down South, and the Left Unity Party’s inauguration. I wish we had better politicians; I wish they had more imagination. And I wish Scotland well and know it will make the right decision.

ALK I don’t know…but I hoped the chat last time. I liked the walking about. The sessions were great; the atmosphere also. I look forward to being surprised. I hope there will be no more dying gannet problems, though. That was a bit heart-breaking, and sore on the arms.

The last time A. L. Kennedy was at the UBF she ‘made an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to save a dying gannet she’d found on the beach there. Such encounters are little blessings to writers for whom no death is ever a bad thing. It would be like someone having sex with your husband for you…’
Poems by Stewart Sanderson

Hare

Although no Dürer, I can draw a hare from memory.

First the lines on which the fur depends like sailcloth,

woven wicker-like. Where scars on tender skin should be

and where the ears will stiffness at danger, soften down or flop

disconsolate. No creature like a hare for melancholy.

Second have the colours stir from base coat up
to a grizzled, finite curve of sudden brushstrokes

bristling. Eyes which bore to the quick of you.

Pathetic, empathetic slurs on your conviction.

There is nothing like a hare to contemplate you,

bound away as flesh, stop there.

Island Widow

Bright coins from a mermaid’s purse dissolving in the sea;

an evening made of orange light;
a single apple tree

out of the wind, behind a drystone wall on which a cup of tea

sits cooling, waiting for a man who no one else can see.

Similes

The white hills balanced like pebbles on the windowsill.

The stopped watch crouched like a lizard on the old man’s wrist.

Stone Axehead

At twenty one I borrowed it from the shadows of an uncle’s palm;

now I keep it on my bedside table to ward off the dead and sometimes lure them closer.

It is very smooth: a wedge-shaped lozenge of discoloured stone green as a serpent’s eye.

It came out of a field far to the north, in Caithness where the shadows end and where the slate walls break my heart with dreams of Orkney.

Pears Soap

A pre-war scent;

cracked dryness, sweetening and going airborne to the touch of water;

lavender and balsamum and chords of palm oil, drifting through the bathrooms of a hundred fallen houses.

Border Christmas

24.12.2013

Hailstones caught on cobwebs spiderless and tattered in the wind stiffen and wax the whiter.

So the strands of draggled wool laced intermittently on hedgesows and barbed wire turn murkier and ragged as the dyer’s hand consumed by what it works in.

So the turning year falling away behind us like a snow-flecked slope grows indistinct; an arbitrary imposition in our minds upon the wind funneled through clogged gutters and the muddy flux impending in the spotless whiteness of the coming year.

The Confession of Chancellor

Nicolas Rolin

– Jan van Eyck, c.1435

The man is insignificant; merely a crocodile in human form kneeling before a young girl and her child whose chubby hands rough nails must soon deform. He stares irresolutely at the wee boy’s face, unsettled by a thing so mild. The baby looks ahead, to Calvary.

His mother is a triangle of red fabric, erupting from the floor to shock the praying chancellor: the blood of Christ, supposedly, and so a door into another world, in which the dead confront their lives. A toasted flood of aurubus cascades downwards from her head.

The infant in her arms is very old. His scalp is visible through wisps of thistledown; a dandelion clock meeting a breath. His painted flesh is crisp. A hundred hairline cracks distort its folds like ice under a foot. He is a rock; the symbol of an undivided world.

Over that tiny brow an angel waves a golden crown. The chancellor’s thin eyes dart upward for a second, while van Eyck swaps brushes. Jan is unsurprised and lets his subject settle. Soon the grave will swallow all of this. Each word now strikes a sin. Rolin speaks quickly: ‘Lord, forgive –
Grigor’s Gifts
SHORT STORY BY LIZ GRAFTON

It took them a little while to find me in the morning. They didn’t expect me to be in the shed. I asked for water and they hurried to bring it, and fresh-baked rolls with blackcurrant jam, and an apple.

Bottoms strode, out into the cold and across to the outhouse. The hens poked along the end wall burred their rising ‘here’s someone coming’ caution to each other, but stayed put. Below them was a cobbled-together pen, containing about a dozen rabbits, some stretched out, looking half dead, others sifting in the straw. The now familiar strange smell was stronger in here, and stung the back of my nose. I looked around. Shelves holding jars and demijohns, tubing, metal clamps; over in the corner, a pile of tyres. And on the table a large old paint tin. I found a spoon in one of the jars and levered the lid. Inside was a greasy, treacly substance, like black vinegar, the source of the smell.

‘DON’T’ Nun-too-Clever rushed in. ‘Don’t touch it Sister. It’s nasty stuff.’

‘Goodness, Sister, what a fright you gave me.’

‘I’m sorry Sister.’ Nun-too-Clever put the lid firmly back on the tin. ‘It’s to mend the stove with. The buildings. All the cracks. If we don’t do something, the place will fall down around our ears.’ And she told me what she’d been doing, and what she’d done with her failed attempts. It hadn’t mattered to begin with, the old bath was large and sturdy enough for a day. And then the snow had come, covering it all up. But with the thaw and the rains, the bath had filled and the water spilled over. It seemed the animals had been drinking at the puddles.

The light dimmed and I looked up to see Nun-the-Wiser outlined in the doorway, with Nun-of-the-Kind at her shoulder. They glowered at Nun-too-Clever, who glared back.

‘Look what you’ve done.’ Nun-the-Wiser indicated the rabbit pen. ‘Poison. Sister. Think about it.’

‘Yes. And finding a cure uses up all my herbs, not to mention my time, Sister. Think about it.’ Nun-too-Clever waved her arms in exasperation. ‘But, if we don’t secure the buildings, it’ll be immaterial whether there are animals or not, or whether you can cure anyone, because we won’t survive. Sisters. Think about it.’ Strong words, plainly spoken.

All three looked at me expectantly. If we didn’t mend the walls, we’d be homeless. If we did mend the walls, animals got poisoned. Curing the animals depleted our resources; if we didn’t mend the animals we wouldn’t be able to mend the walls, up with an unhealthy heap, to mention the suffering and the morality issues. Making the medicines needed buildings with a roof. Selling the wall fixer could bring in money to buy more supplies. The thoughts chased each other around and round my head and I could not see no way out. Who would have thought our strengths would turn out to be our undoing?

I said I would give them an answer in the morning and retreated to my room. I must have looked weary, because later, Nun-of-the-Kind popped up with the Baileys and a mug; and after her came Nun-the-Wiser, with her Rubayat in case it might help. And Nun-too-Clever was playing one of Grigor’s tunes on the elder-twig penny-whistle. A kind thought, but it brought back memories I’d sooner not face. And I don’t want even to look at that dratted fox. So I am having a wee drink filling the Cup before Lifu Lintong in its Cup be dry, and hoping it will ease the pain in my back, and the tightening in my stomach.

It took them a little while to find me in the morning. They didn’t expect me to be in the shed. I asked for water and they hurried to bring it, and fresh-baked rolls with blackcurrant jam, and an apple. I let them each hold the bundle, which smelled not of fox but of warm hazelnuts and salt.

Through the open door of the shed I can see across to the birches on the slopes of the Sgurr, white-trunked and purple-branched in the sunlight, their daintiness belying their strength. If an answer to all this is to be found, if there is a way forward for our ideas that ought to have worked but didn’t quite line up, it will need to be like the birches. I think; having something of flexibility and tenacity, able to find purchase in this field of stones and grass; if we are to steer a course through the Wise, the Clever and the Kind, that somehow accommodates us all. I look down at my beautiful daughter, wonder at how tiny she is, and feel the beginnings of hope. Because Grigor’s gift to me, to all of us, is Nun-the-Less.
**At Ceos**
**Alison Scott**

The lochan rose pink last night around the boat, hull reflected perfectly in shaft of navy blue. Later the half-moon cast a shrouded light over Loch Erisort. This morning at the window, a painted lady fluttered to get in, and, later, the wind has risen, the water a shifting glitter, ripples as clouds are driven softly across the sun. Still the boat moored between us and the little islet does not move. Earlier, a fishing boat left quietly, and you left too to fish inshore. So I can sit alone and look and let the dull brown dragonfly settle on the rock beside me, twitching transparent wings, long tail rising as cloud and sun come and go and she casts her own light shadow onto the grey rock, as the trees move in the wind, each with its own sound.

**Chairm Agin Watter-Elf Disease**
**Thomas Clark**

Gif ye be stricken bi the watter-elf’s disease –

bi the fingernails will ye ken it, fur thay will be haw;
bi the een will ye ken it, fur thay will be watshod;
bi the stare will ye ken it, fur it will be doun.

Remeed is this; thair’s pennyroyal, Thristle an risp grass an lupin an lily, Y erb o marshmallow an strawberry leaf, Betonica, comfrey, an alacampine, Smeddum o eller, bunewand o docken, Wormit an yewberry, horehound an dill. Kirn it aw in wae some sauntifeed watter, Grind up wae wattermint, draigle wae beer, Than ower the pheesic this chairm cry three times:

_This wound-written werriour Ah will make fere;_
_Lat his hurt neither birn nor burst beae bluid,_
_Nor spreid tae his fower quarters, nor atter fill._
_Lat this skaithe goose na, an thab na, _
_An be ludge tae nae thing quick; but heal itsel hail,_
_An leave nae mair mert than the swaw agin the shore._

Sing this mony times syne, an the yird in aw her micht will beir aff yer blaud. This chairm men’s kin mey sing oan ony wound.

---

**Bait Bucket**
**Jan Sutch Pickard**

In an abandoned bait bucket, gooseneck barnacles have set up home among traces of the original owners – waving wrathms of maggots.

This bucket rolling on the tide-line is boiling with busyness, with creatures to raise goosebumps or make you gag – what are they like, gooseneck-barnacles?

Pale bivalve shells, like birds’ heads attached to stretching necks of livid flesh (necks that are really feet) that wag and grope blindly and squirm, while the shell heads turn as though curious, or gossipping, gape like beaks; greedy, they compete for the last few maggots: a tight little colony feeding off each other:

a gaggle of gooseneck-barnacles, a shellfish village, a can of worms.

**Attic Sound Track**
**Joan Lennon**

rain on the roof
gentle static
the mysterious scuffle of
... something
the tiny ping that stars make
coming out in the blue dusk
the shush of snow
sliding down the slates

---

**The Language of Parrots**
**Katherine Lockton**

Winter, and we don’t even kiss.
Instead our tongues hide from each other, in indifference.
You suggest counselling, but we know only magic will do so we call the local magus who prescribes Parrot droppings each night, before sunset.
At first we take them religiously, setting alarms up everywhere around the house but when nada happens we double our dosage of droppings. After the fourth day we start coughing up feathers, first green, then red, then blue ones. Our magus tells us to stop the treatment but you insist he’s wrong. On the fifth day we both sense otherness. Our tongues coated in coloured feathers, it’s hard to talk now so we use signs only to forget what each sign means. I think you’re asking for bread, but you’re angry when I pass a slice. We forget what it is to speak.

