

Reviews

Interviews

Short Stories

Community

Poetry

THE EILDON TREE

NEW WRITING FROM THE SCOTTISH BORDERS & BEYOND

GUIDELINES	3	The Bletherin Bawtie – Iain McGregor	18
EDITORIAL	4	Beside Myself – Tim Nevil	21
POETRY		A Creative Dream – Raghu B. Shukla	24
Café Bar – Helen Boden	5	The Case of the Coloured Kipper – Louise Thomson	26
Grasping the Measure – Michael Davis	5	The Frog Down the Well – Olga Wojtas	27
Dead Wasp Haiku – Sean Fleet	5		
Morning Crowds – David Hendry	5	INTERVIEW WITH PAT MOSEL	29
Invitation – Davy MacTire	5	THEATRE, FILM & EVENT REVIEWS	31
Scots, Scotch, Scottish – Philip Hutton	6	BOOK REVIEWS	33
The Bridge – Anita John	6	BIOGRAPHIES	46
Love of Two Oranges – Robert Leach	6		
Moscow Hoodies – Robert Leach	7		
Far Awa – John McCann	7		
Roosting Aloft – Barbara Mearns	7		
Swallows, Bonaly Reservoir – Ian McDonough	8		
Clachtoll – Ian McDonough	8		
The Last Home of Robert Louis Stevenson – LesleyMay Millar	8		
15 – Jamie Norman	8		
Stand at the Edge – Jane Pearn	9		
Teacher – Penny Reid	9		
Fox – Elizabeth Rimmer	9		
Spindle – Elizabeth Rimmer	9		
Last Borders Weaver Pantoum – Ian Richardson	9		
Adolescence 1950's – Chrys Salt	10		
In the Merchant City – Finola Scott	10		
A Hern i Langholm – Hamish Scott	10		
The Dooble – James P Spence	10		
Adam Smith – Jock Stein	11		
Farewell to the Lums O' Cockenny – Jock Stein	11		
Wattie Suddie – Alun Robert	11		
FICTION			
Flowers for Shirley – Douglas Bruton	12		
Snowed In – Sean Fleet	13		
The Cleaning Programme – Russet J Ashby	14		
The Kelso Chemist – Jo Jones	15		
Goodbye, Isobel – Vivien Jones	16		

WHERE TO FIND YOUR FREE COPY OF THE EILDON TREE

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

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

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMITTING WORK TO EILDON TREE

Submissions of new writing are invited for inclusion in the next issue of *Eildon Tree - Spring/Summer 2016*. The Submissions **Deadline is 18th March 2016**.

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

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

HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR WORK

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

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

THE PROCESS

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

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

Publications Submitted for Review

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

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

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



CAROL NORRIS



SARA CLARK



IONA MCGREGOR



JULIAN COLTON

EDITORIAL TEAM

Carol Norris, Sara Clark, Julian Colton, Iona McGregor

PUBLISHING TEAM

Susan Garnsworthy, Joy Dunsmore, Andrew Frost

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Graphic Design, Scottish Borders Council

As you are reading this editorial, the dark days of winter are rapidly moving into the lighter days of spring. So much has been happening in the Borders writing scene since the last issue with an unsurpassed number of book launches, readings, open mic and drama events all reflecting the rich diversity of writing voices from Scottish Borders and beyond. Just take a look at our Review Section for confirmation of this fact.

Over time an untold number of writers have contributed original work, reviews, interviews, and articles. Add to this Writing Festivals, workshops, CDs, writing competitions and performance events associated with ET, and the magazine can justly claim to have played no small part in a hard won victory to celebrate and raise the profile of contemporary writing in the area. Incidentally, a victory shared by a fantastic support network of writers, Councillors, the Arts Development team, editors, graphic designers, writing professionals and festival organisers inside and outside the magazine. You are all central to the current, and future success of *The Eildon Tree*.

The Eildon Tree has always endeavoured to provide a creative platform for eclectic voices and to engage the reading public's attention in the region and further afield. In showcasing first time writers, widely published authors, playwrights, translators and poets, encompassing use of both Scots and English language, as well as representing all ages and abilities - this current edition reflects this assertion. The standard of submissions for this issue was incredibly high and for any writers who did not make the final selection on this occasion, the Editorial Team advises perseverance.

