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

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

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

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

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

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

Kenny Taylor, Editor

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Scotland’s Literary Resurrectionists

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

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

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

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

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

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

To return to John Buchan continuing the adventures of Raymond Chandler’s Phillip Marlowe; Stephen Baxter providing “authorised” sequels for two iconic novels by H G Wells, with The Time Ships and The Massacre of Mankind; Anthony Horowitz, who is surely the only writer to officially resurrect both Ian Fleming’s James Bond 007 and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes. Closer to home, St Andrews-based Robert J McCaughrean was genuinely surprised by the Edinburgh publisher Birlinn, whose back catalogue includes paperback editions of all John Buchan’s novels. The idea of a new novel bringing together some of Buchan’s most popular characters piqued his interest, which forced Harris to sit down and spend several weeks working out his proposal.

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

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

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

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

The plot sounds pretty much like a Buchan “shocker”; but how does Harris ensure that these books ‘feel’ reasonably consistent? “It has to be a Buchan story that appeals to Buchan readers, admirers of Buchan who have enjoyed his books,” he accepts, if only to ensure good sales. “It’s not just imitating; it does something, it’s a positive hook of a character or name that’s known, but there’s also the risk of seriously annoying the readers who don’t share the new writer’s vision of the character. In the end, perhaps the best ‘sequels’ are those that come from a completely different perspective, but are nevertheless aware of what has gone before?”

One thought of mine is that there is a Scottish tradition of ‘The Adventure Story’ which comprises Sir Walter Scott, Stevenson, Conan Doyle, Buchan and Alistair MacLean,” says Harris. “I see myself contributing to this as a folk musician might contribute to our musical heritage.”
A’ leughadh sna làithean saora

Meg Bateman
(July 2018, an Àird Bheag)

Ann an taigh gun dealan agus bruideach dhèin chuairt an-dè, cleachdadh sinn solas na madhne guis leughadh ceithir cinn èghe bhàna ’s mo cheann-sa laeth crùibthar thar leabhraineach. Tha sinn còmhla ach fa leth, aig amannan diofraichte, an àiteachan diofraichte – Howard’s End, Bhaile Naoimh Pàdraig, Iapiàn …

Aig ar casan, dà chàidh is cat, na cluasan a’ priobadh ri crònan cuileig, ris gach duillgach gá tìomndadh.

Bean Phàdraig
Aonghas-Phàdraig Caimbeul

Na sgonaichean teth air a’ ghreideil agus cù a’ comhartaich fad’ às. ’Ith suas’ thuirt i. ’Siuthad a-nis, ith suas.’

An t-Òban
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Thàinig Harold Wilson dhan bhaile, còt’-uisge geal air agus pìob na dhòrn ach fhad ’s is cuimhne leam cha do chuir iad chariot òir sìos gu Combie Street far an robh Iain còir a’ toirt fa-near nan lilidhean nan uile ghlòir.

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Aonghas-Phàdraig Caimbeul

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Deborah Moffatt

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Grùla ’s Brunnal, ’s dà chnoc Scarrail,

ann an duibh air tuill cha robh ach rànaich ’s rannail, oisach is acain, guidheanchan ’s mionfachadh, èigheachd fhidhlaich ’s crònanaich dhìolachach

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**Clues to unsolved cases**  
Mark Ryan Smith

That night they watched  
the slow burn  
of the unused outbuilding,  
residents reported  
a gentle pulse  
of blue light.

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

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

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

The story goes  
that he had a talent  
for the zodiac,  
that he was kind of heart  
but touched in some way.

A jagged glass muffled  
in a bunched red shirt.

On September 13th  
residents reported  
a terrible taste  
in the water,  
and that the only thing  
to rely on was the mail  
ever coming on time.

**Dynamite day**  
Mark Ryan Smith

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

Smoke rises  
from the latest wound  
in the quarry’s wall  
and one of the boys  
scores an easy goal.  
‘Hey! That doesn’t count.’

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

**If he’d done the right thing**  
Marc Innis

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

That quine he walked hame,  
hert name it wis Jean,  
worked in the sheds,  
straight shooting machine,  
ever easy letting her go  
afore her Ma got back  
fae the bingo.

A canny chiel though  
kains rep goes afore  
yer heid’s roun the door,  
that first impression ay crucial.

So, he wis happit, cooried doon,  
in his ain huis  
when news came through.

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

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

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

**The doctor’s advice**  
Marc Innis

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

If ye canny sleep ye  
should dee summin.  
Easy enough

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

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

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

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

How brave they all were  
from a safe distance.

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

**Heart Rot**  
Matthew Gallivan

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

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

sweet-white maggots  
chirping rain and laying  
eggs in the quiet heart:  
pale flesh for rattling beaks  
hidden in the rump  
of the tree.
Every year
Sharon Black

the same white morning lightflash 
blanketing the Sound,
the same three skiffs with outboard motors 
tugging on their orange buoys,
the same pink granite walls keeping in 
the fishing stories, lambing stories,
the peat-cutting, land-draining, rebuilding stories,
stories of subsidy cuts,
depleted fish stocks, land rights,
of sons and brothers lost at sea; 
keeping out 
Atlantic wind and rain and six long winter months,
the stories of how idyllic 
life on these islands must be.

Sheela-na-gig
Sharon Black

She looks out wearing light 
across the south end of the island. The chapel 
is scaffolded, interlocking poles 
rising thirty feet high beyond the wall. 
The opening on which she sits – 
legs spread, labia 
pulled wide – 
is an arch of basalt and red granite, 
weathered and freckled with light. A steel pole 
has been thrust through. 
Fencing on the other side divides the view 
into twelve square frames: blue sky, two sheep 
on a sill above the bay, a skein of geese 
arrowing north beyond the abbey’s 
heavy coat of grey.

A Seat at Cailleach Farm
Sharon Black

(i)
She lumbers over marsh and machair –
coat tails flapping, stick feeling the way.
Ewes huddle by a five-bar gate. 
An empty bucket rattles on a post. 
The farmer’s truck is absent. 
The pier is empty, the dirt track too. 
Only the gulls bear witness as they curve 
above the fields, the pebbled yard 
with its wooden bench, a brass plaque 
engraved Cailleach.

(ii)
Don’t cover me in winter 
while the barn owl’s still roosting, 
the white heart of its face 
dipped to its chest. Let me 
be adrift in a bog of flag irises, 
sun in my throat 
and earth in my voice. Let me 
take it all in, in huge gulps 
than in sips. Let me lift the soft bright wings 
of darkness to my lips.

(iii)
She walks and walks, her basket 
spilling boulders that roll 
to the sea, boulders big enough 
to land a boat on, build a home. 
On they tumble: basalt walkways, 
cliffs of gneiss and tuff, granite columns 
landing upright in the fields. From time to time 
she takes a chisel 
and tames a fallen rock in the image 
of a hare, gannet, weasel, otter, eel. 
At the bay, she tips the remnants of her cargo 
into the Atlantic: stepping stones 
that will be named for islands 
when the animals break free.

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

Soothmoother
Maxine Rose Munro

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

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

Evening Draws On at Tote
Anjali Suzanne Angel

The new house sits on the rise of the moor, 
alone, 
a face unknown among neighbors.
A croft house chimney prevails over crumbled stones, 
surviving windows compete 
for a sunset view.
Taking its cue from the Highland landlord, 
the burn at dusk dominates the croftland 
with silver.
Headlights through darkened alder and rowan 
break reflections on the startled loch.
Under evening stars, 
visitors’ sheets hang heavy and wet, 
no wind today on the isle.
A cow’s bellow paints question marks in the night.
The Vanishing Point

Short Story by Olga Wojtas

A Short Play by Phil Baarda

Prisoner

A dark cell-like room.

Two chairs.

Jak Two chairs.

They make do as a bed.

He arranges them.

He arranges and lays them down on them.

Or sometimes a writing desk.

He arranges them, and sits, writing.

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

He arranges them as such.

or a train.

He arranges them.

He arranges them.

Go-kart.

He stands on one of the chairs.

The officer throws him a rope.

Jak fashions a noose and puts it round his neck.

The officer throws the other end around a high beam.

Jak Do I kick the chair?

How?

Can’t you kick it away?

Officer No.

You know I can’t.

Officer Sorry.

Jak You can’t?

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

Jak How about I make it into a horse instead?

Officer It’s time..

Jak Now?

Officer Now, prisoner 82914376A.
Time in Tatters
SALLY EVANZ

sounds of orchestra in a northern garden
silent piano where the record player turned,
cigar, blind man in the country orchard,
a small wasps’ nest and pear tree huge and frail,
thirsty wait for the lush red pears on grass
ranks of may trees in dusky blossom,
the beck ran south of all, the dead cow,
tents in the glade and the magpie tree,

Japanese anemones, pumice stone walls,
girls playing tennis then winter aconites so many
old maid studies fairies, permission
to walk round seeking her not so recent youth,
sacred wood and the pig man, the one-armed gardener
the lady standing in the middle of the lawn
wouldn’t you like to go and live in town
this empty photograph of a framework

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

Canada
IAN MCDONOUGH

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

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

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

John o’ Groats Sunday, May Day
SHARON GUNASON POTTINGER

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

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

Diving Belle
LINDA MENZIES

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

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

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

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

The lifeguard clicks her needles without pausing,
Calls out: “Dinnae dae that, hen, you’ll brak’ the board!”
The dream empties: the old woman gazes
beyond the blossom flaring from perfect trees,
and smiles at the memory of the young woman
Who once held silver aloft.