On the sixth day you start to say something when I do. We open our mouths, and watch as parrots fly out. We sit back, clutching our throats, our tongues flown from their nests.
‘Thorkell. Where’s Hildr?’

‘They could be very persistent, these trows who argued, that fire flourished. The villagers were not so shy of their cacophony, and as I looked across the pool and drew closer. A piece of partially o’ ye.’

But it wasn’t a trow.

I felt Hildr’s hand in mine as the first spots

But then I thought – perhaps a fisherman could be made of him after all.

He staggered backwards, as if my words had struck him physically, and all fight, all anger, and all hope drained from his face. ‘Then it is decided,’ he said. ‘She is no longer a daughter of mine.’

The child never came and Hildr changed.

Spring, Not that an outsider would know. They see little change between the seasons on this island; the signs are imperceptible to them, but one morning there was a streak of bone coloured light between sky and water. The ocean heaved a sigh beneath the clouds, the wind stopped its yo-yo and the prospect of fishing returned.

From my doorway I looked towards the shore and to the small stone building where my skiff had sheltered throughout the winter. It would be good to go to the fishing banks at last, to have my boat dance across the waves, experience the breeze on my face, and to feel alive again.

But just then, without warning, a draught of shining black-blue flashed past my head. I ducked and instinctively raised an arm in protection. A crow had flown into the cottage and settled on the kitchen table. It was stabbing its beak into the house.

I entered the circle of stones, into a vacuum of silence. And something else, a sensed presence that disturbed my reason; a feeling that something wicked was nearby.

I thought myself a smile and thought that perhaps even a worthless fisherman like me might be of some use after all.

Our fishing days were long and we flourished. The villagers were not so shy of their cacophony, and as I looked across the pool and drew closer. A piece of partially o’ ye.’

At first light the following morning Svienn Olafsson came to me. A simple lad from the village, (there were those that said he was three-quarters daft), who I hadn’t seen since Hildr had vanished and presumed that the others had poisoned his mind of me. He offered work in return for a share of any catch. I agreed if for nothing else but to ease my loneliness and, although no fisherman, he was strong, smiling and not one for idle chat or questioning. I remembered how his help had been welcomed when Hildr and I first started. She had wanted a small plot beside the cottage for vegetables, herbs and even flowers. These things were new to me; things to do with the land; digging, sowing, weeding, reaping. Tasks I couldn’t do when my priority was the sea.

With Hildr’s guidance Svienn proved to be a good worker. She was happy then and at the end of a day walking homewards from the shore I could hear her singing melodies that were as clear and sweet in the air as from any songbird.

I offered work in return for a share of any catch. I agreed if for nothing else but to ease my loneliness and, although no fisherman, he was strong, smiling and not one for idle chat or questioning. I remembered how his help had been welcomed when Hildr and I first started. She had wanted a small plot beside the cottage for vegetables, herbs and even flowers. These things were new to me; things to do with the land; digging, sowing, weeding, reaping. Tasks I couldn’t do when my priority was the sea.

With Hildr’s guidance Svienn proved to be a good worker. She was happy then and at the end of a day walking homewards from the shore I could hear her singing melodies that were as clear and sweet in the air as from any songbird.

But I had to send Svienn away when we lost the child.

A few days later, when the signs were more favourable, Svienn and I dragged the skiff across rattling pebbles into the surf and jumped aboard. I raised the sail. It cracked and flapped loudly until the wind filled the canvas and the boat leaped forward. I saw fear on Svienn’s face as he cowered in the prow; holding onto the gunwales with limp hands as the skiff rose and fell against the incoming surf. But then, as the craft settled on its course, Svienn’s broad smile reappeared and he stood up, turned fore and like a child he began shouting and hollering with whoops and roars.

Then I thought – perhaps a fisherman could be made of him after all.

But then there was that noise again; like the scuff of a rat in a roof or the rub of a razor on a strop. I swept the torch through the air in an arc of roaring flame and raised my cudgel.

‘Who’s there,’ I challenged. ‘I’m no’ heart o’ ye.’

But I was.

I saw a flash of metal at the edge of the pool and drew closer. A piece of partially buried silver chain was lying on the moss. I pulled it free and on its pendant was the figure of St Andrew, the fisher of men and I realised it was the selfsame necklace I had given to my Hildr.

I fell to my knees in shock and looked blankly into the pool. In its depths I saw her. Hildr. She lay naked, as if asleep.

The trow must have stuck me from behind. I felt a weight on my chest and I couldn’t move.

I opened my eyes. The stars were racing across the vast darkness of the sky as if the universe was spinning at an astonishing speed.

Then I realised I was underwater and saw the trow looking down at me, grinning, pointing to the dangling necklace.

But it wasn’t a trow.

It was Svienn.

I felt Hildr’s hand in mine as the first spots of autumn rain blurred the surface of the pool, turned to smoke at her.

‘I’ve returned,’ she said. ‘At last,’ I said.
Sisters
Maggie Wallis
A wall intersects our city.
I barely think of you.
Sometimes I do
try to imagine
life on the other side.
Come up with a brick wall.

If there were a loose brick
I could ease it out
create a chink
glimpse your peering eye, whisper.
We could touch fingertips
get an inkling.

Near Inchnadamph
Ian Mcfadyen
A full day’s journey taking us
into the long highland twilight,
all the mountains of Assynt
backlit in gold or red -
the frayed summit of Stac Pollaidh,
and Suilven from Elphin,
the other side of the sugar-loaf
a great serrated blade.

Near Inchnadamph,
a sudden white house
with a stand of the only trees for miles,
rough grazing, a desultory fence…
and within it two horses,
tough, solid little highlanders,
a dappled grey, a brown.
We know them,
milestones on the journey
we are always quietly
satisfied to see.

But today they are three,
a tight, companionable trinity,
heads down, absorbed in their grazing,
and in the centre
a red deer stag, full antlers exaggerating
each movement of his princely head
as he tugs the coarse grass.

We press on, the image sinking in,
not sure just what it is
that leaves us wondering.

Andromeda on All Hallows Eve
Jane Aldous
Leaving the light of the caravan,
I was half expecting the crows
emptying out the crows and jackdaws,
the tidal fields of gulls and greese,
pyres of buzzthorn, hawthorn, rowan,
waves of storm-lobbed clouds
but when night bolted the door
I saw stars unravel,
constellations snap into place.
Then east of Cassiopeia
a tight-knit galaxy, a luminous coven,
concealed in a cloak of its own brilliance,
moving through the thin end of the year,
almost silent.

Sù Marbh
Pàdraig MacAoidh
Nuair a mhothaicheas tu
gu bheil ur 5 bliadhna còmhla a’ tighinn gu crìch
rachadh dhan t-sù
an teas-meadhàn Bhaile Átha Cliath:
a dh’haicinn a’ pheileagan neo-thorrach air a h-ugh,
an tigear tìmghach na chlìabh
an orang-utan a’ crochadh le beag an ùidh
on spirs, agus an giraffe
rag na stùic.

Chan e seo an sù marbh
le fàirgeall na h-Ìmpireachd: cotan-pasgaidh,
stùilean-glamine, ’s grùthan ’s ára
’s sgamhan ’s crìde
ann am brochan de formaldehyde;
creutairean nach robh riamh ann ’s nach deach a bhith –
skivader, jackalope, griffin, mermaid
seasmhach le leth-tunna de ghairimreach,
craiceann nathrach agus neas (hey presto, haidra!) –
ar mac-meamna tar-chinealach
a’ cruthachadh drach ùr: piseag le plocan na lámh,
coineanach ann an spoil sglèatach.

Tha an sù seo, leth-marbh, na chànaimh.
Seall an càraig balbh ron a’ ghran!
An seo cha theid càil a gheidheadh. Chan eil càil ri rádh.
Babel
By James Sinclair

1. Da Wife

Had dee horses!
A’m no finnished wi dee yet.
How could du, joost how could du?

Wi yun harlot, du dirty lipper
an dee makkin laek du’s innocent
does du no tink dat I hae eyes in me heid.

Does du no tink I canna see da guilty look i dy een.
Does du no tink I canna smell her scent
hit wis laekin oot o dy skein laek pooshin.

Me an midder A’ll no be able ta hadd
wir heids’s up i da kirk on Sunday.
An whit about dy peerie lass, Jessie.

Du’s no geen her muckle o a start in life, has du?
Du’s fur nae use, me midder ay said dat.
I joost hoope naebody saw dee oagin aboot up yunder.

Dey’ll be some sport i da shop on seterday if dey have.
Dey’ll be beside demsel wi da excitement o hit aa.
I blame da minister, he has nae backbone dat man
if he’d hed ta mak fur da hoose at Hillside.

2. Da Husband

Whit have I done, joost whit have I done?
A’m laid open Pandora’s box
A’m set free a pit o serpents.

Christ shu’s mad, A’m niver seen her laek yun afore.
Mind you, wan look at her midder
sood a geen me some kind o a clue.

Shu sits i da corner aa cled in black
gless beads fur een an da beak o a corbie.

Ina staands afore me wi her hands on her hips
yalderin aa kinds o abuse at me.
Does shu no tink dat I feel bad enoch
Does shu no tink dat if I could o undone dis mess, I wid have.

Weel maybe if shu’d been a bit mair willin
I wid’n’a hed ta mak fur da hoose at Hillside.
A’m no gotten a sniff at her, fae shu fell pregnant
an yun’s wir Jessie tree come her birthday.

A man can ony tak sae muckle, da boys
telling me foo good hit wis an wi twartree drams
as a da peerie bit o wat I hed, fled wi da wind.
Charlotte wis willin, pleable an warm.

Shu certainly kens foo ta mak a man blyde.
I doubt my days around here are numbered.
A’ll hae ta see if I can get a berth
get back ta sea an get da hell oot o here.

3. Da Gossip

Listen up fok, you ken fine weel
A’n no een fur sheeksin.

But whit Bells saw dis past Sunday
A’ll mak your legs piirk up, I wid warrant.

Shu aye keeps a close watch
on da comin’s an goin’s at Hillside.

Yea, I towt you micht want ta hear mair.
Wha did shu see, but Ertie fae da hooses
creepin trough dir kale yard i da early oors.