Also testimony to the magazine's growing popularity was the incredible number of folk who last year entered our *Waverley Lines* writing competition to celebrate the return of the railway to the Borders. Thanks to all who contributed and congratulations to the winning poets and writers who featured in our special *Eildon Tree Waverley Lines* anthology published in September. It's clear that, as a hive for writing activity, the Borders has never been busier. So look out for similar writing opportunities promoted by the magazine in the future.

Enjoy writing and keep sending in your submissions.

Julian Colton
Carol Norris MBE
Sara Clark
Iona McGregor
The Eildon Tree Editors.

CAFÉ BAR

In profile, in conversation
 the fabrics of your clothes (linen, silk)
 complement the sofa (indigo/slate).
 My glimpse of that keen glint from your eye,
 gem set deep in a near-classical form
 - save for a bead of sweat on your temple
 featured by the angling of the lamp-shade
 along with incipient paunch, as you lean
 in profile, in conversation --

is enough to recall how under less subtle light
 and wearing black you asked me to hold you
 after I again refused to commit,
 and I refused that too, wanting at least
 to look you in the eye,
 not over your shoulder, insincere:
 the cinema stereotype, unable to promise
 to the middle distance, or to you, held ignorant
 what I could never deliver.

Helen Boden

GRASPING THE MEASURE

I've walked the Somme from Serre to Mametz,
 I've looked into the crater of Lochnagar.
 I've seen the countless lines of graves,
 Studied maps and read the books,
 But I'd never grasped the measure of the Somme.

One day at work Craig sat next to me;
 Eyes shining with his zest for living.
 Narrow framed and callow limbed,
 His boyhood not yet through its moulting,
 Balanced at the cusp of promise soon becoming.

And I recalled again that gently sloping field,
 Freshly ploughed, with rusting shells and bones
 That marked the path of the Glasgow Pals:
 And grasped then the measure of that day
 As being the death of twenty thousand Craigs.

Michael Davis

DEAD WASP HAIKU

Antennae still twitch,
 Though your thorax has been crushed.
 You left me no choice.

Sean Fleet

MORNING CROWDS

Daffodils hang their yellow heads
 In a shadow cast by a house,
 Surrounded by a white, soft frost,
 Which the sun is melting.

People walk by on a pavement,
 Their footsteps clattering.
 More people come than go, leave no
 Traces to show they've passed.

Is it sad to be among them,
 These morning crowds that move like clouds
 Along the street, gathering, forming, drifting, parting,
 Beside a garden, sun, shadow, flowers and frost.

David Hendry

INVITATION

Come the winter
 where leaves rot
 and worms shrink
 in icy heaps.
 Come the winter
 when snows drift
 and willows break
 in frozen lakes.
 Come the winter
 where medieval
 is the tone
 and all the children
 coming home
 are wrapped
 against the biting wind
 and numbing cold.
 Come the winter
 so I may at last
 grow brave and old
 and keep the world
 in sleep.

Davy MacTire

SCOTS, SCOTCH, SCOTTISH

Fringe crowds take the summer hot on flesh.
 Sunburned faces cram our narrow Mile
 of trodden cobbles, crowstep gabled heights.
 Heliotropics, sensation hungerers from Greece
 France Italy Australia, Marrakesh,
 all the spectrum of americana, cameras and smiles
 weathering their gentle senses, sunlit teeth
 exposed to saltire-daubing mountebanks and touts
 for itsy-bitsy cuteness dunked in scotsiness.

Far off, a let-out into emptiness
 on backswept spaces contoured high –
 carved out husk of glaciation cycle –
 empty slopes and scree-torn steeps –
 windcombed flattened whitened grass.
 This fort, sixth century, seventh, eighth
 they think, dissolved now to a stony ruckle,
 a lichen patched and hobble-nobble heap.
 Pictish? Celtic? Scots? Brythonic? They only guess
 or freely name the vague and vanished folk.
 Skyline crested, the viewpoint of a future state
 it blocks in foreground where the vision leaps
 to tribal turbines, leagues off, arcing into sky
 and leagues beyond them vanishing in smoke.