Bennachie from a train, October
MANDY MACDONALD

cloud washes the Mither Tap
wraps her in her own weather

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

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

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

autumn cleans the land
A Question of Honour

SHORT STORY BY IAN TALLACH

I went without saying – technology has changed our lives beyond what anyone imagined just ten years ago. So why say it? Just to make sure we're all on the same page. Well, the same screen, if you like. Language lags behind, as always. Language languishes. Ha! The old ones are the best. Is that an old one? Probably. There's nothing new these days. Except technology.

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

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

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

So, Eustace has no place to wheel his chair but to the middle of the room; the peripheries are all used up. He brings with him a smell of pipe-tobacco. Pairs of eyes that had been darting furtively about now find a place to rest: a focal point. And seeing this, he laughs … throws back his head and laughs. A long, sonorous, wheezy, chuckle! All 90 pounds of him, his head and laughs. A long, sonorous, wheezy, chuckle! All 90 pounds of him, his head and laughs. A long, sonorous, wheezy, chuckle! All 90 pounds of him, his head and laughs. A long, sonorous, wheezy, chuckle! All 90 pounds of him, his head and laughs. A long, sonorous, wheezy, chuckle! All 90 pounds of him, his head and laughs. A long, sonorous, wheezy, chuckle! All 90 pounds of him, his head and laughs.

I’ve 75 years since those words, describing Tom, the philosopher-hero of Neil Gunn’s ‘The Serpent’ first appeared in print. I think of them at times when I visit the viewpoint memorial to the writer, a monolith surrounded by carved stones and inscribed words up on the Heights of Brae to the northwest of Dingwall. This was the area where Neil Gunn and his wife Daisy lived for twelve years; where he wrote more than half his 20 novels. His preference was to write in the morning and walk in the afternoon, taking a route that often crossed the ground where the monument now stands. I sometimes wonder if the idea for the title of his novel ‘Wild Geese Overhead’ came to him on one of those walks, as the grey geese swirled down to the fields and bays of the Moray Firth below.

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

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

Behind all the calculations of the intellect, behind the mangalomania of a leader, behind the religion of an economic system, there is that individual, the individual who suffers, who dies, who loves. When we forget that individual, when we forget to pay tribute, above all things, to the living core and flame of the individual life, at that moment we are heading for the organisation of death. The first Neil Gunn Writing Competition (won by Bess Ross, later of ‘A Bit of Crack and Car Culture’ fame and more) was launched the year after the unveiling of the monument. The current one, now open for entries of new prose and poetry and the 15th in the series, was launched at an event in Eden Court Theatre this September. This followed a ‘lecture’, shaped as an amalgam of readings, musings and recollections, by the life-affirming Scottish makar, Jackie Kay, herself a lead judge of a previous competition.

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

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

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

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

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

“We hope this acts a reminder to entrants of Neil Gunn’s legacy. We’ve been delighted this year to have help in achieving this aim from James Cook and Jenny Wilson, who’ve been working with Highland schools to raise attainment in literacy. Jenny has put together some lesson plans and also written a great introduction to Neil Gunn for pupils. “You can find all these resources by visiting James Cook’s blog at www.highlandliteracy.com”

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

From the previous competition, Michel Faber’s words still resound for the present one: “If you have a story to tell, or a deep feeling to express in poetry, then tell that story and express that feeling. “Neil Gunn himself believed in encouraging unpublished and upcoming writers. Some of you have the potential to embark on a career as writers; others may simply have one thing which is trapped in your brain, which is waiting for you to find the right words to give it an existence outside of you. So, in the days and months and years to come, I hope you will find those words.”
THE BOY
Short Story by Jo Gilbert

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

Can you take him a couple of afternoons a week?
She was demented and needed to go back to work.
You know I know fuck all about kids.
Oh please, I don't want him out to people he doesn't know.
The first time I took The Boy out on my own, I was handed four hundred pounds in cash. To change it into pesetas for her holiday.
I trust you, she said.
The magnitude of that statement hit me like an artichoke. In my former life as a full time professional dosser, nobody and I mean nobody, not even my own Mother would have trusted me to go to the shop with 50p for a pint of milk. I'd never have come back with it. This woman knew everything about me, my giggled and capered. It was usually me being told off for taking things too far. I tickled him mercilessly and I liked making him laugh. We began to bond, the friend wrecker and me, despite my distance he did not want to leave my side fucking hell I couldn’t even pee. I’ll just be a minute I shout as I make a run for it and I’ve hardly sat down for two seconds before his fat little sausage fingers appear under the bathroom door I’m having pee I shout, and The Boy replies with a muffled joojoo as he tries to slide his face through the wood. Now, The Boy is making me laugh and I feel a weird flutter through my chest.
Muffin Boy would fall asleep, holding my hand from the snug car seat and my friend would get all teary eyed and think it was adorable. He'd rub my scars with such gentle concern, looking up with a brown sore bits jojo and I’d smile, all better now and walk away. What am I supposed to say? How do you explain self-harm to a toddler?
I learned children go through stages, phases and odd behaviours, ones that aren't as weird as my own mummy would have me believe. Bap-head went through an 'oh, I'll just break my heart any time someone I love leaves phase. Fuck's sake, can you get him off me I plead. Mummy peels him off my leg. I'm coming back soon! I could not bear that snotty face of genuine heartbeat, awkward pat on the shoulder okay then bye love you and I scuttled away. I could still hear him screaming from around the corner. Waah, joojoojoo. I never wanted a human to have that much power over me. I wondered how my friend bears it.
My little best friend helped me defrost, become a real human. The Boy and I grew up together and he taught me how to laugh and play. He doesn’t have any hang-ups or bullshit, he just loves, unconditionally. This wee soul has taught me more about love than any other person on this planet.
Now, he’s not so wee. Twelve going on fifty and I call him by his name, but occasionally still The Boy because we think it’s funny. I told my Mum, I want to go back to uni and be a writer and I got wavves of fear and panic oh my God you can’t do that what will happen if and a raft of assorted barriers as to why I couldn’t. I ran it past my brother, who is a logical Vulcan, often scolding me for being into all that ‘tree hugging hippie shit’. He’s my voice of reason sometimes though and I got supportive, yet practical advice well how will you afford it etcetara waffle waffle. I told my best friend and she was like yeah go for it, jack in your job you hate and do it and The Boy’s face lit up and said are you going to write a book and I said aye and without a flicker of doubt he said straight away can you dedicate it to me? He was believed. So, I believed him, and here we are.
For Seamus, because he asked first.

DADDY SAYS THE BUS IS going all the way to Inverness, through the hills and through the mountains.
‘Can me and you go to Inverness, Daddy?’
‘Maybe one day, son. But not in the winter. See, it is already getting dark. It will be pitch black by the time you come into Perth. That is far enough for today.’

The Big Blue bus is coming. It stops at the bus stop. There is a funny yellow man on the side of the bus.
‘Daddy, that man is also going to Inverness, isn’t he?’
The door swings open. Two ladies step out and then a man who is as old as Gramps, though he doesn’t walk with a stick. Then Mummy sticks her head through the door and waves.
‘Alright, young man,’ says Daddy, ‘in you go. And he lifts me up the first step. My rucksack is in the way. My new jammies are in there, the ones Daddy bought me yesterday. He’s kept the old ones, for the next time I am coming. Rupert is also in my rucksack. Rupert is a bear and he and I are always together.

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

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

GOING HOME
Flash Story by Trudy Duffy – Wigman

Flash Story by Trudy Duffy - Wigman

Inverness. Isn’t he?’

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Sgoil nan Seanmhairean,
Phangane

Maggie Rabatski

‘S milis leath’ an tràth nuair a thilgeas i dhith aodach luaithreach na banntraigh;
 truth-aobhanneas a’ sileadh tro cuiislean nuair a shuaineas i umpe sír làinn na sgoile,
dath pinc dàna na h-ibhis a’ dearbhadh nach boin i do dhuine seach dhi fhèin.

Nach iad seanairean a’ bhuaile a chliseas — cà ‘n deach a’ chailleach a chrùb seachad gun fuithsta na h-ìreadh thaibhseil?

Cha ghlasc i sgoile ag crochadh na bàth agus an trusgann pinc éidheireach gun a dhadhadh a son fhéin.

Chì e mìth i am fear usal a dh’athach gun ròbha ghluca domhain nan seanmhairean truaillte le naire neo-ìtarchadh,
Is thug e dhubh cothrom sgoile nach d’fhuaire iad nan òige, agus an dathadh aird òirbhseach.

Hath der a bhàid air i airDearadh na sàrthadh a’ cheòbaidh nach boin i do dhuine seach dhi fhèin.

Tha an còrd teac ’s a cheannach gun robh glioch domhain nan seanmhairean truaillte le nàire neo-litearachd,
Is thug e dhubh sgoile nach d’fhuair iad nan òige, agus an dathadh air ais thuca fhèin.

Mas riug i gàrradh na sgoile tha gnothaich aise sa bhàidh.

Cha chroim i ceann riutha fhèin. Tha i ‘g iomnuadh mar a leughas i an Leòr an Naomh air a son fhéin.

Ach caoimhinn MacNeill

Còmhna MacNeill

ann an tìne a thug e dhuinn cofaidh ceart a dheasadh nach dhi dh’aois?

Cha ghlach a bha chòll cruinn a bhòidhchead a bhàidh na h-uileadhtha,tuilleadh.

An Latha

Còmhna MacNeill

an latha ag tunneachadh mo mhial-chù a’ cheadadh seadh pàidhe a’ chianalais nam bhruilleach

Fuachd umba m’ fhailais

Dàibhidh Èyre

Nam sheasamh air bonn a’ ghlìmne sna h-Alpennan. An an lòs an fhuarchainn ruadh, purpdaidh, buidhe, geala agus achadh lín fhàileadh na costaidh.

Bòidhchead. Aoibhneas.