He wiss a takkin’ his usual gair
By dir front door an dat maks you winder
but oagin laek a drookit rat among da tattie shös.

An yun hoor settin pretty in her brothel
up da hill, laek shu’s da Queen.

Göd fok duna deserve yun kind o behaviour.
Da minister sood a said something lang fae syne.

I mean ta say, you mind da time
Chaarlie o Brake lost aa dir rent money.

He cam hame foo as an eeg, a smeeg aa ower his face
an no a penay in his pocket. Dey nearly ended up i da poor hoose dat time.

4. Da Harlot

So A’m da een ta blame fur aa o dis.
Dir maybe furryat dat hit taks twa ta birl.
If dey wir gettin hit at hame
dey micht’a be sae keen ta mak da visit.

Dunna get me wrang A’m no adverse ta
some male company; hae a bit o a laugh
an if dey come wi a gless o gin dan aa da better.
So if I liberate twartree shillings fur da back pocket
I see dat as ony fair, wha will dey tell onywye.
I hae hungry bairns ta feed an cled
wha’s fedders tak little ur no interest i dir upbringing.
Da women wid o shaested me oot o here years fae syne.

If dey hed dir woy, dey micht even a done worse.
Dey blame da minister fur no makkin a staand.
A’m seen da look in his een, da look dat aa men
get whin dat need dey hae starts da temperature rsin.

Dey come trough my door, lambs ta da slaughter
bulderin hill rams, dir dander up
an wance dir spent, dey geng hame laek
a cast hug, dir tails atween dir leegs.

Me felder maks sure we’ll no starve
But fur aa dat, he’ll no look me i da ee
ur utter a single wold ta me ur da bairns.
He’s dat busy balin his money at da Kirk.

I da vain hoop da göd man taks notice
an welcomes him wi open airms at da pearly gates.

Weel A’ll tell you aa something.
Dir ir mair sins i da world as mine alone.
In defence of the Crane Fly
Jon Plunkett

The adult is known as Whopper, Gollywhomper or Daddy Longlegs.
It is a weak insect, a poor flyer
(easily snatched from the air).
It is drawn to light, rests with wings outspread.
The slender abdomen has no scales or sting
(is soft and defenceless).
It has small antenna, and gynoscope flight controls behind each wing.
The six long legs are thin,
(can be pulled off one by one).
Its purpose is to find a mate, to procreate, then die.
They have no mouth with which to bite
(or scream).

No carbon footprint, or Home grown
Gordon Jarvie

Strawberry plants: a gift to my son from someone at work, then gifted from him to me. “Maybe strawberries for tea in a year or three,” he quipped. For a while they lay there dunked in a bucket of water. Then I stuck them among gravel beside the back door, unceremoniously.
Their first year saw them stretch tentacle runners into the sun. I fought these runners, cut them off. This year it seems I’ve won. They’ve flowered like fury, berries formed, swelled, reddened in hot sun. Daily I nipped slugs and bugs, chased off blackbirds. Finally I picked ripe fruit – more and more of it taking the place of earlier trusses. It was magical. The Sorcerer’s Apprentice had nothing on our strawberries. They were magnificent, best in Fife, best in my life.
Poems from The Highland Literary Salon Poetry Competition

The theme for this year’s competition was ‘Roots’

First Prize

**Fuadach 1492**  
**Marcas Mac An Tuairneir**

Air aithche ar fuadaich,  
Chuir mo mhàthair am menorah  
Aosta am màla carrach,  
Paigfe am fìlleag sìoda  
A shìubhail lem athair  
O na h-Innseachan.

Chuir i cùl  
Rì bhaile Girona,  
Far an dèanadh ar cinneadh  
Ar àrach,  
An agulhan-mhaighstir,  
Len mìthaid a’ leanann  
Litrianchan miseichte  
Ar làmh-sgriobhainnean.

Far a-nis a sgriobhadh  
Sgeulachd eilthireachd ùr  
Nàn lidhail, a  
Phaisgich am màilleid  
Fò chabhadh titheil  
Is fuachd an eagail san smior.

Bho mhullach an teampaill,  
Leis a dh’uinneagan is  
Dòrsan dùinte,  
Chuala gach acarsaid Iberia  
An aon ghuth fo èislean  
Rì sheinn  
Shama Yisrael.

Chuir iad ceithir mìosan seachad,  
Gach lorg ar muinntire  
A spìonadh a’ bun.  
Thionndaich i thugam,  
A’ togal mo làmh is ag ràdh:  
“Thig a m’ eudail  
Is eàrntach an àite seo.  
Cuir sùil ris an Ear.  
Cuir fàilte air  
Gairm a’ chuain.”

Clearance 1492  
**Marcas Mac An Tuairneir**

On the night of our clearance,  
My mother placed the old menorah  
In a scratchy sack,  
Wrapped in a silken scarf  
That journeyed with my father  
From India.

She turned her back  
On the city of Girona,  
Where our kindred  
Sprung forth  
In the rabbinic schools  
The gilded letters  
Of our manuscripts.

Where, now, would be writ  
A new tale of emigration  
For the Jews  
In hasty peace  
And the chill of terror to the marrow:

From the vault of the synagogue  
With its casements  
And doorways boarded,  
Every anchorage in Iberia  
Heard the same grieving voice  
Chanting  
Shama Yisrael.

In a mere four months,  
They eradicated  
Every trace of our people.

She turned to me,  
Taking my hand and she said  
“Come, my love  
And leave this place.  
Keep your eye to the East,  
And embrace  
The call of the waves.”

Runner Up

**Done Up**  
**Jared Carnie**

She’d been meaning to have it done for years.  
Every time a guest went in the upstairs bathroom  
She felt the need to apologise.  
She hated the rusty taps.  
She hated the sickly green of the wall.  
She hated the way the carpet  
Reminded her of an old people’s home.  
She hated anyone seeing it.  
That is, until the storm came  
And blew a willow  
Strait through the front wall of the house  
Exposing the bathroom  
For the whole town to see.

After that she realised  
Maybe it wasn’t such a big deal.
First Prize

He Has Written to the Council
Asking for Stars
JULIET ANThILL

He slips the painter of his brother’s boat
and rows it out across the loch,
sunk in Lyra, Pegasus, Aquila.

A night’s worth of dreams condenses on the window
where the curtains don’t quite meet. In the kitchen
he crackles the radio, butters toast.
A hungry mountain pierces the mist. It seems,
since she went, there is always a frost.

He takes the letter and reads it over
through the narrow shaft of his vision;
holds it high before him like the minister.

It was Angus who started it. Angus wrote
asking for lights, said it wasn’t right
their end of the street should be un-lit, and besides,
lights are what the visitors expect.
Angus has no interest in the stars.

For himself, he’ll be glad when the visitors stop.
They stay later every year.

He only went out for a smoke.
When he was young the darkness never troubled him.
The dark was never truly dark.

He leaves the letter, unposted, on the side
and heads down to the loch, where the bareknuckle
rowan rattles her beautiful fruit.

The water itself has caught the frost.

Runner Up

Coming Home
GILL TERRY

Familiar postcard images fragment
into loose watercolours, wet in wet
between each pass of wiper blades.
The metronome beats on a muffled drum.

I turn at the township road.
Braids of pitiless rain, grey as ashes,
become the corrugations of crofters’ roofs.
The line between earth and sky is lost.

Silence in church:
faces to the front, no eye contact
I am led in like a prisoner
cursing my smart shoes for their heels
raucous on the wooden floor.
The shock of the coffin close enough to touch.

The minister in his crown’s nest speaks of sin.
I want to argue that she wasn’t that bad really.
I am sorry now if I suggested otherwise.
A long line of hands to shake in the lobby
and surely some are going round twice it takes so long.

In the graveyard at the bealach
Council boys in yellow jackets
frantically pump out the water.
I follow the hearse up the hill road.
We drive at snail’s pace to give them time.
The compassion of bracken fronds layered over mud.

Finally, the performance of the carry.
The sodden sheet of paper
from which the names are read:
Caley MacIvor, Blondie MacLeod, Black Bob
like characters from a gangster movie.

For what is funny about so many good suits spoiling in the rain
a coffin lowered on eight black cords like seaside crabbing lines
and the Council boys, jumping from their truck
before the last car has started back along the road
to tuck her in before the swaddling soil
is washed away.
winning poems from The Baker Prize
Watching Robert Duffin

Baker Prize Short Story Competition Winner

By Connie Ramsay Bott

Y ou're not going to die. Your mother's not going to die. I'm not going to die. At least not any time soon. Now stop worrying, turn off the television and go and do something constructive. Worrying is not constructive.

My parents never let me watch the news. They say there is no point. Mom says I take things too much to heart; I'm just too sensitive. Dad says I have morbid curiosity; I dwell on horror. They say the news has nothing to do with me. What do I care if there is an earthquake in Turkey, a flood in China? These things are far away, and no amount of feeling bad can help the people involved. And knowing lots of details is just sick.

Mom says childhood should be a happy time. When I was little, and used to dream about the bombers coming, I'd call out in my sleep. I'd see my bedroom in flames, bricks and rubble scattered everywhere. Mom would take me into their bed, telling me to keep quiet so I wouldn't wake Dad. Once, when I started crying and woke him, he said to Mom, 'What now?'

Mom explained that I had had a nightmare about the house being bombed. He said to me, 'Don't you worry, Ruth. John Wayne will come and save you. And then he said to Mom, 'No more war. The a movie for her.' And he turned over and was snoring in about two minutes.

Three years ago, when I was about eight, we had the Cuban Missile Crisis. It was really scary. Everyone was talking about it. The boys in my class said the Russians were going to bomb us all. They said they were going to join the Army as soon as they were eighteen, and were going to save the U.S.A., and all of us girls, if there was anyone alive left to save. They didn't sound scared at all. They sounded really excited, and spent a lot of time acting out battles in the playground.

I did a sort of survey. I asked every teacher I knew if there was going to be a war. Almost all of them said things like 'I hope not,' or 'Whatever happens, I'm sure we'll be safe here in Cleveland.' Mr. Franks, the gym teacher said, 'It doesn't look good.' Only Mr. Talbot, the sixth grade teacher, said 'No. It will all blow over. You'll see.'

And when it did, I decided that he was the smartest man I knew. When he would see me in the hall after that he used to wink at me. Even now, when I see someone wink, I feel like they must have some special knowledge to make them feel so confident about things.

Now the Vietnam War is a different thing all together. It's all still about Communism, but I don't understand much more than that.