A hybrid nation, Scotland
 hooked on high-bred phantom spectres.
 Trilobites to Jacobites as genotypes to phenotypes,
 call centres resonate with connoisseurs, collectors.
 Fossil prototypes determine archetypal choices
 and infant phonemes croak ancestral voices.

Philip Hutton

THE BRIDGE

I search for where it might have been,
 deep in the glen among tall sitka spuce,
 and find two wooden beams or fallen trees –
 moss coated, lichen stitched, two feet apart –
 crossing from one side to the other.
 I would trust my weight to their strength
 in this green and eldritch light
 but I am neither child nor fairy-light.

Onwards then to Bowden Moor
 with a growing sense of watching.
 The moor shrouds itself in a thin-dressed haar
 and the silver threads of spiders' webs
 catch and throw the light so everything shimmers
 in obliterating brightness.
 All sound hushed save for the fragile chink
 of a single bird in an unseen tree.

As though, for a short time, I have stepped
 into a place where fact and myth have merged as one.
 Then the sun insists on burning off the fret
 and my dream-like vision of Scott's Rhymer's Glen is gone.

Anita John

LOVE OF TWO ORANGES

Moscow morning:
 Tonnage of battleship clouds
 And hoodie crows stabbing at gutter litter.
 Between the Bolshoi and the Metropole
 A Barents Sea of puddle, where a roaring truck,
 Remembering a long-gone war, perhaps,
 Geysers up icy cataracts and hoppers-full
 Of brown, stagnant, winter water,
 Which drench and souse and glaciare pedestrians.

At the theatre, a few actors
 Huddle up outside, heads in shoulders,
 Smoking. Each his own. A nod
 Of recognition, and: '*Kholodna.*' ('It's cold.')

I enter. On the desert stage
 Scenery seems arctic refuse.
 Even the dust's too cold to shiver.
 Here I must rehearse, squeeze meanings
 From a sapless trunk.
 We keep our coats on. The play
 Petrifies like tundra.

Sasha arrives. He's late.
 Anger stirs behind my ice-box ribs.
 He puts his hands up.
 Not in surrender, though: he's holding
 Two oranges.

We scamper to him, a tumbling playgroup,
 Encircle him, hungry morning votaries
 In a shadowy carnival ale feast.
 Our shared desire cracks our crazy-paving'd frost.
 Sasha's silver knife blade slowly cuts,
 Opens a promised succulence. Greedy with goodwill,
 We take the proffered slice,
 Pleased to wait till he is pleased to give.
 Juicy freshness pricks our tongues, trickles
 Down receptive rehabilitated throats.
 We are fifteen people, two oranges, one taste.

This Communism works.

Robert Leach

MOSCOW HOODIES

A lone hooded crow
 Squats by the bun seller
 In Alexander Gardens.

Its foot's broken,
 Curled like a fish hook,
 And its two wings
 Don't shut properly.
 Head tucked into neck,
 It sits, drab with pain,
 And when it turns its round eye
 On me, its neck makes
 An arch of agony.

I have no crumbs.

That evening – rain, steady as unwanted time,
 Dusk, thick as borsch:
 A huddle of crows with black heads,
 And grey tattered shoulder cloaks,
 Cluster, and never a wink among them.

They line the phone wires
 Like bullets in a belt.

Under my black wet umbrella,
 I hurry past.

Robert Leach

FAR AWA

Yer a that far awa
 A they thoosands o miles
 Empty hoors on twa planes
 Though nae that lang ago
 It wid hae been wiks
 An nae on a plane either.

Yer a that far awa
 In the cauld and the dreich
 An fin the sun shines it
 Aye feels a bit special
 Cos it winna last onywy
 Its naething like that o'er here.

I ken yir far awa
 Fin I finish my work
 An trudge up thay stane stairs
 Tae my ain foreign room
 An callin for prayers
 Fills the weet, burnin air.

Bit there's aye the web
 Oor one-at-a-time texts
 Sometimes stuttering skype
 Wi words detached fae mooth
 Til that final reid button
 Pits us far awa again.