Ach choimhead mi an-àird gu Mont Pourri, a chaidh a bhuanachadh le làrpaidearan san naòsdhearn linn deug, agus chuala mi nuair a chàgad troma a bhà thimcheall mhuinealan nam bà -

agus bhà mi air ais mile bliadhna a’ gearradh a’ ghlinne bhon lìobhaidh na h-uileadh.

Agus bhà mi gu chumas glusad - réiteach agus dàil -

’s mi a faireachdaimh fhuaichd umba m’ fhailais nam shìilean agus air còil m’ anmaiche fhain.

Canada VI – Thall ’s a-Bhos

Éoghan Stiùbhart

Tha na cuantan air an traoghadh Chan fhas na ròsan tuilleadh Tha an hios lân dè phreasan loma

Tha an uair sin gu do dheugile nam shùileidh ris a’ chothnas bhudhde ’s cuimhne leam do bhòidhchead

Canada VII – Brataichean

Duileag ìbreag air talamh geal Geal choch is Rìunann is Chran na Fìla Léimhainn agus Còsabh an Daraich Tri-dhathach le Reul na Mara

Canada VIII – Coyote

Chuala mi coyote a’ combartaich anns a’ choille air ais mìle bliadhna a’ gearradh a’ ghlinne bhon talamh, agus cuideam an t-seòl fhuair, ghil sin a’ laighme orm gu mhaitheanas.

Agus bhà mi gun chomas gluasad - réiteach agus dàil -

’s mi a faireachdaimh fhuaichd umba m’ fhailais nam shìilean agus air còil m’ anmaiche fhain.

Canada IX – Dithis

Fìonnn Mac Cumhaill agus Glosscap

Nuair a thàinig am fuamhaire gu tir bha fear eile a’ fheòrtean ris

Fìonnn Mac Cumhaill agus Glosscap a’ feuchann ri oilean fhìaighinn orn agus m’ fhéile huasgladh far mo chinnchan

Canada X – In Our Hearts We Behold The Hebrides

Thig air ais cuide rium ’s da na beannan ’s dh’a na lìthean ùra
Rhapsody
Phil Baarda

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

DNA On Iona
Leonie Charlton

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

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

Ten Minutes of Weather Away
Leonie Charlton

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

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

eyearly sunshine takes all that in

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

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

and they resolved to nothing, absolutely nothing

around a cassette tape –
Bob Dylan’s Freewheelin’
that hadn’t been played in decades.

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

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

Wheesht, mo ghràidh
Arun Sood

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

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

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

The drinkers, wheesht mo ghràidh, lay asleep.

Peatfire (Proustian)
Arun Sood

stacking
kindling
placing
peat
blowing
ember

your hands, in mine

Suicide Mango
Juliet Antill

September, and soft plump pendulums
dangle from mama-mango
each gilded orb marking time
in the hungry breeze.

A sharp gust loosens the maternal bond
and a single fruit falls,
skins fearlessly the steep
green awning;
it lands on concrete
rupturing its flawless skin
scattering the sunlight of its flesh.

Newcomers
Robin Munro

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

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

Eviction
Robin Munro

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

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

And swallows?
Tell them as they cross
increasing deserts,

pass a day as hirondelles,
to seek a northern remembered steading,
tell them Farmer Brown requires
a better return than theirs
The Whole Hog
Short Story by Isobel Rutland

Fit had he been thinking? Oh aye, Natalie. Lucky number three.
He would’ve been happy to stop at four burns, three wi Aileen, a drunken mashup wi Tanya – but then Natalie-trapped him. He should’ve bent better at the age of forty-five, but she was only thirty and loved babies. He sometimes wondered what she saw in him. But her previous boyfriend battered her, maybe it was just that Kevin didna use his fists.
Just then Plook reappeared wi a spring in his step.
‘How’s the hog coming along then, Kevin?’ he peered at it, as though that would help.
‘Another couple of hours, at least.’
Plook’s face grew darker as the mass of clouds sitting right above their heads now.
‘Get that off!’ He flapped at Kevin’s unorthodox headgear.
Kevin glared.
‘There’s nae law against it.’
‘You look daft! We need to get this lot fed afore the rain comes on. Lara’ll blad her good shoes if this ground goes saft.’
‘I canna help it. I canna serve raw meat.’
But this has been planned for weeks. I expected better fae you, Kevin.’
Kevin clucked the skelter tight, feart to move. If he lost the rag now, he didna ken far he micht poke it.
There was ringing in his ears as he calmly removed the tea towel and handed it along with the skewer, blunt end first, to Plook then walked awa.
‘Hing on,’ Plook roared. ‘If you walk awa now, Kevin, you’ve nae job come Monday morning!’
Kevin kept walkin as cold splats smacked his dome. He should’ve kept the tea towel. Problem was Plook’s pad was oot in the country and he’d given Kevin a lift wi the rustic rolls. Now Kevin had nae wye hame. He kept walkin til he came to a port-a-loo, round the side of the house, out of sight of the party. One bottle for fifty fowk, fit was Plook thinking.
He tried the handle, edged in sideways, squeezed past the tiny hand basin and shut the door.

***

Stevie rapped on the hard plastic.
‘Come on Kevin. It’s lashin out here and there’s only one toilet. You’re causin a queue.’
Kevin’s cheeks were weet. A horrible gasping escaped fae his throat. Shit, the walls were so thin he was feart to fartin in een of these, abobeoy would hear. Abody outside would ken he was bawlin like a baby.
He scrubbed at his een with the heels of his hands.
Fit a bloody mess he made o things!

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Come on, Kevin! Stevie’s voice was unusually gentle.
Kevin handed up his boxers, belted his jeans and opened the door. He daren’t look up at the string of fowk waitin. Stevie grabbed his arm.
‘Come back to the car.’

They set off at a fair trot round the

The popping of corks and folk laughing...
back of the hose to Plook’s driveway, where there was a special parking area marked out with fluorescent cones. His boss thought o aathin. Aathin except how many bogs were needed and how lang it took to cook a pig.

‘Get in,’ Stevie shouted above the din of the rain.

‘Bit your interior. I’m soakin’

‘Get in!’

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

‘Enough!’ Stevie ordered.

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

‘So fits this a a about? Stevie turned in the driver’s seat, staring at him.

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

‘I just cock up aathin,’ Kevin clenchd his fists tight to stop greetin again.

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

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

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

‘Things can change…’

‘Plook tell me nae to bather comin on Monday morning.’

‘I wana speaking about that. Mine I wanted to ask you somethin?’

‘If it’s about your grand…’ Kevin started.

Stevie waved him aside.

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

‘Workin offshore is a a it’s cracked up to be,’ he began. ‘Awa fae hame at the time, hearin Permata greetin doon the phone when her period starts… onywy, now I’ve got my redundancy I dinna want to go back. I want to try something different.’

Kevin might have known this would be about Stevie.

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

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

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

Stevie was starting to give him a sure

heid. Maybe Natalie was right. Maybe his blood pressure was wrang.

‘Fit have I got to dee wi Waitrose and Markies?’

Stevie shook his heid.

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

‘Fit you on aboot?’

‘Do you fancy being our business partner? Permata, you and me — thirty odd percent each.’

Kevin couldn’a believe what his brother was offerin, a stake in a business when he, Kevin, had nuthin to put in.

‘I dinna ken fit to say, Stevie.’

‘Say aye.’

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

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

Flora, or was it Harris, started barkin again.

Stevie lent across the passenger seat.

‘Fit are you deein? Aabody’s lookin.’

Kevin laughed.

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

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

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Poems by Lydia Harris

Disposal of the Body as Individual Act

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

March 27th 2005

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

BY SALLY FRANK (with GAIL LOW)

Emerald green, Kildunan blue

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

It is wonderful to be back, despite the fact that it is freezing cold and the 40mph wind expected tomorrow is building slowly. Archie and Peggy, elderly crofting neighbours, drop by to say hello. Archie keeps his hat on, though he is over-trousers roll down into twin toe-caps sticking out.

Most mornings, we have a routine: a Co-op shop, a bit of cleaning and tidying. We go to Susan’s house in Scarinish for tea on Saturday and they come to us later in the week. Today the weather is fantastic and Tiree is magical: blue sky that extends forever, melding with the sea, and hardly any breeze. There are perfect days here and we’ve just had five of them in a row. I am struggling with the medication as usual, either stiff or dizzy, sometimes both stiff and dizzy.

* * *

Dark, grey-black...

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

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

* * *

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

* * *

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

* * *

and orange

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

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

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

* * *

Parkinson’s disease is a progressive, degenerative neurological condition that affects the control of body movements. It causes trembling in the hands, arms, legs, jaw, and face; rigidity or stiffness of the limbs or trunk; slowness of body movements; and unstable posture and difficulty in walking. Early symptoms are subtle and occur gradually. It happens when the neurons (nerve cells) that normally produce dopamine in the brain gradually die. The death of these cells leads to abnormally low levels of dopamine.... Parkinson’s disease is a chronic, progressive illness, and no drug can prevent the progression of the disease.

* * *

Love something every day. Except the flutter of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.

The act of losing isn’t hard to master.

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

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

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

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

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

*.

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

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

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

*.

Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture I love) I haven’t had lied. It’s evident.

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

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

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

*.

Writing It

Who is writing this “I”? In one of our earlier conversations, I said to Sally, “You should write about having Parkinson’s; between the medics and the carers, I can see how you are feeling more and more diminished. Parkinson’s - both the illness or the medical language of diagnosis or treatment - doesn’t define all of you.” She tells me that she doesn’t have the energy or the sustained motor-coordination to write a long piece. We talk about what we’d like to see in the essay, arrange a time for an interview and then record it. I collect past emails, interview transcripts and, later, lay them all flat on my dining room table to take stock: a mosaic of words, fragmented, shaped and quilted together to inhabiting her “I”, knowing all the time I am not her, but trying to work with the grain of those words and experiences. When I email an early draft to her, I write, “I’ve tried to preserve your words and the emotions as much as I could, but have also compressed, shaped and quilted together to make the writing more seamless.” In her reply she seems bewildered and, perhaps, also cross. “Did I think this?” she says. I reply, “I’m sorry, but I am so, so also absorbed.” “But this is you!” she says. “Oh, I want to shout, “everything I’ve written you have more or less said.””