When I visit Grandma we watch the news, and she lets me read the newspapers. I wish I understood how it worked, and why young men go to the other side of the world to fight. I wonder if it makes it easier to kill someone if he is a different race, and doesn't even speak the same language. Grandma says the military teaches you to hate, so it makes it easier to fight and kill. She says it's necessary, to keep the world safe from Communism.

Up until a month ago, talking to Grandma was as close as I'd come to the war in Vietnam. Then something really terrible happened.

There's a boy who lives across the road from us. His name is Robert Duffin. I didn't notice him until two years ago, when he was sixteen, and got his first car. It was old and very noisy.
When I chapped the door, it opened at once. It felt like he’d been expecting me and standing there waiting. Our eyes locked. He said, ‘Welcome home.’

The words Welcome home gave me a feeling of safety. Feeling safe isn’t the same as actually being safe, but the feelings you get from situations take you to places you can’t get to if you pay too much attention to how things actually are. I also knew that sometimes when two bodies hold together as closely as can be, skin to skin, they are enclosed in a mysterious space invisible to the eye, and this space is at the core of things and the two bodies are safe in it.

I said, ‘I’m here to bring you exciting news for people who like to eat in the best restaurants, and isn’t that all of us?’

When I tried to hand him a leaflet, he hugged me. I caught a sigh which seemed to turn into the name Alastair, forced out by overwhelming relief. The leaflet was crushed between us. The hug went on for a long time. The home scents flooding out from the flat reached deep into me like the scents of my own home.

‘Not Alastair,’ I said. ‘David.’

‘At last you’re here,’ he said. His tone made me think of someone saying again what they’d said before so as to correct the other person’s mishearing. ‘Alastair, David ... What does it matter, now, what you call yourself?’

He was patting my back, driving into me the feeling of all being well again.

‘See, the six number one restaurants in your area,’ I said while he patted, ‘have joined the campaign. By hugging me. ‘All you have to do is sign here and then you’re a Finedine Gourmet Voucher holder. Eat at one of these six number one restaurants and get six vouchers, worth £60, to start you on this exciting adventure, regular dining in six number one restaurants.’

He said, ‘The longer I kept faith that I’d find you at the door one day, the more I knew that just the fact of my keeping faith would bring a return. I’ll get champagne. It’s been chilling!’

I said, ‘There’s the Lotus Bloom, voted one of the three best Chinese restaurants in Glasgow.’

If this didn’t feel like the Miss Havisham scenario, could it be a version of the Sexy Stranger At The Door scenario? Someone—it could be a woman or a man—answers the door and on the doorstep is this compellingly attractive stranger; a plumber or electrician, say. Perhaps even a Mormon. Or a guy—not bad-looking, by the way, despite all the knocks—who’s reduced to delivering leaflets for some crackpot dating-out scheme. Maybe the stranger peels off his tee-shirt at once, insolently, a challenge, a risk, and he has a body to die for that turns vulnerable while his head’s lost in the tee-shirt he’s removing. No words have to be spoken, eyes lock, there’s instant awareness of irresistible mutual attraction, etcetera, and it’s straight to the bedroom for wild sex.

Up to a point, I liked feeling I was in that scenario, because when the past and future seem m, as they do when you’re not strangers, all the real revelations get dulled over.

But that scenario doesn’t allow for kindred spirits.

I could hear him in the kitchen as I studied the picture above the mantelpiece, a large oil painting, not a print. It showed tenement roofs in town. I had a fanciful idea about it that felt very familiar and comforting; the fat stately well-wrapped-up woman foreshortened down on the pavement was fetching medicine from the chemist for a sick neighbour across the landing, and later there would be a moment of happiness between them like the touch of something eternal only recognised when looking back.

He returned with a bottle and two glasses on a tray, poured champagne for both of us, and sat down in the facing armchair. ‘To us.’

‘To us,’ I said back. I thought of another time when I’d said this to a guy whose body and mind had the authority to turn the life I already possessed into someone else’s past.

He said, ‘So it didn’t work out as you imagined.’

One sign that the person in the facing chair is your kindred spirit is the feeling he’s reading the direction of your thoughts.

I said, ‘Where your kindred spirit is concerned, things often don’t work out as you imagined and you walk away.’

I should point out that the phrase kindred spirit has become debased. People just use it to mean someone you have something in common with—you both like football or share political views. But emphasise kindred and you can see a deeper meaning: two people who are kin beneath the skin and always have been and always will be, no matter how different they are and how different their lives, and no matter what things they say and do to each other that cause stumbles and separations and get in the way. They know each other always, and that’s true even when they doubt that they’re kindred spirits.

I said, ‘When I was twenty-something I was obsessed by this idea that I’d meet him in totally ordinary circumstances like popping out late at night to buy milk.’

I related my story of how one night around eleven I went out for milk to a corner shop in Maryhill Road and then hung around outside in the darkness and drizzle waiting for him, capital a, to turn up on the same errand.

‘Our eyes would lock and the feeling would hit us that we were fated for each other, etcetera. We’d walk back to my flat together like we had no alternative, and that would be it for evermore. And I waited and waited, trying to make eye contact with guys who came to the shop, strangers, trying to radio them the message: Here I am: we’ve been waiting for each other all our lives.’

He kept nodding impatiently, as though hurrying me to get to the punchline of a joke that was familiar, which was a bit irritating.

‘During lulls I’d look in the shop window and there were tins of pink salmon and a card of girls’ combs with glittery bits in the plastic and pipe cleaners and boxes of oats and boxes of washing powder and batteries and bubble-blowing kits, so many things that told you what people were like because they might buy these things.

‘And then the police came. The shopkeeper had called them because I was hanging around and peering in like I was choosing my moment for a robbery. I couldn’t have been a very convincing robber and they went off when I told them I was waiting to catch someone who did shopping there. That was before everyone had mobiles. You can’t explain to the police that you’re looking...’

www.kindredspirits.net
for your kindred spirit. But people are, more often than they think.

He said, ‘Even when they’ve already found him.’

I showed 100% agreement by nodding vigorously. ‘Finding him makes you walk away to look for him. Oh, and I mustn’t forget the Delhi Deh, where the real Indians dined out and buy their delicacies to take home.’

‘We won’t eat out tonight,’ he said. ‘It’ll be good just to be quietly at home together. There’s a lamb casserole heating—you like lamb casserole, don’t you?’ The words, considered just as words, could have been used by an anxious host worried that his dinner-party menu wouldn’t be to his guest’s liking, but the way he said them, it felt like someone remembering something and just then I knew that his lamb casserole would be just how I liked it, with the meateness overlaid by sweetness.

I said, ‘And Family Fare, a really family-friendly restaurant where kids have their own menu and are really, really welcome.’

‘You want to adopt?’

‘And Beefed Up, started by three girls who used to work in a burger chain, you know which one, and wanted to show the world what real burgers could be like. Joanna Blythman gave it 10 out of 10 in—’

Walking in complete darkness was quite good fun until I suddenly lost my bearings and when, later, decorously, without hurrying the moment, knowing each other, we undressed did in the hills above Naples.’ And the lamb casserole was exactly as I’d expected, and I fluctuated between these two feelings, and still he sat there without moving, and the second one was getting stronger, gripping me like an incontrovertible fact. I’d have to put my clothes back on and leave, totally ridiculous, shamed forever.

Until he said, ‘Perhaps there are some things you can never really walk away from.’

I said, ‘And Secrets, the night club restaurant where top performers entertain you while you dine and dance the night away.’

He got up and walked across and embraced me, though it was awkward because I was in the armchair and he had to lean over to do it, which meant he couldn’t press me to him in token of safety. But afterwards I was able to put my clothes back on without feeling foolish at all, and I said, ‘And last but not least, Luigi’s, the Italian restaurant where they make all their own pasta just like Luigi’s grandmother did in the hills above Naples.’ And the lamb casserole was exactly as I’d expected, and when, later, decorously, without hurrying the moment, knowing each other, we undressed and got into bed, that mysterious invisible thing clamped to our heads that we call memories opened up and we were safe in it and that space is my eternal home.
Galtymore Dew

JOHN QUINN

Cue a greyhound track in post bellum Scotland. Galtymore Dew has just romped home refulgent. The miners in this somewhere don’t like it much, grim grins like once adjacent piano keys.

They spy strangers in the house in no spa town and trust the result the way they would trust gas, sift through lists of coal dusted moot responses, form a liver salts crowd, tart, fizzing, angry.

The strangers send out a slim dark haired woman to garner impossibly well gotten gains as miners form a curt guard of dishonour, let the lady through to man handled pound notes.

Anon the strangers exit stage anywhere. Family in flight their Egypt is northwards. Like the three wise men they take a different route. There were many mansions in my mother’s house.

Dorcha

MAGGIE RABATSKI

Oidheach reòitha meadhàn na Déibhlachd:

sinn air t-slighe dhlachadh,
gabhail tarsann air an Drochaid Chàin,

mo charaid rim thaoibh a bruidhinn
mun chàrdagan uaine àlainn
a cheannais i an-duigh dhà nighean,

ach tha ma’ aire-sa air solais gheanail
baile Ghlaschu, a’ tseachd astar mhìleann
fo iarrnaite gheur a’ gheamhradh–

nuair a chiuimhnicheas mi
mar bhualle dhamh bhodhaig
nach eil thusa rid long

an aon oisean dhèn bhual mhòr seo

Is gu h-òban
thig dubharach air an àit’,
na stèidean a-nise cho uaigneach
ri raointean sgaoilte Shraith Nabhair,
far an tèid sinn a dh’athghurr

gus do leigeil dhachaigh ris a’ ghaosail

Beathachadh

MAGGIE RABATSKI

Tha ghrian a’ teàrnadh gu iar
nuair a dheann Màiri-Anna dhan phàirc,
basgaid air a gàirdean.

Tha na fir, gun fhacal
mar is àbhaist,
a’ dalladh air còcadh.
Tògaidh iad ceann
ach cha sùgur iad buileach –

gun thios nach tig uileadh

a-màireach –
gus a bhreil an túbhalte geal,
ns gamaichean’ s an gruth,
a theatha dhubb làidir

càirichte sios air an talamh.

Tha obair gu leòr roimpe fhèin
mas tig an oidheach,
ach a chòir’s gu bheil i sùirce,
air chòir’s gu bheil a thugnas i
nach e tart na teatha
a bhios orra a-mhàin,

bheir i tìreig na suidhe cuide rith’,
a càirteadh cho finealta sumdach
na bhreatachadh dhaibh,
fhad’s tha iad ri rìhe’s ri òil.

Pith

JON PLUNKETT

In the dell-thickened quiet every breath was a fug of stillness and spore splicing through my lungs.