John McCann

ROOSTING ALOFT

At ebb of day
 a fleet of swifts
 dark, sleek, fork-ruddered
 silently rise, cruise thermals
 ride gentle airstreams, turbulent waves
 napping, yet mindful of wind-shift, drift and speed
 star-anchored, first to see bursting dawn
 circling on high till streets awake –
 descending a mile of empty sky
 down, down, then swoop
 like screaming pirates
 invade our town.

Barbara Mearns

SWALLOWS, BONALY RESERVOIR

Like the best paper plane you ever built
swallows cut the sky
into a thousand small blue pieces.
*If I come back... you said,
that's what I want to be.*

For me it would be an albatross,
vaulting the heavens
between scraps of rock,
an emblem of dry land,
a mote in the eye
of the God of endless ocean.

Ian McDonough

CLACHTOLL

Remoteness brings the campers nearer,
equal under the straight-talking weather.
Their minds drift gratefully away
from cold city strongholds of glass and steel
the cut and thrust of the water-cooler.

But always a single cord remains
tugging gently, firmly,
even as a crimson gash of sun
dips like some dazzling god-bird
underneath the edge of Avalon

Maybe the solitary diver, black-throated,
plundering the oily larder of the sea,
may be immune. If so, it doesn't know.

We hunt for something lost
between the sea and ancient rocks,
camping on the fragile strand
among the divers and the sea-pinks

I to the hills will lift mine eyes,

Each of us huddles in our makeshift tent,
clutching ourselves like jewels,
pockets full of sand,
the very stuff of diamonds.

Ian McDonough

THE LAST HOME OF ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

I am Elena.
I wear orchids and hibiscus in my hair.
My clothes are the colour
of amaranth, alamanda,
flame tree and red ginger.

I heard the tales of Tusi Tala.
He talked of places I would never know.
He built a house of red and peacock-blue
with rooms as high as trees,
filled it with wild music.

In rare moments, he liked to lie
on the veranda of Vailima,
breathing scent of ylang-ylang,
dreaming of his other home,
a grand house in the cold north.

Drinking Kava and smoking,
he drifted back to childhood,
to the sounds of the old city.
He sailed the ocean to reach us
in the delicious heat of Upolu.

I cared for all his family,
for travellers who came to hear him,
washed and smoothed their strange clothes:
trousers, and long-sleeved shirts,
stiff dresses and starched headwear.

I often heard unearthly shrieks of his women,
his wife who talked of devils, fought
the grasping lianas in the jungle.
Tusi Tala was like the tallest tree fern
and he fed us with his words.

In the silence of that night
we gathered, fanned him, waited.
I prepared his white shirt,
wove a garland for his journey.

LesleyMay Miller

15

After a single day
Many a fisherman will quit
The heron has yet to move

Jamie Norman

STAND AT THE EDGE

The shore. The land's frayed hem. Where
certainty is worn down grain by grain,
where knowing (you thought you did) meets
unknowable (now you know that you don't).

Stand at the edge of the seeming-solid world (but
sands roll rub shift beneath bare soles),
watch the perpetual restlessness of sea,
feel its pulses echo at the wrist.

It has its own life, its own reasons,
(your life came from it) (your atoms will return)
it has no need of you.

Take a paint-box. Could you? Do it? Glass-deep
green, blue of long summers-ago, silver of promises
nearly-kept. Pigments to capture colours
that are not colours at all like (tones moods airs)
adventure, longing, pity, home.

How to depict the crump – hear it, feel it –
as waves fold over themselves
too heavy for their own strength,
drive against cliff?

Find the wordpaint (can you?) for
how it would be to smooth your palm over
the swelling liquid pillow,
to stroke its curve's expand and stretch.

For how it arches – a horse's neck – along its length,
shatters. A billion bubbles. For how
each captures the sky, explodes
with light, dies exhausted. For how

the foam's shed skin returns to sea. Begins again.

Jane Pearn

TEACHER

My job hurts.
It asks me to meet myself when I don't want to.
I try in my job to detach
to put efficiency, order and timekeeping first.