Between more or less is, of course, an abyss. The art of losing - Sally’s generous gift of ceding control of words, is, of course, my gain.

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

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

If having Parkinson’s can be described a colour, what would it be? It’s dark – black for the moment. Though it may look like (Write it) like disaster.

of me now. When I was first diagnosed, I refused the obvious “What have I done to deserve this?” or “Why me?” question. The answer is always, “Why not me?” And that helped. The doctors don’t know. We don’t know. The pills I take give me a small window of movement.

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

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Sian MacFarlane

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Torridon
ROBIN WILSON

the wilderness says something
and you are busy listening –

the pitch is sharp with birdcalls
the tone is a monster growl

underfoot the flint slides
until you must move or fall –

there should be communion
with moor and lichen rock

not the imagined conqueror

is this the best view?

where’s the outcrop

no one has stood upon?

suddenly light flares out
behind the boulder storm –

this could transcend
all previous distractions

you take a photograph
to define an epiphany

to prove your measurement

of memory and wonder

then press to send
but there is no signal

rooms by the sea
(after a painting by Edward Hopper)
JUDITH TAYLOR

You know by the light
when the sea’s near.

Landbound, how you mistake
that silver shifting

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

never yours.

Though you case your stone foundations
even in caulker’s tar

still

that tide will come.

The Rig
IAIN TWIDDY

If people can live on an oil rig
drilled in to the middle of the sea –

like a rickety metal spider,

braced and craned, cranked, straining-platformed,

like landing gear on a distant planet,

or a pond-skater sunk to its knees

in mud, the tides tugging at the feet,

wind the only solid thing in sight

jerking like vultures at a carcass –

if men can work there, leeching the earth,

the sea as deep as the air above,

like walking outside without trousers;

if men can sleep suspended above
the bed, the cold their only blanket,

when one deep lurch could bring the whole thing
matchsticking down, one spark flood the sky

with a ravenous cataclysm

as the oil spurts like an artery,

then surely I can dig in a bit

longer here, with less of an anchor,

until the reason begins to flow clear.

Beyond The Dunes
JIM C. WILSON

Beyond the dunes the sea is grey and deep;

it’s edging up the beach, like liquid lead –
cold, almost, as sleet. So I will keep
to my path, eyes near-shut, fixed straight ahead.

Then home once more, I have a compulsion
to dive deep down into myself – and write;

but, as the daylight dies, I emulsion
a wall, until I see nothing but white.

Winter winds are moving in the roof space;

I hear them sigh. A second wall shines white

as darkness spreads. Soon, all will be in place,

I think. Now all the house is gripped by night.

Beyond the dunes the sea is deep and black.

Across my finished paintwork runs a crack.

Mappa Mundi
ROBIN WILSON

lichen fizzing over a granite boulder
like the distant lights of a metropolis

and I could be Easy Jetting homeward
above the flat glare of amber suburbs

with the world’s map covering its skin

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

The Room With No View
JIM C. WILSON

This room’s a cube, too small for me to stand
in, too small for me to lie in – and grey –

not dull, not bright, just basic neutral grey,

and if I were to sleep (curled up) when I awoke

I would not know how long I’d been asleep,

if it had been two hours or if it had been
two days (or twenty years) and so I would

not know what day it was (or year) and what

is more I would not know if it were day

or night, this room’s grey walls being windowless

and doorless too, I should have said) and when

I think of food I can’t be sure about

how hungry I should be, not knowing when

it was I last had food and do I need a wash

and where’s my keys and dog, and do my friends

not know about all this and how I came
to be in this small room, this too small room

where I’ve been writing this for, well, I’ve been
writing this for thirty hours or thirty years
although these days or nights one can’t be sure

of anything; the length, the heights, the depths.

Ancestry
HAMESH MYERS

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

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

as you were buried in the sand.

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

Do you believe in ghosts
Or just the tremors of the past?
Sumburgh, 1952

Martin Malone

I

Advertisement

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

A man of parts with a knack for engines, at stations with radar or radio beacons he’ll have a flair for telecommunications. A useful cook and good companion, he won’t make a fortune but will be at peace with himself and the world. Main chores are long hours in the watches of the night. Not for everyone, this keeping of the light.

II

The Inspectors

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

III

The Lightkeeper’s Daughter

We climb the stone wall and edge down the slope to watch puffins for hours, snuggling into the cliff’s nook, me in Dad’s coat out of the wind, drinking tea from his thermos.

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

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

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

IV

The Lightkeeper’s Wife

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

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

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

The Sixty-One

Eileen West

One came in shyly and shook my hand without a smile. Without the look or language of an oilman.

What he’d seen had made him fragile.

One of the sixty-one.

A wife stared at me with a reproachful eye.

Am I the enemy? Do you think I’m someone?

He, nervous, fiddling with an unfamiliar tie.

Another of the sixty-one.

To some we were the enemy: “the Company”.

All full-blown and high-flown and on our throne of money-saving villainy while they toil in agony.

What is left of the 288: the sixty-one.

One watched his mate as a fireball fall to the black water. It plays in his head still and for always like a horror re-run. Sleep has been denied him since the slaughter.

He wishes he was not one of the sixty-one.

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

Those who think they survived: the sixty-one.

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

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

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

Harrowing but an honour to be the stenographer Recording the words and wounds of each father or son who survived their worst night. THEIR Piper Alpha. All sixty-one of the sixty-one.
I snail’s hornies. Mebbe she’d grow ane ae day, like the that she nae hae ane. She thocht that in todgers, tho it wis the first time Jessie Touer.

Todger bedd straicht up like the Eiffel littlin, surroundit bi creams an poothers. He wis crawin an curmurrin like a cushie. The new bairnie wis lying bare nyaakit Mackintosh hoose an intae the kitchiet. Syne her fowk hid adoptit ag ain, a loonie Sally Mackintosh wis adoptit, an nae lang Cam the repon the wee quinie.

The young woman steps off the bus, its last passenger, and into the High Street and she hesitates, standing in the shadowy quadrangle. In the doorway of the Chapel she waits, A dark figure hastens round the corner. In the distance a dimly-lit hotel appears like a spectre which has strayed into a medieval city. The chimes of a clock cut softly through the winter night. She smiles at him. He takes her hand, ‘Uncle Tam wants tae see ye Mary. Can ben wi me.’ Fin Mary gaed intae uncle Tam’s room, he wis spraucled oot on his bed. He wis mither nyakait, barrin a mungin smemit guffin o swyte, booste, an fash. Aneth he wore naethin ava. Mary hid niver seen a nyakait mannie afore.

‘Ging up tae hin Mary. He wants ye tae touch his todger, Luik, I’ll show ye.’ Ina tuik her uncle Tam’s todger in her wea haun, a ruggit up an doon. Mary wis horrified. Uncle Tam’s physog wis a hottered o blackheids. He hid than bluis stringly hair an rotten teeth. His todger stood up like stick o rhubarb, reid, wi veins breenigin oot.

‘Ye’ll get pennies like me gin ye dae it,’ quo Ina. Bit Mary didna wint uncle Tam’s pennies. She ran ar the wyre hame an niver devalued ance. Nae lang eftir thon, she flirtit wi her family tae the Lanie. Anthon wis a thare wi tae the story. The three quinies, Sally, Mary an Jessie playedropies till teatime: ‘I’m awa in the train’, ‘An you’re nae comin wi me, I’ve got a lad o ma ain, An ye canna tak him fae me.’ Wee hea in the fashion, ‘Wee hea, an ruggit it up an doon. Mary stood up like stick o rhubarb, reid, wi brukken biscuits an toast. The queer caimb. An they’d bring in secunt haun wi brukken biscuits an toast. The queer caimb. An they’d bring in secunt haun.’ Ina’s wee brither wis staunin in fyled branches towards her hurrying figure. ‘Cam awa in quinie. Y e’ll be Mary. Ina gathered up a haunfu o chips in a paper cone an skippit aff intae the neist.
**POETS’ PARADISE**

**SHORT STORY BY DAVID McVEY**

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

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

‘Aye,’ shouted Robert Burns, ‘the mair women the better!’

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

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

‘Och, Milton, it’s no all about you.’

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

‘You’ve been asking that every week. Who are you?’

‘Mewling, puking infants,’ muttered O’Hara.

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

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

‘…and you might think that their existence couldn’t be furthered. They have eternal life and eternal bliss. Why would they read poetry?’

‘To make them feel miserable!’ said Burns. ‘Some poems dae that.’

‘Yes, Rah, though in any poetry-reading campaign we had better say “Poetry enables us to taste emotions beyond our normal experience” or some flannel like that.’

‘Michty, Will – we’ll need a marketing copywriter. Name of as would write mince like that.’

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

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

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

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

‘That was iver, Wattie!’ chortled Wordsworth. ‘What you wrote iver wasn’t proper poetry!’