I do not remember the slow germination of the inner forest. I was only aware of the division of cells in the soles of my feet, the boosted pressure, burst and pleasure as new meristem tips rooted through leather and the leaf-mould surface, growing, deep as longing, through the mist-damp earth. I sucked up moisture, feeling the draw of nutrients beneath my hardening skin.

From fingers, new fingers reaching and pointing to every dapple of dancing light.

The nights were peaceful, rodents nosing round me, the quiet flurry of owls like breath upon me.

I learned not to speak, but to stretch and splay in the moonlight, listening through every surface as the whole earth hummed. My knuckles broadened to drink pure energy. I was intoxicated by it, standing here for centuries absorbing life, rain-cleansed, dried by sun-warmth, wing beats and wind.

Only a thin seam of some old self remains, ringed in by years, hidden in my pith.
‘Scotland’s a construct’ - Calum Colvin: ‘What are we looking at?’ - Rab Wilson; so state the artist and poet respectively in this new collection produced as part of Calum Colvin’s new exhibition Burnsiana. Rab Wilson’s poems respond, in a range of forms in Scots and English, to Colvin’s reconstructions of Burns and create an intriguing conversation between the various Burnses of the schoolroom, Burns’ Societies veneration, Visit Scotland’s kitch gee-gaw and the more honest re-examination of the man as a flawed and hugely gifted human being.

Colvin’s images - part sculpture, part painting, part photography, are about ‘transformation and metamorphoses’, about how an image is created and subsequently transmitted into ‘fact’. It is these constructions that Colvin and Wilson seek to de-construct. There are references to James Currie’s damaging biography - ‘Currie’s hatchet job fair dinged ye doun’ - which fixed Burns as dissolute drunk despite attempts to restore his reputation by others; how schools and the heritage industry (the ‘invented Scotland’) have created the Burns the Brand; even Henry Mackenzie’s well-worn epithet of the ‘heaven-taught ploughman’ is dwelled on by Wilson.

The underlying value of Colvin’s work is that he challenges perception and questions the reality of what is in front of you while simultaneously pointing out the precarious fluidity in his (and your own) construction of meaning. His painting/sculpture/photography mixes the actual and the invented in ambiguous, spatial dimensions that question the truth of objects and posts their re-interpretation depending on the context and associations that surround them. An image becomes multi-faceted, multi-faced, its meaning altered and undermined depending on its context. There is the constant use of visual puns - literary, historical and contemporary - which evoke the tricks that time and memory, both historical and personal, play on us. Colvin’s images are ironic in their juxtapositions while Wilson’s poetry provides a voice - angry, jocular, elegaic, tender - that creates an strong dynamic between the passion of the poetry and the silent, abstract/physical interpretations generated by Colvin’s work.

The value of this short collection of art and poetry is the richness of their reference and allusion. Macpherson’s Ossian makes an appearance, its fictiveness being accepted as reality and even inspiration by Napoleon - ‘The little book you clasped...fuelled your visions/Of worlds left to conquer’ - raising the question at what point a myth (fiction/lie) invades the world to become entangled in the facts of history subsequently generating a whole new ‘truth’. And then there’s Walter Scott, that great forger (in both senses of the word) of Scottish identity who nonetheless in Wilson’s poem, as Malachi Mallagrowther, preserved the Scottish banknote.Viewed from the slightly different angle each time, the picture changes.

This insistence on ambiguities, layers of meaning and complex narratives places the reader/viewer at the heart of interpreting what is real. There is no settled history...and in this crucial year of referendum, and the questioning of ‘Scotland’ and ‘Scottishness’, there are few acts more important.

Bannockburns: Scottish Independence and Literary Imagination, 1314-2014
By Robert Crawford
Edinburgh University Press
Review by Fiona Watson

Every nation needs its high-flyers, those who soar above the mundane to provide the rest of us with stimulation and inspiration. And in this referendum year, Scotland surely needs its novelists, playwrights and poets to imagine the future, not least to enthuse, one way or the other, the third of the electorate who remain undecided. Quite rightly sensing an opportunity, Robert Crawford explores how much independence has mattered to Scotland’s writers from the very moment of Robert Bruce’s iconic victory 700 years ago. One might presume, therefore, that the point of the exercise is to show that the results have shaped Scotland’s sense of identity and its place in the world ever since.

In the earlier chapters/period, where one can be reasonably comprehensive in analysing the role of independence and freedom in the nation’s psyche, this is indeed the clear intention. In the Declaration of Arbroath, Barbour’s Bruce and Hary’s Wallace, as well as Scotland’s early historians, it is clear that they are something of a national obsession, at least among the educated elite. In the immediate aftermath of the Union of 1707 when the benefits of colonial trade were only trickling, rather than flooding, north, these questions remained (indeed, Scotland’s nobles, the very ones still accused here of being bought and sold for English gold, tried very hard and only narrowly failed to break the Union in 1713).

However, most Scots were soon enjoying the benefits of Union and here I found the plot beginning to unravel. It is one thing to explore Robert Burns’ sympathies towards Jacobitism, but quite another to claim that, in evoking Bannockburn directly or indirectly, he ‘performs the greatest service both to the ideals of modern democracy and [my italics] to the cause of Scottish independence.’ Firstly, if the latter is true, then clearly the national Bard had little or no impact on the national psyche and to argue that he was merely ahead of his time is determinist in a way that his democratic aspirations, with the example of the French and American revolutions before him, is not. Secondly, Jacobitism cannot be equated with Scottish independence; it merely sought to replace one monarchical dynasty with another. As acknowledged on p.87, what concerned the Scots was not the Union per se, but England’s domination of it. This, though not fitting in with Professor Crawford’s overtly nationalist agenda, has profound resonances for today, when many Scots would like to see a properly federal UK, with each nation largely governing itself but joining together far more equally on issues of mutual interest.

I could go on, for much of the second half of the book seems skewed to fit, without
much analysis of the extent to which the chosen authors have proved influential. But where this book really captured my imagination was right at the very end, with a beautiful and insightful analysis of the poetry commissioned to commemorate the 700th anniversary of Bannockburn. Here Professor Crawford leaps off his soap box and soars, showing, rather than insistently telling, that Bannockburn and ideals of independence and freedom are still thrillingly resonant in the twenty-first century. But what they mean, to both writer and reader, is hugely more complicated and interesting than we mostly find in the rest of this book.

Scotland: A Creative Past, an Independent Future
by Paul Henderson Scott
Luath Press
Review by Jim Miller
My most depressing moment so far in the Referendum campaign came last September when I saw in The Scotsman howe voters had stated in a poll that they would vote for independence if it ensured a rise in their incomes of £500. Was this truly a reflection of the state of the debate? The tone of discussion has risen since then, I am glad to sense, and in this book Paul Scots fuels the upward trend. The Referendum should not be about just economics and salaries but about the vision we have for the future of our country. At the right time, I can see why Alex and his SNP champions present the case for a Yes vote in a manner similar to a party manifesto before an election. Heart versus head, and it is safer and more fitting to the desired image of Scotland as a modern European nation to appeal to the head.

Paul Scots has for long, if not all his life, been a patriot and nationalist. He is not wont to appeal to the heart but at the same time eschews narrow-minded waving of the Saltire. After a long career in the military and then in the diplomatic service, he has the wherewithal to bring an international perspective to his opinions.

The book is a collection of essays, reviews, talks and articles that have been published in various outlets over the last decade or so. He returns regularly to favourite themes, such as the need for a writers’ museum, the antiquity of the erstwhile Scottish Arts Council to a national theatre, the neglect of Scots language and history in our schools, the lack of control of broadcasting north of the Border, and the bribery surrounding the Treaty of Union in 1707.

As to the writers’ museum, there is a very good one in Dublin that presents the story of Irish literature. Something similar in Scotland as a modern European nation to appeal to the head.

There is a strangeness to Calton Hill. The volcanic fragment is neither the tallest nor largest of Edinburgh’s numerous hills—indeed, at just 103 metres (338 feet) it’s dwarfed by Arthur’s Seat barely half a mile to the south—but it has a unique sense of separateness from the Scottish capital, “stubbornly enduring as an untamed space encircled by the city”.

Paul Scots has for long, if not all his life, been a patriot and nationalist. He is not wont to appeal to the heart but at the same time eschews narrow-minded waving of the Saltire. After a long career in the military and then in the diplomatic service, he has the wherewithal to bring an international perspective to any opinions.

The book is a collection of essays, reviews, talks and articles that have been published in various outlets over the last decade or so. He returns regularly to favourite themes, such as the need for a writers’ museum, the antiquity of the erstwhile Scottish Arts Council to a national theatre, the neglect of Scots language and history in our schools, the lack of control of broadcasting north of the Border, and the bribery surrounding the Treaty of Union in 1707.

As to the writers’ museum, there is a very good one in Dublin that presents the story of Irish literature. Something similar in Scotland as a modern European nation to appeal to the head.

Strangely, the book ends with a reprinting of the “Declaration of Calton Hill”, a document approved on the 100th night of what would become a 1,980 day vigil for the creation of a Scottish Parliament. “Sovereignty rests with the People of Scotland, and as such, we demand a referendum, to determine the will of the People of Scotland.” Well, we have now!

Neil Gunn Circle: Nation and Nationalism
by Stuart McHardy and Alastair McCleary
Whittles
Review by Meghan McNair
The release of this collection of essays on novelist Neil Gunn is a timely one, intended to appeal to current widespread interest in questions of nationhood and Scotland’s future. The book has the noble aim of reconciling academic discussion of Gunn with the interested general reader. It is a collection of essays from scholars, politicians and intellectuals, including Gunn’s own short essay, “Why are Writers Nationalists?” The essays include a completely fresh look at Gunn’s commitment to Scottish independence – even if it doesn’t quite answer the question it poses in the title. Through the essay, Gunn hopes to have ‘at least suggested’ the necessity of political independence in order to sustain and continue the tradition which he sees as vitally necessary for a writer.

Much of this collection is biographical and the tone is eulogistic in places. Gunn’s literature is not the focus here, rather, his role in the political scene of his day takes precedence. Alastair McCleary’s introduction succinctly introduces Gunn as a political thinker, within the context of the wider Scottish Literary Renaissance, and the concerns of its various figures with class, social justice, nation, and the relationships between those. Michael Russell’s essay – the longest in the collection – provides an accessible overview of the nation’s cultural politics, along with a spirited case for the benefits of teaching Scottish writing in schools.