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

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

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**ENDLESS. BEGINNINGS. Nothing ever begins or ends. Continuity contains entropy, stasis contains movement. Nae meter how many times ra knife chops, severs, slices, divides, nothin separates.**

*A get in ra lift oan ra 10th floor. Ra man awready in ther fae higher up. E could be 35, or 60; ra povurty, diet, man awready in ther came fae higher up. He’s smokin in ra lift, even though it’s against regulations, an’ fur a second A consider no gettin in ra lift wi him, but A dae.*

*He’s talkin tae dugs. “Ye’re ma good girl. Ye’ll feel better soon, eh? Good girl.” “Is she ill?” A ask.*

*“She gat somethin oan er tail oot ther in ra grass.” E points tae a hairless, crusty sore. “A got some cream fae ra vet, an’ she’s gettin bettur.”* When we leave ra buildin, A walk by ra rivur, an’ e walks wi ra dug oan ra path thit runs parallel, separated fae ra Kelvin Walkway by bushes. Wi cannae see each uthir, but A hear im. “Ye’re a good girl, eh? A’ll look urther ye. Ye’ll feel bettur soon. C’moon an’ wull huv a wee walk aboot.”

*It snawed in ra Wyndford ra day, but noo it’s evenin, an’ ra snow has turned tae ice an’ slush. A walk through it in baby steps, kerryin a heavy bag ay groceries in each haund. Thit’s an iron fence, an’ a young wumman oan the ither side ay it. She’s got three plastic bags; wan hunds a boattle ay Irn-Bru, anither a boattle ay cider, an ra thrud a mix ay food an’ claes. “Excuse me,” she says. “Wull ye gie me a hand? A cannae get the bags ower ra fence.” “A huvnae goat any,” A say. “Sorry.” “Thanks anyway. Thanks a lot.” “Take care.” A pick up ma bags an walk hame.*

*In Tesco, a young man mumbles a question tae ra middle-aged man at ra checkout. “D’is it coast 50 pence tae pay wi a debit cerd?” “Naw, no here, pal. It’s free.”*
THE WRONG IDEA

SHORT STORY BY S.A. MacLeod

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

‘I’m sure he didn’t mean …’

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

‘Look…’

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

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

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

At night the caravan shook when your mother stomped around and it rocked when she shouted at your Dad. Now and then you imagined the sea had come right there and then gone. You threw off your pyjamas and started getting dressed.

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

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

‘No, I’m the king of the castle get down you dirty rascal.’

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

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

‘We got burnt.’

‘That was stupid.’

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

‘Didn’t you have any sun cream?’

You looked at Mairi who was looking at the boy.

‘Come on up here, if you like,’ he said. You both ran towards the rock and climbed up beside them. You could see all around: the people on the beach, a dog, the sea and the sky.

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

‘Look,’ you said to Mairi, ‘it’s a limpet.’

‘Tongue and teeth? And… has it got eyes?’

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

‘Tongue and teeth? And… has it got eyes?’

‘I don’t know.’

‘What about ears?’

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

‘In their space?’

‘Yes, they push it away.’

‘They’re not up yet?’ you asked Mairi.

‘On the toilet,’ she said. ‘Look, you said to Mairi, ‘it’s a limpet.’

‘A what?’ she said.

‘A limpet. We did it at school.’

‘Oh,’ she said, ‘is it alive?’

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

‘I’m putting on my shorts,’ said Mairi.

‘Me too!’

‘And that’s my T-shirt,’ you yelled.

‘And I’m putting on my knickers,’ shouted Mairi.

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

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

‘What do you think you’re doing? You’re just: ‘Having a lovely time’. You looked at Mairi who was looking at the boy.

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

‘They’re not up yet!’ you heard her roar.

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

‘There’s a boy to see you.’

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

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

‘We’re just coming!’ You shouted to the boy.

‘Hurry up!’ he said.

You threw off your pyjamas and started getting dressed.

‘I’m just putting on my knickers,’ you yelled.

‘And I’m putting on my vest,’ said Mairi.

‘Me too!’

‘And that’s my T-shirt.’

‘I’m putting on my shorts,’ shouted Mairi.

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

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

‘What do you think you’re doing?’ she growled.

You looked down.

‘What had you done now?’

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

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

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

‘What idea?’ asked Mairi.

‘Do give me that cheek. You know what I mean?’

‘Don’t give me that cheek. You know what I mean?’

‘I’m putting on my shorts,’ you yelled.

‘Off with you. Go out and play with your boy.’

You walked out of the caravan slowly.

‘What did she mean?’ asked Mairi.

‘Knickers and vest are bad words,’ you said.

‘Like bloody and damn and… big bum…?’

‘Shh! If we say them… people…’

‘It’s going to be pink. It’s going to be pink…’

‘The wrong idea,’ repeated Mairi.

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

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

You remember rushing through the sand dunes with the reeds stroking your legs, the wind in your ears. The boy was saying something that you couldn’t hear. Mairi was dancing down the beach. What did the boy know? Why were you so bad for saying these words? Mairi did a cartwheel on the beach. Suddenly she was upside down and then the right way up again. You felt heavy and stuck in the sand. The boy was zig-zagging across the beach, nee-nawing like an ambulance, or maybe it was bee-bawing because he came from down in Glasgow. The sea was sparkling. Fat seagulls were swooping or maybe it was bee-bawing because he...

The boy was waving now, jumping up and down, watching them and then you looked out...

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

You stood at the side of the cave...

‘Jesus… girls… are… stupid!’ said the boy.

‘That’s… right’

‘A f**king… football… team?’

‘No… what… is… it?’

‘What’s… that?’

‘Celtic… forever!’ said the boy.

‘A f**king… football… team!’

‘A f**king… football… team!’

“The boy started laughing. ‘Jesus… girls… are... stupid!’ he shouted.

You stood at the side of the cave watching them and then you looked out at the sea again and your eyes hurt going from the dark to the light. You felt dizzy and walked away from the cave to look at the rocks and the pools around them. And maybe it was the crab that reminded you. The crab was scuttling sideways, but you had walked home slowly with the flowers. You had walked in the heat and the bluebells had turned purple and withered. And you couldn’t show her how lovely they had been on the hill. You thought you could make her happy, but you weren’t fast enough, you were slow like the limpet stuck to the rock, the bluebells had died and it was your fault.

And you stood up and walked away from the crab and the rock pool, away from the cave. Mairi and the boy were still shouting and their voices faded as you got nearer the sea. The seagulls screamed above you. And now you can see yourself, a child of seven or eight, standing there looking at the sea...
**Waiting with Greyfriars Bobby**  
**Janis Clark**

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

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

When the sun cried off behind a cloud,  
my watched warned it was getting late.  
My first and last time.

Before I left, I patted Bobby’s nose  
and marvelled at his patience.

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**Driving Lesson**  
**Merryn Glover**

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

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

---

**Celebrating a Cypress**  
**Juniperus communis**

juniper smoke saining a new year in  
an ancient medicine

jenever fortifying dutch courage to win  
the dry london processing of savin  
with various botanicals therein  
berries of juniperus and citrus skin  
tonic, ice and lemon the linchpin  
the raj sugared bitter quinine with gin  
mother’s solace, maudlin heroine  
heart of the cocktail hour – no sin

now additional aromatics begin  
a gin evolution a la Darwin  
gin for joying,  
gin for ageing  
whatever, whenever, GIN.

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**The Reunion**  
**Sheila Lockhart**

Brisk breezes sweep the New Town street,  
Festival madness in her step  
She hesitates, peers through the open door  
Still there these thirty years and more?  
Thinned hair, pale skin, worn slippers on his feet,  
A gust quakes her heart in its foundation,  
Spots of cold rain splash her face.  
He speaks her name, not forgotten then?  
She enters, remembering this place, his embrace.
Savour the huam

Artist Amanda Thompson on the roots of her new book

A

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

I loved these words and more: they had a resonance and a particular feeling to them that was sometimes poignant and affecting, and sometimes conveyed a prosaic descriptiveness that nonetheless spoke of close connections to the land. More than names, these words conveyed a sense of the landscape, what it contains, how we move through it, and even specific times of day or year.

Break-back: the harvest moon, or the earth in the earth in the warm days of summer, evocative of that feeling of the hazziness of a long, hot summer’s day as it spills into evening. This old dictionary made me begin to wonder about lost connections to land and place and perhaps even ways of seeing and being in the world, and I began wondering what else I might find.

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

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

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

T

The alarm gied yi a fleugh so yi blooter it intae silence—anither day sters. Yi hae that wee bevridge aff thisideboard before Yi. But it wuz nae aye like this. When yi keep yer dignity, ken whit eh mean? Ye’re a bittie ootae order, but fur Yi like thi crowd in here, ye dinnae get tae keep thi heid; she’ll see whit she kin dae. Then... suspentit! Whits ye were gi’in’ me thi boady swerve,” yi shout, an gang ti gie thim a wee hug. But it wuz nae like this. When ye first started in thi Cleppy Road, before thi barns, it wiz a joy to get up fur work. A brach crowd o’ lassies and aw thi strappin laddies fae thi mills doon thi fir work. A brah crowd o’ lassies and aw, and almost mair chattie though. Seams yi keep yer dignity, ken whit eh mean?

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Everybodys’ goat thi hump thi day. Yi like thi this place, especially thi auld songs oan thi juke box, yi sing alang, they’re a lauging, they enjoy a guid sang an a sesh, so yi dae a few mair. Megic! Thi feeling of being ‘tap o’ thi hulfitoon Ma’— who wuz it that said yin yok? Och, Wha kersel! Yi close yer een tae savour it. When yi open them wherr ur they a’? Ye go roond thi big curved bar and ther they ur.

“Hullo ther. Ony body wid think ye were gi’in’ me thi boady swerve,” yi shout, an gang thi gie thim a wee hug. But yi yer feet catch oan thi brass rail and thi wae glass in yir han creshes oan thi bar. As thi thare clatter across thi bar tae a spinning stop, yi see ther een; oot like prawns, thim drawin’ back slowly, like yi were mental an a’. And as thi rose-tinted glesse fa’ awa, yi see clearly, an’ it izna bonnie.

Cataracts

Short Story by Roddie McKenzie

Maist fowk are braw when yir helping them choose thi frames and thi bairns that jist need a wee bittae re-assurance. Yi ken yi wur a bittie ootae order, but fur her tae pit a complaint in aboot yi... ah mean tae say... Then... suspentit! Whits that aboot? Yi asked Cath. She tells yi tae keep thi heid; she’ll see whit thi kin dae... Still, stupidly noo, walk oot proud, dinna gie them thi satisfaction.Yir een burn, bit yi keep yer dignity, ken whit eh mean?

Nae point in gangin’ hame sae early, jist mair time tae kail. Yi gang up tae thi ‘View’ tae relax. Thi vino goes down pretty guid. Yi like thi crowd in here, ther usually mair chattie though. Seems everybody’s goat thi hump thi day. Yi like thi this place, especially thi auld songs oan thi juke box, yi sing alang, they’re a lauging, they enjoy a guid sang an a sesh, so yi dae a few mair. Megic! Thi feeling of being ‘tap o’ thi hulfitoon Ma’— who wuz it that said yin yok? Och, Wha kersel! Yi close yer een tae savour it. When yi open them wherr ur they a’? Ye go roond thi big curved bar and ther they ur.

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

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

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

Kyleakin ferry remembered
Peter Godfrey
Cars and lorries snug on deck in a din of steel and rivets that drifts out half a mile, slips past its sister vessel.
Far-flung lamps a constellation, green and red, dim white and blinking as a searchlight arcs the cosmos, falls on capstans and dark waves.

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

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

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

Here is the butter silk
Of crumpled sea storm fronds
Sneaking up on the bent grass
By the bleached tombola
And here, here is the last sigh,
A soft swither of a glance,
Then a pull on the door of the old place
And the sharp creak of leaving.

If You’re Out There
Marie-Bernadette Rollins
Don’t come complaining to us about war – you had it coming.
Don’t feed the stove with iron and ice if you want it burning.
Don’t appease our wounds with elixirs that you know won’t be numbing.
Don’t promise us next May when you know that you won’t be returning.
We’ve mourned the moon through each feeble night but this eye can’t find sleep.
Don’t condemn vices you burden us with from cradle to tomb.
Don’t reproach us for ravishing fields that you gave us to reap.
If you want us to repent, then tell us who’s praying to whom?

In a Hebridean cemetery
Peter Godfrey
We are just stones, somewhere between boulder and pebble lodged on a mound of grass, a twist of ewe’s wool on the rusting wire.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Robertson was brought up in Aberdeen, where his father was a university chaplain. He went on to study English there, and his work often recalls the north of Scotland, particularly the coast. Poems in the 2010 collection The Wrecking Light talk about “The fishboxes of Fraserburgh, Aberdeen / Peterhead… nothing but the names / of the places I came from years ago…”, while the penultimate poem in the collection, “At Roane Head”, winner of the Forward prize for ‘Best Single Poem’, is well known for its gruesome text: it is full of “daggering light and sun laid out everywhere”. The story of The Long Take is based around a soldier returning from the Second World War. Scarred by his war experiences and unable to settle back home in Cape Breton, Canada, he travels first to New York, then west to Los Angeles and San Francisco. “He walks. That is his name and nature.” We read at the start, and Walker takes us with him through the seedier side of these cities of 1940s and 50s America.

The Cape Breton setting – and the precise use of language – are reminiscent of Alistair Macleod’s wonderful novel No Great Mischief, and Robertson studied for his Masters under Macleod’s tuition, at the University of Windsor in Ontario, Canada. But whereas No Great Mischief was a richly Canadian novel that Scots could see themselves in, The Long Take’s Canada is sometimes very Scottish: we never hear of the French Acadian side of Cape Breton, or the long African culture and history of Nova Scotia. Walker is a traditional man, silent, believing that the girl he has left behind could see themselves in, the disconnected thoughts of the war veteran, his short diary entries and brief conversations with fellow citizens of the city’s underbelly, the precise words of his newspaper copy, the elliptical dialogue of film. Robertson has said that he thinks poetry should be read aloud to be savoured, and combinations and descriptions in The Long Take reach moments that need to be re-read and tested: directionless and hungover, Walker wakes up: “He found himself misplaced in his bed all night, missed…”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It’s difficult to believe that Michael, ever the perfectionist and stickler for every detail, wasn’t directing the design of the cover, a “chronicler of the improbable, celebrant of the underdog”.

Fiends Fell

Tom Pickard

Flood Editions (Chicago 2017)

Ballad of Jamie Allan

Tom Pickard

Flood Editions (Chicago 2004)

Review By Bor Pegg

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

a gold crest of light
caps black mountains

and a raven
on an overhead powerline

sling below cumulus

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

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

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

Music is a recurring motif in Fiends Fell. Wind strums a powerline like an Aeolian harp. It plays across a chimney...
lip “like a sooty flute.” In a gale, the inside of the house breathes like the bellows of a concertina. At the end of November, with the cafe about to close for the season, and a wind coming from the north “like flying ice”, Pickard tells himself:

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

The piper is Jamie Allan – musician, thief, serial army deserter, stravaiger, incorrigible snook-cocker - born in Northumberland around 1734, possibly of Gipsy parentage, and died in prison in 1810, while awaiting transportation for horse stealing. In the high cafe, Pickard is working on the libretto for a ballad opera based on Allan’s exploits. This preoccupation is hinted at in Fiends Fell, which mentions Allan from time to time (as an unreliable guide across the treacherous landscape of the uplands), and contains a cold-blooded sequence about murdering 80-year-old Maggie Clark, once a partner of Allan, who contains a cold-blooded sequence about who was it static from her stockings lit the room an instrument I was inside of

Fiendstones – New and Selected Poems by Jim Mackintosh (Tippermuir) 2018
The Language of Lighthouses by Alison Seller 2018

The Walrus Mutterer, published this spring as the first in The Stone Stories trilogy. Pythas may have been the initial inspiration, but the book’s primary focus is a young woman, Rian, and several other women besides. Taken into slavery from Clachtoll after being staked in a gambling wager, Rian suffers many hardships through the book as she voyages away from Assynt. Not the least of her tormentors and captors is Uss, a female trader with the heart of a splintered iceberg. Pythas features, but despite the plot-shaping implications of some of his actions, seems almost a peripheral character in this first volume. As befits the matriarchal society the book describes, the interplay of powerful women, whether vicious or benign, is to the fore. That, and the strangeness tinged with old magic in the character of the ‘mutterer’ himself, Manigan.

Beyond the opener, where a cast of characters so large as to be dizzying.
seems to issue from the broch, the way the main characters relate to each other and reveal parts of their stories becomes more and more intriguing. As with all good historical fiction, this is a book which takes some facts about the past and then, through its artistry, makes you feel that past as a living presence. Roll on volume two: I’m itching to find out what happens next. ■

Sand and scrim and tarnished gold
Poetry Review By Lydia Harris

Guts Minced with Oatmeal: Ten Late Poems
Alasdair Gray, Fras Publications, 2018

Helopolis
Hugh McMillan, Luath Press, 2018

Sorceries
Walter Perrie, Fras Publications, 2018

Glik
Sarah Stewart, Tapsalteerie, 2018

Floating the Woods
Ken Cockburn, Luath Press 2018

Alasdair Gray has been a major figure in Scottish literature and art for many decades. His work spans seven novels which he has written, designed and illustrated, plays, short stories, poetry, drawings, paintings and murals – including the huge ceiling mural at Oran Mor in Glasgow.

“It’s always been interested in the beginnings and endings of things,” he has said. So his recent collection of ten late poems holds special interest, as a distillation of a life in verse. It opens with gratitude to the poet’s parents and ends with an invitation to: “obey that call into fertile nothingness.”

The poems are framed with a confessional prologue, ruefully entitled ‘Critic Fuel’. The reader begins her voyage through this life, made wonderful by contact “with art, science, magic and history” in conversation with the poet. Gray’s tone is candid and self-deprecating, as he promises his readers a “nourishing distillation of a life in verse.” It opens with an invitation to: “obey that call into fertile nothingness.”

The poem asserts that we are “fast afraig of “time holding eternity’s rage in our osmotic chain” – “We don’t serve pints to ladies,” the poet asks: “how can a twain be wholly one?” The language of love is qualified, “a two letter shift from is to is.” The poem asserts that we are “fast afraig of “time holding eternity’s rage in our osmotic chain” – “We don’t serve pints to ladies,” the poet asks: “how can a twain be wholly one?” The language of love is qualified, “a two letter shift from is to is.” The poem asserts that we are “fast afraig of “time holding eternity’s rage in our osmotic chain” – “We don’t serve pints to ladies,” the poet asks: “how can a twain be wholly one?” The language of love is qualified, “a two letter shift from is to is.” The poem asserts that we are “fast afraig of “time holding eternity’s rage in our osmotic chain” – “We don’t serve pints to ladies,” the poet asks: “how can a twain be wholly one?” The language of love is qualified, “a two letter shift from is to is.”

Like Alasdair Gray, Ken Cockburn invites us to enter a dialogue with and about his poems. ‘The Afterword’ in ‘Floating the Woods’ lets us into the process of creating; often playful and always intriguing. His methods are as beautiful as the poems. So ‘The Solitary Reaper’ is conceived as: “translations of (Wordsworth’s) reaper’s song made by a poet familiar with Basho’s work.”

This poet of fragments and random comings together, whose currency is what the eye sees and the ear hears and nothing second-hand, through his collaborations and projects, makes writing an adventure. An adventure for the reader too. He shares with Gray a delight in the texts of other writers. He also explores the use of other languages. Interesting too is his use of given measures, the alphabet, the months of the year. “These constraints” he writes, “evince (memories) in a way that more direct approaches often fail to do.”