McCleary’s essay provides an erudite account of events in Inverness focussed on the National Party of Scotland campaign during the General Election of 1931, where Gunn’s role in supporting candidate John MacCormick was necessarily a covert one, due to his job in the civil service. This essay evokes some questions as to the relationship between Scotland’s writers and the nation’s political narrative, both then and now – even if it doesn’t go so far as to fully map those out for the reader. Ewan Cameron’s contribution is an autobiographical account of his own experiences with Gunn’s work as a schoolboy and an historian. Diarmid Gunn and Neil MacCormick (son of aforementioned NPS candidate John MacCormick) both contribute biographical memoirs, one oriented towards Gunn’s novels, the other towards his politics.

Christopher Stokoe’s Bibliography is useful for those seeking further knowledge of Gunn’s politics, and the short article introducing it helpfully problematizes Gunn’s thesis, explaining that his nationalism was “not just the book, but the commitment to individualism. Also included in this collection is Gunn’s ‘Salute to a Miracle’: an allegorical story whose message of change and exploration of reactions to pending change seems to resonate with a particular poignancy in the lead-up to the referendum.”

Overall, this collection takes a particularly focussed approach to Gunn’s politics. It offers the reader a handy familiar with Gunn’s literary work a refreshing new perspective on the writer as political and historical figure, and may serve as a helpful – if extremely detailed and specific – introduction to Gunn for the less-familiar reader.

The Mile
By Craig A Smith
Standfirst
Review by Paul F Cockburn
Three Scotsmen walk into a bar…

It could be the set up for a joke. To an extent it is a humorous conceit transposing personal, metaphorical journeys onto a physical, geographical stagger down the length of Edinburgh’s Royal Mile, from the historic Castle at the top via its most prominent public houses to outside the Scottish Parliament.

This is a novel, primarily, about three men, friends since university who are now on the edge of their 40s, no longer young. Ian, though happily married, is ground down by daily financial strains and fears that the impending arrival of a third child will be too much of a strain on his family. Euan is consumed by the crumbling reality of a failed marriage, clinging to the last vestiges of his life as a computer programmer. And then there’s Stuart; handsome, tanned yet withdrawn, he’s the travel writer who can’t face flying, back in the old country for this reunion, but considering moving permanently into his self-renovated home in France.

Fine dramatic kindling, you might think; but debut novelist Craig A Smith chooses to spark The Mile into comedic life with an 84-year-old Jock, a bright-eyed former army veteran who has unostentatiously slipped out of his Bruntsfield care home for the day and invites himself onto the three men’s pub crawl.

Jock is the heart of the novel even though we generally see him only through the eyes of others: most obviously Ian, Euan and Stuart [between whom the authorial point of view flies with often dizzying and—at times—genuinely confusing speed] and Rosie, who works in the care home where Jock lives and, while searching for him, embarks on a personal path of her own.

For the majority of the novel, we alternate between these two journeys—Rosie for the most part, being an hour or so behind them. Unfortunately, this is a structural device which, like most pub crawls, quickly becomes repetitive, especially as the men’s activities are necessarily retold for Rosie’s (rather than the reader’s) benefit. Rosie too, lacks the depth of personality given to the men; not least the fact that it’s a humorous conceit transposing personal, metaphorical journeys onto a physical, geographical stagger down the length of Edinburgh’s Royal Mile, from the historic Castle at the top via its most prominent public houses to outside the Scottish Parliament.

This is a novel, primarily, about three men, friends since university who are now on the edge of their 40s, no longer young. Ian, though happily married, is ground down by daily financial strains and fears that the impending arrival of a third child will be too much of a strain on his family. Euan is consumed by the crumbling reality of a failed marriage, clinging to the last vestiges of his life as a computer programmer. And then there’s Stuart; handsome, tanned yet withdrawn, he’s the travel writer who can’t face flying, back in the old country for this reunion, but considering moving permanently into his self-renovated home in France.

Fine dramatic kindling, you might think; but debut novelist Craig A Smith chooses to spark The Mile into comedic life with an 84-year-old Jock, a bright-eyed former army veteran who has unostentatiously slipped out of his Bruntsfield care home for the day and invites himself onto the three men’s pub crawl.

Jock is the heart of the novel even though we generally see him only through the eyes of others: most obviously Ian, Euan and Stuart [between whom the authorial point of view flies with often dizzying and—at times—genuinely confusing speed] and Rosie, who works in the care home where Jock lives and, while searching for him, embarks on a personal path of her own.

For the majority of the novel, we alternate between these two journeys—Rosie for the most part, being an hour or so behind them. Unfortunately, this is a structural device which, like most pub crawls, quickly becomes repetitive, especially as the men’s activities are necessarily retold for Rosie’s (rather than the reader’s) benefit. Rosie too, lacks the depth of personality given to the men; even though we often get to sit inside her head, there’s the real sense that Smith literary wheels are spinning with little traction.

A somewhat Panglossian conclusion notwithstanding, there’s much to praise about The Mile; not least the fact that it’s often really funny. Smith’s smooth, easily-read prose successfully invokes the atmosphere and milieu of Edinburgh’s Royal Mile, from the historic Castle at the top via its most prominent public houses to outside the Scottish Parliament.

This is a novel, primarily, about three men, friends since university who are now on the edge of their 40s, no longer young. Ian, though happily married, is ground down by daily financial strains and fears that the impending arrival of a third child will be too much of a strain on his family. Euan is consumed by the crumbling reality of a failed marriage, clinging to the last vestiges of his life as a computer programmer. And then there’s Stuart; handsome, tanned yet withdrawn, he’s the travel writer who can’t face flying, back in the old country for this reunion, but considering moving permanently into his self-renovated home in France.

Fine dramatic kindling, you might think; but debut novelist Craig A Smith chooses to spark The Mile into comedic life with an 84-year-old Jock, a bright-eyed former army veteran who has unostentatiously slipped out of his Bruntsfield care home for the day and invites himself onto the three men’s pub crawl. Jock is the heart of the novel even though we generally see him only through the eyes of others: most obviously Ian, Euan and Stuart [between whom the authorial point of view flies with often dizzying and—at times—genuinely confusing speed] and Rosie, who works in the care home where Jock lives and, while searching for him, embarks on a personal path of her own.
A willingness to come at reality from new and illuminating angles is evident from the shapes and contours of other poems. In ‘The Wedding Road, with Free Bar’ the lines teeter and stagger their way across and down the page, breaking in unexpected places to reveal that words has had as much to do with meaning as ways of looking – thus ‘themselves’ becomes, rather charmingly, ‘thems elves’. In ‘Smiles learnt in the cockle-bed’ words cling haphazardly to the white space surrounding them so that the reader becomes a sort of cockle picker, scanning the page for meanings rather than having the sense of poem delivered in the expected, cumulative manner.

Although Hadfield’s natural mode is one of affirmation and celebration, she also understands that we are, all of us, fragile creatures of time: a cat stares into ‘the black hole’ of a dead blackbird; a moth alighting on a man’s finger ‘shivered the eloquent/ flakes of its wings’. Elsewhere she even addresses the ‘unspeakability’ of death: ‘a poem or riddle collies no particle/ of it for us to fank/in mouths and minds.’ But life and death are so much more than, as the cliché would have it, two sides of the same coin. In ‘The March Springs’ she writes ‘It’s impossible to think of any one thing’. From the Atlantic Ocean to the back of a fridge, Jen Hadfield is a superbly attentive and eloquent witness to how our world – our own world – brims with variety and meaning.

The Girl on the Ferryboat

by Angus Peter Campbell
Luzath Press

**Review by Cynthia Rogerson**

The Girl on the Ferryboat begins: ‘It was a long hot summer.’ Great title, great first line. And within pages, we are promised proper romance. What is more romantic than being haunted by a glimpse, a moment, a blurry un-edged slice of possibility? The protagonist, Helen Shaw, is a young woman, a good wife, and has been loved by a loyal wife, and yet upon widowhood in his sixties, suddenly pines for the girl he passed on the ferry walkway, decades ago. A stranger, a pretty face with no history. Even her name is pretty but neutral: Helen.

Surely, the reader thinks, Alasdair has passed many strangers since then, and good percent of them must have been pretty young women – why this one? He has not even told him later. He understands that he needed the story he has told us disinclination to study Helen’s journals and letters. All along, the story he has told us about Helen has been his own imaginings based on the few scraps of information she told him later. He understands that he needed the gaps of ignorance in order to feel close to her. Knowing too much would be the kiss of death. As Somerset Maugham said: Love is what happens to a man and woman who do not know each other. And as Alasdair proves (perhaps unconsciously), it is safer to love what doesn’t really exist anyway – no risk of disappointment.

Because it seems so unlikely that they would each remember each other after the briefest of encounters forty years ago, I was left wondering if the novel was (at least on one level) the story of a widow so lost to his own self, so lonely, he fabricated a perfect relationship, then invented an accident which precluded a proper test run of the relationship. A kind of survival mechanism. But it hardly matters if the older Helen is real or not. The girl Helen existed. He fell in a kind of love with her, and that spark sustained him all his life.

So, it turns out this story is not just a romance after all.

First of all, is a philosophy book; how a man can be infected with nostalgia, and live somewhere in between lived life and imagined life. Alasdair’s life inspired his book and all its wonders, but there is also a more seductive kind of truth residing in conclusions, subtleties and shadows.

Secondly, it is a linguistic treat. Line after line of delicious words are joined up in an aesthetically pleasing order, an intoxicating and melancholy journey. Maccaig said ‘His words are so calm, so composed ... as if they had been inspired by a book and all its wonders ...’

Blackthorn

by Aimée Chalmers
The Lumphanan Press

**Review by Helen Amby**

Aimée Chalmers’ Blackthorn, explores the life of the North-east poet Marion Angus (1865-1946). In her introduction, Chalmers describes her book as ‘less of a fictional biography, more of a novel’. I would add that it is an extraordinarily rich one at that. Before reading Blackthorn, I was familiar with Angus’ poetry, but had only a vague impression of her often thwarted life. The novel gives a powerful, and multi-faceted portrait of a woman at odds with the world, and the people surrounding her.

The first five chapters are written in Scots, and chart the romance between Marion and Wull, a traveller. Interestingly, and I believe, unusually, the viewpoint is Wull’s. His hopes, anxieties and dreams are evocatively described, and are interspersed and represented by stirring descriptions of the landscape. I was immediately drawn into his earthy yet poetic existence: ‘Nae moon, nae stars fire and smoke and mist. He spat in the fire and listened tae the gob sizzle.’

The circumstances of Marion and Wull’s first encounter, is gripping, and the dialogue crackles with drama and romance. The significance of the novel’s title, and the couple’s fate, is beautifully implied in their conversation about the blackthorn’s flourishing buds, and cruel thorns.

‘Pears, that’s what they’re like...’