Cockburn collaborates regularly with visual artists, which led to some of the work in this collection. This includes the six poems of ‘Ness’, which form a linked chain of responses to the eponymous river. They were composed to a brief drawn up by sculptor Mary Bourne as part of the River Ness Art Project – a series of inter-related works commissioned to highlight the ways the River Ness connects Inverness to other times and other places. The sequence is mesmeric. Collaged reflections assemble the river’s parts, from its tongue to its creatures, from the names of its tributaries to its power-balance with the tide.

These ‘woods’ are entirely welcoming and entirely unfamiliar. The poems are spare and exuberant at the same time, with such variety of response to the endlessly fascinating world of the poet’s imagination. The reader cannot help but be exhilarated by this collection. ■

The latest in a line of more than ten collections stretching back to the 1970s, Walter Perrie’s new work includes the poem ‘What can the makar?’ where he writes that the makar illuminates this where, this when, this cast. His Sorceries is full of wherens, whens, folk and creatures, each offering a moment of insight. But Perrie qualifies the possibilities of language and poetry; admitting (with candour, given his status as a poet, editor, publisher and critic) that language is limited: ‘What can the makar?’ ends:

all we thought we were collapsers in earthquake and metaphor.

These poems of humility are not afraid of “time holding eternity’s rage in his long strong arms.” The makar’s eyes are on eternity and time. The pamphlet is rooted in this paradox. Its author does not shrink from big abstractions and from distilling from them – in roads, hills, lizards and bindings. In the beautiful love poem, ‘Though you are sitting beside me’, the poet asks: “how can a twain be wholly one?” The language of love is qualified, “a two letter shift from is to is.” The poem asserts that we are “fast afraig of “time holding eternity’s rage in our osmotic chain” – “We don’t serve pints to ladies,” the poet asks: “how can a twain be wholly one?” The language of love is qualified, “a two letter shift from is to is.” The poem asserts that we are “fast afraig of “time holding eternity’s rage in our osmotic chain” – “We don’t serve pints to ladies,” the poet asks: “how can a twain be wholly one?”

The poem’s soft rhymes enable the reader to reflect on the act of reading. Perrie’s poems draw us further into “the enigmatic, the sovereign.” After this task, the final poem is a song to prompt us to end more resoundingly,” the note invites us to look through an ancient book gives each poem a classical context, expresses of fragility. They offer a lucid and honest account of this separateness.

Bar – “We don’t serve pints to ladies,” the barman said.” - she writes how:

My mother did not flinch. Coolly,

she asked for two halves, decanted them into a pint glass. I like to picture her, backlit by the jukebox in the pub’s smoky fug, raising that tarnished gold to her lips.

Glikc illuminates the bodily-ness of life with tenderness. It is also a robust analysis of the ways society has diminished women. In ‘You Ask Why I Seldom Write About Men’ Stewart defyly reverses gender roles, and describes marginalised men, inviting us to notice the way language has been appropriated.

There is fascinating range in these poems. Each offers pleasure where language and sense fit perfectly together.
CONTRIBUTORS’ BIOGRAPHIES

Frances Aimidle lives in Perthshire. A finalist in the 2017 Costa Short Story Award, she writes poetry and fiction and is currently doing an MLitt in Scottish Literature.

Anjali Suzanne Angilay is a Spyke poet, lyricist, ghostwriter and former journalist. She writes about UK history travels and is working on a book of essays about Hungary.

Juliet Attlee lives on the Isle of Mull. Her poems have been seen most recently in Magma, New Writing Scotland and the crime novel, Afloram.

Phil Baetson is a playwright and theatre maker from the Highlands. Creative director of Magnatique Company, he also runs the Internet Playwright – a group of drama writers of all kinds.

Meg Bateman is a Meg Bateman, a ragtag of Dùn Edinna since 1959, na b-iomar ag 5b Publican an Éilín Sgitheanach. Tha i riir n fùrlaichadh den bhàrdachd air aite: thèin a air le dhaonra ceann an t-athair. An bhàrd air tri crùnachadh, a bhàrdachd Ghlàighidh cath-a-rithadh a me a cheichadh.

Kirsten Bell is a poet, writer, copywriter, and literature student (of the Highlands and Islands). She lives and works on a croft in Lochaber.

Sharon Black is from Glasgow and lives in the Cotehele mountains in France. She is the subject of her fourth collection www.sharonblack.co.uk

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

Aonghas Peadair Caimbeul’s Am Bhom An Leth Mhàirtreachan an eim-se-dàra Udhât a De a tha Aonghas Peadair Caimbeul The e ar guileán leithreachadh bhoileachadh, nam mcag nam Oidheachd Mhac Dò Sheall dh’-Chàirdeileachd lainnt. Aonghas Peadair Caimbeul is a writer, poet and author.

Jennifer Morgen Henderson’s book Johnie T-j-Lfly was included in the Observer’s list of the best biographies of 2015. Her website is www.jennifermorgenhenderson.com

Marc Innes has been writing a novel for some time. His book of poems Shirth is available online.

Sheila Lockhart is retired and lives on the Black Isle. She started writing poetry two years ago following a bereavement and now she can’t stop.

Gail Low teaches at the University of Dundee. Having written academic essays for most of her working life, she is just discovering the possibilities of the essay form.

Mandy Macdonald’s poetry appears in journals and anthologies in and outwith Scotland, with contributions forthcoming in McSweeney’s (Shoreline of Scotland) and Thistle (Empire (Gray Hines)).

Sian MacFarlane works as a graphic designer at Tangent in Glasgow. A graduate of DJCAD University of Dundee, more of her work can be seen at www.sianmacfarlane.org

S.A. MacLeod’s short stories have appeared in anthologies, online and been shortlisted for competitions. She has just completed a novel that moves between contemporary Scotland and wartime Japan.

Aonghas MacNessail Poet in three languages, songwriter, journalist, broadcaster, translator, scriptwriter A Borders-based, multi-award-winning Skyeman, he is a Fellow of the Association for Scots Literature, with an Honorary Doctorate of Literature from Glasgow University.

Màirtain Mac an t-Sasir Ruggid Màirtain Mac an t-Sasir an t-Ann 1965 agus theagoidh an t-Eòlas e Ghlàighidh, Athair, crùnachadh dh’oidhchean guim, Deas na Samhna Society amson Caid Làothair an t-Am an 2003 an t-Inach an 2013 cho bhàith a’ rìgh air aige samhna 78 bhòidhcheadach Leal Proag.

Ian McDonald has published four collections of poetry, most recently A Birds among The Gwaybereis (Macarthur 2014). His work has appeared in Poetry Review, Ars Poetica, New Writing Scotland and other places. Brieza Rangasar supporter.

Fearghas MacFhionnlaigh Tighearcal air chluainidh an t-Ard Mòr. Roddie McKenzie has published in Northerners Writers’ anthologies since 2006 and recently also appeared in Lallie, Soinge Be, New Writing Scotland 33. 50 Shades of Toad and Toilet.

Cosminn MacNeill Tha Cosminn MacNeill na seòideach air Oidheachd Shìreaghadh An marn meg na leòghaidh aig Tha’ Brìgh leis e Forest Ages Tha’ Dhùl e Asphalt Sgòrbh eam faoin Òran: Tha’ Brìgh a ceann 120 dhà thoilrigh aig Tha 50 Shades of Toad and Toilet.

David McVey has published over 120 short stories and also writes non-fiction articles. He lectures in Communication at New College Lanarkshire.

Martin Malone lives in north-east Scotland. He has published two poetry collections: The Hunting Hillside and Ciel. He’s an Associate Teaching Fellow in Creative Writing at Aberdeen University.

Linda Menzies lives in Dunfermline and has had poetry and short stories published in anthologies during the past 20 years. Her first novel was published this year.

Deborah Moffatt (Aberdeen, USA) has a first book an Fhìtha nan bain. Bhit dh an cho-chuirmachadh air a fhòiltighadh an t-Am 2015, “Eating Thistles,” (Camphorstock Books) and is now writing her second.

Sherry Morris lives in the Highlands where she pets cows, watches clouds and dreams up stories. Her published work is here: www.ukihoko.com. She also tweets @ukihoko.

Maxime Rose Munro is a Shetlander living in Glasgow and still suffering the culture shock. Her poetry is an exploration, and interpretation, of this.

Robin Munns is now lives on Bute, after running a bookshop in Galloway. He has been published in poetry magazines as The Land of the Moon and Shetland like the World.

Hamish Myers lives in the Highlands and enjoys writing poems mainly inspired by the history, landscape and natural rhythms of the area.

Bob Pegg lives in Strathpeffer in Ross-shire. He is a singer-songwriter, musician, author, and occasional storyteller.

Sharon Gunnason Pettigrew’s novel, Rémourny, The story of Alexander Stanley was published in 2015. She has also worked in New Writing Scotland.

Marie-Bernadette Rollins is a Dundas-based poet, editor and non-native English speaker who believes in the power of words across borders.

Isobel Roffland enjoys penning novels as well as short fiction. She won the Rosemary Nevinson’s Association Elizabeth Grange Award in 2015, as an art correspondent for The Hè Rosie and a member of the Aberdeen Writers’ Studio.

Mark Ryan Smith lives in Shetland. His poems have appeared in various places, including New Writing Scotland, Gatier, Jock Scott and Zero and Saltmarsh.

Aren Sood teaches Romanticism, Gothic Literature and Critical Theory at Plymouth University and he is also working on several writing projects, including a book about the transatlantic cultural memory of Robert Burns.

Ian Talbott was raised in Taiwan and Hong Kong, worked in Botswana and retired from pacificists with progressive MS. He now lives in Glenshaibh with his wife, daughter and son.

Judith Taylor originally from Perthshire, nice lives and works in Aberdeen. Her first collection, Not in Nightingale Country, is published by Real Square Press.

Amna Ahmad teaches Romanticism, Gothic Literature and Critical Theory at Plymouth University and she is also working on several writing projects, including a book about the transatlantic cultural memory of Robert Burns.

Iain Twiddy studied literature at university, and lived for several years in northern Japan. His poems have been published in The Poetry Review, Poetry Ireland Reviews, The London Magazine and elsewhere.

Linda Taylor lives in Aberdeenshire. Her short stories have been published in the UK, the US and Australia. She is currently seeking a publisher for her first novel.

Eileen West teaches creative writing at Aberdeen University. Her work is influenced by Scotland’s wilder places and our interaction with them.

Sally Frank lives in Fife and Three. When she can, she likes to teach Creative Writing.

Matthew Gallagher is a Canadian living in Edinburgh. His poetry and short stories have been published in numerous journals.

Joan Gibson lives in Kintyre and is a member of Kintyre Writers. She began writing short stories and poetry in retirement.

Northwords Now at Ness Book Festival & Dingwall’s Word on the Street

As part of NBF 2018, Kenny Taylor will be joining Rosemary Badcoe, editor of online poetry magazine Antiphon, in the Highland Print Studio, Inverness, at 4pm on Saturday 6 October to discuss the pleasures and challenges of publishing literary magazines.

As part of Dingwall’s 2018 Word on the Street, several writers whose work often appears in the magazine will be joining the editor in Highlight Books from 2pm on Saturday 20 October to launch this edition of Northwords Now. Tea, coffee and cakes will combine with readings and conviviality. www.word-on-the-street.weebly.com

Keep in touch

With occasional news about Northwords Now and other aspects of the literary scene in the north of Scotland follow us on Twitter @NorthwordsNow and Facebook www.facebook.com/NorthwordsNow
Wild Twins


Making ink, pens, books and prints by hand from natural materials. Responding to the sea, the wind, the land and each other. Stories by the fire. Good food and company. Wild Twins is a unique course designed to offer all this and more.

Taught by award-winning novelist Paul Kingsnorth and artist Caroline Ross, who specialises in creating ancient art materials from the ground beneath our feet, Wild Twins is a course which will twin writers with artists, allowing them to respond to each other’s works and that of the wild land in which the course takes place. All materials, for both writers and artists, will be made by hand. Tasks and exercises, hours wandering on the beaches and down the lanes of this remote Irish island, with time with teachers and with each other, and much more will all serve to revivify your writing and art and who knows, perhaps more.

The venue for the course is Sherkin North Shore, on Sherkin Island – a small, remote centre on the very edge of some of the legendary islands of West Cork, surrounded by rugged rock seas, white sand beaches, fields and ancient ruins. Sherkin is comfortable but basic. There’ll be great food in the evenings, outdoor fires, perhaps a visit or two to the island pub for a music session, and the chance to mingle with other writers and artists in one of the most beautiful spots in the west of Ireland. For Paul Kingsnorth and writing go to: paulkingsnorth.net, for information about ancient & natural art materials, more details about the course, cost and bookings go to either: carolineros.co.uk/wild-twins

Ullapool Shore

Adrian Clark

She takes her time seeking weathered shards along the shore, I stride on, pocketing the odd one, Wondering at the abrading power of sand, sea and stone

In rendering jagged glass from mindless acts

To potential jewels at our daughter’s hands.

For what is waste, a sage has said, but atoms temporarily out of place.

Where to find a FREE Northwords Now

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Inverness

Waterstone’s, 69 Esplanade Centre
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Lakeland Bookshop, Greyfriars Hall, Church St.
Moistie Mower Writing Centre, 4 Traevann, Kyleakin
Highland/Whirled, Unit 6, 13 Harrow Road
Museum & Art Gallery, Caithness
Waterstone’s, 69 Esplanade Centre
HICA, Dalmellach, Loch Rafferty, by Dos
Visit Scotland, High St, Fortrose

VisitScotland, High St, Aviemore
Caithness Horizons, Old Town Hall, High St, Thurso
Achins Bookshop,

Storehouse of Foulis, Ullapool Bookshop, 14 West Argyll St, Ullapool
Moray Libraries
High St, Dornoch
Dornoch Bookshop, Timespan
Kilmorack Gallery, by Beauly
High Flight Bookshop, High St, Dingwall
Picaresque Books, High St, Dingwall
Tulloch St, Dingwall.
Highland Libraries
Highlands (plus Moray and Perthshire)
HICA
Culloden Battlefield Visitor Centre, Church St
Hootananny, Simpsons Garden Centre
St Margaret’s House, 3-3a Haddington Place
Visit Scotland, Dalcromie
69 Eastgate Centre
Waterstone’s, High St, Dornoch

Dumfries

Giraffe Cafe, 51 South St, Perth
Moffat Bookshop, 5 Well St, Moffat
115 High St, Ayr
214 High St, Montrose, Angus
Montrose Library
Morrison’s Haven, Prestonpans
Prestongrange Museum, East Lothian
29 Market St, Haddington,

26 Market Pl, Selkirk
The Forest Bookstore, 20 Dee St, Banchory
The Byre Theatre, St Andrews
Queen St, Broughty Ferry
Jessie’s Kitchen, Clementine
52 Nethergate, Dundee
Dundee Contemporary Arts
Callander, 91 Main St, Callander
Midlothian and East Lothian Libraries
Stirling Libraries
South

Stirling Libraries
Midlothian and East Lothian Libraries
Kings Bookshop, Callander, 9 Main St, Callander
Dundee Contemporary Arts, 52 Nethergate, Dundee
Clemminster, Gray Street, Broughty Ferry
Jennie’s Kitchen, Albert Street, Broughty Ferry
Broughty Ferry Library, Queen St, Broughty Ferry
The Byre Theatre, St Andrews
J & G Innes Bookshop, St Andrews
Topping & Co Bookstore, 7 Georgian, St Andrews
The Forest Bookstore, 26 Merkur Pl, Selkirk
Kesley’s Bookshop, 29 Market St, Haddington,
East Lothian
Prestonongrace Museum, Munro’s Haven, Prestonongrace
Munro Library, 214 High St, Montrose, Angus
Sah Cocoa, Lorne Arcade, 115 High St, Argyll
Moffat Bookshop, 5 Well St, Moffat
Graffe Cafe, 52 South St, Perth

Enter Library, Dumfries
Graciefield Arts Centre, 28 Edinburgh Rd, Dumfries
The Tolbooth and Albert Halls, Stirling
The Backlach Centre, Langholm

Islands, West & North

Isle of Eigg Craftshop, Isle of Eigg
Colombyn Bookshop, Isle of Colombyn
Caledonian MacBrayne Ferry Terminal
Subby Mòr Outsitting, Sleat, Isle of Skye
Blue Shed Cafe, Toros, Isle of Skye
Cafe Ardiea, Portree, Isle of Skye
Macintoshs Bookshop, Portree, Isle of Skye
Carmina Gadelica, Portree, Isle of Skye
An Buath, Brag, Sleat, Isle of Skye
Murn Books, Slan, Isle of Skye
Coral na Mara, Durness, Isle of Skye
An Caithrid, Caithness, Isle of Skye
Staffin Stores, Isle of Skye
Sgàghan Hotel/Struan’s Bar, Sleat, Skye
An Caithrid, Caithness, Isle of Skye
An Lamhain, Kilmartin St, Stornoway
Acair Ltd, Stornoway
Hebrides Jewellery & Bookshop, 63 Connel St, Stornoway
Taigh Chearsabhagh, North Uist
Hebrides Trust, Mealad, Luskara
Sheridan and Orkney Libraries
Western Isles libraries
Carling Micor, Isle of blyth
An Buath Bleg, Ferry Rd, Kyle
An Tobar, Skyeview, Muil

Aberdeenshire

Books & Beans, 12 Belmont St, Aberdeen
Lemos Terre, 54 West North St, Aberdeen
Newton Dee Cafe, 60 West Deer Village, Birkside, Aberdeen
Blackwells, Old Aberdeen, Aberdeen
Aberdeen City Libraries
Woodend Barn, Bue O’ Bittine, Banchory
Trains of Barnsley, 20 De St, Barnsley
Aberdarendshire Libraries
Hammerton Store, 336 QH Westend Rd, Aberdeen
Spendrift Studio, Tho Mars, Banff
Better Read Books, Ellow
Baffl Castle and Community Arts Centre
Orbs Bookshop, 134 Deveroe St, Hatley

Edinburgh

The Frumagallery, 45 Market Street
Blackwells Bookshop, 53-9 South Bridge
Scottish Poetry Library, 5 Crichton Clear
Elephant House Cafe, 21 George IV Bridge
The Village, 16 F St Forest
Kilmhorne, 88 Lothian Road
Mac’Naboo Books, 3 is-1141882t164 St Margaret’s House, 351 London Road
Summerhall, 3 Summerhall
Amenity Bookshop, 12 Resoreon St, Macinest
Wood Power, 4-5 Nicolaus St
Out of the Blue, 36 Dalmarnry St, Edinburgh
Edinburgh Bookshop, 219 Broughton St
Golden Hare Books, 68 St Stephen St., Stockbridge
City Arts Centre, 2 Market St

Glasgow

Centre for Contemporary Arts, 350 Sauchiehall Street
Oran Mor, 731 G Wester Road
The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, 100 Renfu St
The Piping Piper, 30 McPater St
Caledonia Books, 483 G Wester Road
Tchou Omsa Thadhon, 42 Oige Lane
Mmm, King’s Court, 10 King Street
Gallery of Modern Art, Royal Exchange Square.
Tell it Main, 134 Renfu St
WASP Studios, The Bigginst, 141 The Bridge Gait
Oxfam Books, 330 Byres Rd
An Lecragh, 22 Mainsfield St
Glasgow Concert Halls

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