...Watch yersel, and mind that branch, that’ll ’eave yae toes...A black hert, it has, yon bush.’

The first mention that Angus is a poet, come in Chapter Three, in the context of Marion and Wull discussing how they will come in Chapter Three, in the context of Marion and Wull discussing how they will remain together. Couched in purely practical terms, her work is offered as an answer to the question of ‘her future’.

Later sees a shift to a first person narrative in English, with the reader’s first glimpse of...
Marion's inner life. We see her grappling with a poem about the blackthorn, and she makes a thrilling statement about the poet's use of imagery: "...the missionaries said that native people make images of goddesses to protect their villages, little statues of their enemies in order to control and destroy them. Isn't that something like what a poet does?"

Part II opens thirty years on, and we see Marion attending an event on the poetry circuit. She is self-effacing and uncertain, and we get an impression that the years have weighed heavily upon her. This is explored in more depth as the reader learns of Marion's role as carer to her sister, Ethel. Again, the dialogue here is masterful. Marion's feelings of responsibility, fear, and resentment are beautifully handled.

"You didn't have to do that, dear."

"I don't expect you'd have done it."

"...the jocular tone that isn't."

"Talking above all else. (Hall of the Heavenly King)"

"Variation" is a poem worthy of mention for its almost Belgian style of surrealism which brings to mind Bosch and Magritte and deserves to be quoted in full for it seems to subtly undermine the self-aggrandising tone poetry can sometimes take on:

A Pisci Tukki and a Wee Lamb were impaled on a thorn. Said the lamb – 'I'm a ram from the Great Death Pit at Uy, said the Tukki – from the Tamil or Malayalam, I am, and it's Pusheen and Epicurean on special occasions when I employ my charms, such as here, in this thicket, before the pove of The Patriarch's lie, so they upped sticks and rose to the flame."

The poem 'Pavilion of Ancient Wisdom' also supports the notion that the poems are a step away from the lyrical ego of a poet into a new and often defamiliarising terrain where the natural world exerts itself. The speaker of the poem seems almost incidental after a thrush flies into her while out dog walking. In the dusk, this thrush lies on the ground like 'a nipped / umber toad' and:

The ancient pavilion of I am draws taunt the thought of woman dog, toad, bird.

For all of the adventurousness of the vocabulary in these poems (sometimes a line left me scratching my head), they possess a winning pared-down quality — a sharpness of image and a bareness of tone combined with an almost elliptical writing style. For instance a lamp of beech is brought home for a chopping block:

... to save the axed flagstone — reader, stagger by the fire, better than no flame.

(That Things Are Not As They Seem)

One of the most enduring effects of this collection is its celebration of life, of double-vision (an awareness that the poet fictionalises the world and can obscure it by writing about self) and a contentment found as far as to read deeply into the patterns or behaviour of birds:

My pet blackbird at home isn’t mine.

He sits on the telegraph pole where the wires for neighbours are tied and he pours out and holds forth.

Birds get people talking.

He’s the Samuel, Smuell in my ear at 4pm, he’s our nunc dimitis these clear nights.

truly, I’d be lost without him.

It’s the way, in dreams, a person you know means whatever you associate with them. In that way – that bird –

Poetic Adventures in Scotland with Seventy Selected Poems by Sally Evans
Diehard Publishers
Review by Richie McCaffrey

The cover of Sally Evans’ selected poems curm poetic travelogue has already generated much internet interest. It shows Sally in her bookshop in Callander, holding ‘Finlay’ the quasi-wild cat. Sheena Blackhall has been quick to point out, and pen a poem on the subject, that here is Sally Evans’ life in Scotland handed to the reader ‘and the cat gets the review’. So, now Finlay’s out of the way, we’ll carry on – for carrying on through opposition and bad luck and despite perhaps indifferent and male or university dominated poetry cliques of the 1980s is one of the great hallmarks of this book; the poetry keeps flowing and responding to twists and turns in Sally’s life.

While this book is foremost a selected poems covering over thirty years of writing, it is the ‘inter’-amble between these poems that makes the book one of double interest. All of these poems are woven together by biographical stands of optimistically silver thread and anecdote which is tactfully presented to the reader. There is much first-hand writing about poetry and literature in Scotland from just about every decade of the last century, but there is little on the 80s and 90s, so I was fascinated to read about the early days of the Scottish Poetry Library and in particular the troubled but brilliant poets Rayne MacKinnon and Sandie Craigie.

It seems selfless of Sally to use her own poetic adventures as a means to discuss other poets who arguably worked on the fringes of poetry. One of the un-self-conscious motives behind this seems to be to show the emergence of a thriving community. Early in the book she talks of the influence of Edwin Muir on her early poetry, but Muir argued that community is something that existed as a public – Sally’s book shows that poetry-centred communities can be possible, away from the well-meaning but ultimately patronising ‘head-patting’ gestures of male poets and publishers like Duncan Glen.

Of the poems in this book I was struck by how many dealt with the imagery of journeys, discoveries and debatable lands of language, poetry and society as well as notions of hard work, harvesting and gardening. Towards the end of the book, there is a sudden grouping of elegies for poets such as Kathleen Raine and Adrian Mitchell. I worried for a moment that the book would end on a sombre note but we are taken through Sally’s most recent work and given a few sample poems from one of her most ambitious sequences Anderson’s Piano – based on an old railway signalling system which alerted trains to rocks falling on the tracks. In these poems we are given a sense of the value of life and of people living in difficult rocky places, which can be seen as emblematic of the position of a poet arriving in Scotland and making themselves at home whilst also honing their craft in such landscapes.

I was taken in an extract from a poem based on a dream where Sally envisions a community of women poets brought together out of...
Pamphlet presses are the bedrock of poetry: they’re maybe small in output but never small in ambition or importance, nor are they simply stepping stones towards a full collection, but works of art in their own right with a far greater diversity of voice, language and subject matter than could ever be achieved by the major houses.

It’s good to see national awards such as the Michael Marks and Callum Macdonald recognise and reward this essential service.

by John Glenday

Pamphlet presses are the bedrock of poetry: they’re maybe small in output but never small in ambition or importance, nor are they simply stepping stones towards a full collection, but works of art in their own right with a far greater diversity of voice, language and subject matter than could ever be achieved by the major houses.

It’s good to see national awards such as the Michael Marks and Callum Macdonald recognise and reward this essential service.

by John Glenday

Every country needs their Graham Fulton. He’s a prolific, angry, humane, funny, accessible poet in and in ‘The Universe is a Silly Place’ (ControlledExplosion press) we can enjoy every aspect of his writing: a hilarious amalgam of spam email teles; a dialogue between Daleks in Tesco or MacGonagall’s take on tennis. But it is poignant too - in poems such as ‘George Square Thatcher Death Horse’, he shows how well he can observe and delineate the inequalities that divide and define us.

Red Squirrel Press of Northumberland has a strong track record of publishing Scottish poets and running at 154 pages Eddie Gibbons A Twist of Lime Street is an impressive, substantial selection. Although his punning titles ‘The Electrode less travelled’, Pantoum of the Opera; ‘Death Shall have no Dunn Onion’ were at times in danger of stealing the thunder, it is the scattered sequence of short elegies in memory of his father that remained with me longest.

It’s about time they proclaimed Lesley Harrison the Auchtimie Makar. She’s been quietly and painstakingly mapping the landscape of Scotland and Beyond for some years now, from Eday to Ulambazar: Upstream (available through www.ballastflot.com) is a pamphlet and poemcards commissioned as part of the Making Space for Water project, which aimed to highlight the interplay of artist and landscape - in this case the landscape and specifically the rivers of Angus. Some are patterns of place names, lists, litanies, lyrical definitions, but whatever form the poems take, they illuminate the natural world in a simple and dazzling way: ‘faintly rocked/like an old sea bell’/‘our axis, our stone rim/a slow wheel/of thin rain, and red blink/and silence.’ Harrison is a clear-sighted, original poet, and this is a hugely impressive addition to her work.

Douglas Kynoch’s Summer Ostin is a fine addition to Doric literature – his original poems and prose are written with a natural ease, and he includes some translations and versions - I thought his Doric versions of Frost and Edward Thomas leaned too heavily on the genius of the originals, but his excerpt from ‘Letters de Mon Moulin’ was executed with such careful gusto I couldn’t help being carried along…’au loutain, nous voyons le troupeau s’avancer dans une gloire de poussière.’ rendered by ‘hine awa, we twig the hirsl bursin forrit in a glory o stoor.’ I bet Daudin wishes he wrote that!

By Alex Finlay is the difficult thing/poets do, trying/to belong:

You Listening

Pamphlet presses are the bedrock of poetry: they’re maybe small in output but never small in ambition or importance, nor are they simply stepping stones towards a full collection, but works of art in their own right with a far greater diversity of voice, language and subject matter than could ever be achieved by the major houses.

It’s good to see national awards such as the Michael Marks and Callum Macdonald recognise and reward this essential service.

by John Glenday

Pamphlet presses are the bedrock of poetry: they’re maybe small in output but never small in ambition or importance, nor are they simply stepping stones towards a full collection, but works of art in their own right with a far greater diversity of voice, language and subject matter than could ever be achieved by the major houses.

It’s good to see national awards such as the Michael Marks and Callum Macdonald recognise and reward this essential service.

by John Glenday

Every country needs their Graham Fulton. He’s a prolific, angry, humane, funny, accessible poet in and in ‘The Universe is a Silly Place’ (ControlledExplosion press) we can enjoy every aspect of his writing: a hilarious amalgam of spam email teles; a dialogue between Daleks in Tesco or MacGonagall’s take on tennis. But it is poignant too - in poems such as ‘George Square Thatcher Death Horse’, he shows how well he can observe and delineate the inequalities that divide and define us.

Red Squirrel Press of Northumberland has a strong track record of publishing Scottish poets and running at 154 pages Eddie Gibbons A Twist of Lime Street is an impressive, substantial selection. Although his punning titles ‘The Electrode less travelled’, Pantoum of the Opera; ‘Death Shall have no Dunn Onion’ were at times in danger of stealing the thunder, it is the scattered sequence of short elegies in memory of his father that remained with me longest.

It’s about time they proclaimed Lesley Harrison the Auchtimie Makar. She’s been quietly and painstakingly mapping the landscape of Scotland and Beyond for some years now, from Eday to Ulambazar: Upstream (available through www.ballastflot.com) is a pamphlet and poemcards commissioned as part of the Making Space for Water project, which aimed to highlight the interplay of artist and landscape - in this case the landscape and specifically the rivers of Angus. Some are patterns of place names, lists, litanies, lyrical definitions, but whatever form the poems take, they illuminate the natural world in a simple and dazzling way: ‘faintly rocked/like an old sea bell’/‘our axis, our stone rim/a slow wheel/of thin rain, and red blink/and silence.’ Harrison is a clear-sighted, original poet, and this is a hugely impressive addition to her work.

Douglas Kynoch’s Summer Ostin is a fine addition to Doric literature – his original poems and prose are written with a natural ease, and he includes some translations and versions - I thought his Doric versions of Frost and Edward Thomas leaned too heavily on the genius of the originals, but his excerpt from ‘Letters de Mon Moulin’ was executed with such careful gusto I couldn’t help being carried along…’au loutain, nous voyons le troupeau s’avancer dans une gloire de poussière.’ rendered by ‘hine awa, we twig the hirsl bursin forrit in a glory o stoor.’ I bet Daudin wishes he wrote that!

Also celebrating the Doric –this time the Banffshire genius, is Bill Thom’s The Quiet Chief (Tapsalteerie), a funny, rollicking, ‘flyting’ in which two canine pals best the Devil.

One of the most original, challenging and adventurous collections in my pile comes from Pighog Press. The Last Wolf of Scotland by MacGillivray is a hair-raising, bloodthirsty, bizarre conflation of Scottich and ‘Wild West’ identity.At first I reckoned Pighog were trying their best to put me off with the over-the-top blurh: ‘MacGillivray has walked in a straight line with a dead wolf on her shoulders…

eaten broken chandelier glass in a derelict East Berlin shopping mall… breast-fed a Highland swan in Oxford…’ But I persisted. And this is a collection which demands persistence – MacGillivray herself describes it as a ‘pugdin-mix’ of appropriated Scots, esoterica and archaisms. I have no problem with this. Poetry should appropriate; it should push the envelope to remind us how

by John Glenday

Pamphlet presses are the bedrock of poetry: they’re maybe small in output but never small in ambition or importance, nor are they simply stepping stones towards a full collection, but works of art in their own right with a far greater diversity of voice, language and subject matter than could ever be achieved by the major houses.

It’s good to see national awards such as the Michael Marks and Callum Macdonald recognise and reward this essential service.

by John Glenday

Every country needs their Graham Fulton. He’s a prolific, angry, humane, funny, accessible poet in and in ‘The Universe is a Silly Place’ (ControlledExplosion press) we can enjoy every aspect of his writing: a hilarious amalgam of spam email teles; a dialogue between Daleks in Tesco or MacGonagall’s take on tennis. But it is poignant too - in poems such as ‘George Square Thatcher Death Horse’, he shows how well he can observe and delineate the inequalities that divide and define us.

Red Squirrel Press of Northumberland has a strong track record of publishing Scottish poets and running at 154 pages Eddie Gibbons A Twist of Lime Street is an impressive, substantial selection. Although his punning titles ‘The Electrode less travelled’, Pantoum of the Opera; ‘Death Shall have no Dunn Onion’ were at times in danger of stealing the thunder, it is the scattered sequence of short elegies in memory of his father that remained with me longest.

It’s about time they proclaimed Lesley Harrison the Auchtimie Makar. She’s been quietly and painstakingly mapping the landscape of Scotland and Beyond for some years now, from Eday to Ulambazar: Upstream (available through www.ballastflot.com) is a pamphlet and poemcards commissioned as part of the Making Space for Water project, which aimed to highlight the interplay of artist and landscape - in this case the landscape and specifically the rivers of Angus. Some are patterns of place names, lists, litanies, lyrical definitions, but whatever form the poems take, they illuminate the natural world in a simple and dazzling way: ‘faintly rocked/like an old sea bell’/‘our axis, our stone rim/a slow wheel/of thin rain, and red blink/and silence.’ Harrison is a clear-sighted, original poet, and this is a hugely impressive addition to her work.

Douglas Kynoch’s Summer Ostin is a fine addition to Doric literature – his original poems and prose are written with a natural ease, and he includes some translations and versions - I thought his Doric versions of Frost and Edward Thomas leaned too heavily on the genius of the originals, but his excerpt from ‘Letters de Mon Moulin’ was executed with such careful gusto I couldn’t help being carried along…’au loutain, nous voyons le troupeau s’avancer dans une gloire de poussière.’ rendered by ‘hine awa, we twig the hirsl bursin forrit in a glory o stoor.’ I bet Daudin wishes he wrote that!

Also celebrating the Doric –this time the Banffshire genius, is Bill Thom’s The Quiet Chief (Tapsalteerie), a funny, rollicking, ‘flyting’ in which two canine pals best the Devil.

One of the most original, challenging and adventurous collections in my pile comes from Pighog Press. The Last Wolf of Scotland by MacGillivray is a hair-raising, bloodthirsty, bizarre conflation of Scottich and ‘Wild West’ identity. At first I reckoned Pighog were trying their best to put me off with the over-the-top blurh: ‘MacGillivray has walked in a straight line with a dead wolf on her shoulders…

eaten broken chandelier glass in a derelict East Berlin shopping mall… breast-fed a Highland swan in Oxford…’ But I persisted. And this is a collection which demands persistence – MacGillivray herself describes it as a ‘pugdin-mix’ of appropriated Scots, esoterica and archaisms. I have no problem with this. Poetry should appropriate; it should push the envelope to remind us how
Jane Aldous has had poems published in Northwords Now, Stoodleigh and portandgreek. She is currently involved in a collaboration with other members of her poetry group on rural and urban dereliction. Jane blogs at www.kitchenpoetry.blogspot.com

Juliet Austill lives on the Isle of Mull, julietaustill.co.uk for poems and drama stuff.

Connie Ramsay Bott grew up in Michigan, where many of her stories and poems take place. She has lived in the Midlands for many years.

Paul Brownsey has been a journalist on a local newspaper and a philosophy lecturer at Glasgow University. He has had about 60 short stories published in the UK and North America. He lives in Beardsen.

Jared A. Carnie is a writer in his twenties currently enjoying the freedom of the Outer Hebrides.

Thomas Clark is a poet, filmmaker and writer working in Scots. He can be found on the Internet at www.twitter.com/ClashCityClarky

Paul F Cockburn is an Edinburgh-based freelance journalist who writes on disability issues, performing arts, and culture. Recent articles and reviews have appeared in The Herald and Scotland on Sunday.

John Glenday lives in Drumtradoch. His most recent collection, Gain, was shortlisted for both the Grasme and a Carnegie scholar at the University of Glasgow, researching the Scottish poets of WW2. His debut novel, for Acair. www.marcsman.co.uk

Pàdraig MacAodhú – A Leòdhas. Na fhear-teagaisg Pàdraig MacAoidh

Cruinneachadh – À Leòdhas. Na fhear-teagaisg Pàdraig MacAoidh

Marcas Mac an Tuairneir's first collection of poetry was Dò, published by Grace Note Publications. He is now working on a second collection of poetry - Gaismun – and his debut novel, for Acair. www.marcasman.co.uk

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

Gordon Jarvis used to work in publishing, retiring in 2006. He lives in the East Neuk of Fife, nicely placed for checking nearby poly tunnels for fruit. He enjoys walking the dog, birdwatching, and beachcombing along the Fife Coastal Path.

Stephen Keeler is a volunteer member of the Organising Committee of the Ullapool Book Festival.

Joan Lennon says 'The Kingdom of Fife is said to be shaped like a dog's head. If this is so, i live on the ear, which explains a lot.'

Katherine Lockton is co-editor of South Bank Poetry. Her work has been published in numerous magazines such as Magma, Black Star and The Dark Horse.

Marcas Mac an Tuairneir's first collection of poetry was Dò, published by Grace Note Publications. He is now working on a second collection of poetry - Gaismun – and his debut novel, for Acair. www.marcasman.co.uk

Pàdraig MacAodhú – A Leòdhas. Na fhear-teagaisg Pàdraig MacAoidh

Cruinneachadh – À Leòdhas. Na fhear-teagaisg Pàdraig MacAoidh

Caoimhin MacIlleBàin

– À Steòrnabhagh. Caoimhin MacIlleBàin

– À Leòdhas. Na fhear-teagaisg Pàdraig MacAoidh

Juliet Antill is a poet, sculptor and writer whose inspiration is drawn from her early childhood in the Isle of Lewis and its landscape, history and people remain a source of inspiration.

James Sinclair began writing in his forties, publishing a pamphlet, Gulf Stream Blues, through North Idea in 2007. He is on the editorial committee of The New Shetlander.

Jan Sutch Pickard is a poet and storyteller living on the Ross of Mull. A member of the Iona Community, Jan worked for six years on Iona, was Warden of the Abbey. As a volunteer with the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel, she wrote about life in a West Bank village.

Gill Terry studied Creative Writing with the Open University and attempts to write narrative poetry that is accessible without being slight. She lives on Skye.

Maggie Wallace is learning to integrate the practice of writing with focusing on poetry.

Fiona Watson is a writer, historian and broadcaster. Author of a number of medieval history books, she is currently working on her first novel.

Martin Russell specialises in short fiction, often autobiographical, occasionally from other perspectives. He has also completed an as yet unpublished novel. He lives in Inverness.

Stewart Sanderson is a PhD student in Scottish Literature at Glasgow University. His poems have appeared in various magazines, including Guizer, Magma, Poetry Hikes, Poetry Review and Irishe Pages.

Alison Scott lives in Aberdeen. She spent her early childhood in the Isle of Lewis and its landscape, history and people remain a source of inspiration.
ULLAPOOL BOOK FESTIVAL 2014

9-11 May

FUNDERS
LUCHD-MAOINEACHAIDH
Creative Scotland, Highlands & Islands Enterprise, Bòrd na Gàidhlig

SPONSORS
URRASAIREAN
Ullapool Bookshop, The Ceilidh Place, Achins Bookshop, The Ullapool News, The Arch Inn, The Open University in Scotland, Ullapool Harbour Trust, West Coast Delicatessen

SPONSORSHIP IN KIND
URRASACHD NEO-MHAOINEIL
Wester Ross Fisheries Ltd, Ullapool Smokehouse, Ullapool Bakery, CNAG

Tim Armstrong
Jenni Calder
Chris Dolan
Andrew Dunn
Jackie Kay
A. L. Kennedy
Frank Macdonald
William McIlvanney
Neil Mackay
Iain Macwhirter
Lindsay Marshall
Glenn Patterson
Elizabeth Reeder
Cynthia Rogerson
Mike Russell
Alice Thompson
Mairi Wilson
Matthew Zajac
The Occasionals

www.ullapoolbookfestival.co.uk