But my job turns inwards
and frantically I mould white knuckled vertebrae,
press them urgently into young hands:
leaving my own spine melting

Penny Reid

FOX

unseen, no footprint,
but the bitter smell lingers
on the morning's frost.

Elizabeth Rimmer

SPINDLE

Arrowy leaves, dull crimped white flowers
until the summer's done, and then a blaze
of pink and orange, molten red and bronze,
a hedgerow bonfire of leaf and fruit -
this is the spinner's tree, the dyer's tree,
the tree that spangles the humdrum
with softness, warmth, and colour.
It ought to be exotic, its flaming leaves,
its tri-lobed fruit, bright pink and glowing
like a Christmas bauble, but it's not.
This is no grace and favour tenancy,
No feral wanderer beyond its bounds,
it's native, it belongs in this wild space
here, like art, like passion, like the joy
in work that makes us rich and free.

Elizabeth Rimmer

LAST BORDERS WEAVER PANTOUM

The last weaver that spins in the Borders
With the bright silver thread of the Tweed
Interlaced with his own Holy Orders
He embroiders your every deed.

With the bright silver thread of the Tweed
Fresh spun tapestry every day you arise
He embroiders your every deed.
To give you an enchanting surprise.

Fresh spun tapestry every day you arise
Discovered mist filled in the dawn
To give you an enchanting surprise
But the last weaver's already gone.

Discovered mist filled in the dawn
Broken threads that he's tried to repair
But the last weaver's already gone
Vanishing webs of bright liquid air.

Broken threads that he's tried to repair
Like the Bruce hidden on his way home
Vanishing webs of bright liquid air
He still battens new cloth with his comb.

Like The Bruce hidden on his way home
Interlaced with his own Holy Orders
He still battens new cloth with his comb
The last weaver that spins in the Borders.

Ian Richardson

ADOLESCENCE 1950'S

I was the bee's knees, the cat's pyjamas
smoking on the top of a Midland Red.
My eyes mascara-ed to tarantulas,
puffing on a fag I'd nicked from dad.
My tits were early tulip bulbs just sprouting
under a skinny sweater's stocking mask.
Pan Stick over spots, pink lippie pouting.
'Over Sixteen' if anybody asked.
Hair back-combed to a busby, stiff with lacquer.
Suspenders, fish-nets, tiny mini-skirt
that almost showed a glimpse of navy knicker.
Stilettoes I could hardly teeter in and hurt.
The conductor took my fare and shook his head.
'Does mum know you go out like that?' he said.

Chrys Salt

IN THE MERCHANT CITY

I lounge at café table in cold
sun, sip bitter coffee, wipe froth from
lips with snowy cotton, savour
a cigarette.

Jamaica, Virginia, West Indies, Barbados

Faint at my back between colonnades
a cane tap taps,
gold headed. Voices mutter
of uncertainty
of tides. Sugar Princes mull
over the price of slaves,
the cost of cargo.
Capes swirl crimson above private
pavements. Chandlers, victualers,
scrabble in gutters.
Downstream, out of sight,
gulls keen, the river sucks greedily.

Spiers, Buchanan, Cunningham, Glassford.

In the Style City's crystal galleries
trade bleeds on.

Finola Scott

A HERN I LANGHOLM

'I am only that Job, in feathers, a heron, myself,
Gaunt and unsubstantial'

Hugh MacDiarmid
Lament for the Great Music

In Langholm toun A see
a hern amang the deuks,
an see yung Kirsty Grieve,
his thochts abraid i beuks;
than leukin efter me,
it's Hugh MacDiarmid leuks;
as gif afore tae srieve,
can see the cumin cruiks

Hamish Scott

THE DOOBLE

Ah seen yer dooble the ither day.
Ah tell ee hae wus yer spit.
Same skinny, drink-o-witter figure,
same toosilie hair aboot heez shooters,
even the wey hae walked Ah wud say.
They say awbodie's got thir dooble,
but Ah've nivver seen mines like.
Acourse naebodie ivver sees thir ain.
But this fella's wus yer dooble aw aye.
But Ah kent it wusnae you tho,
jist sumhin, sumhin aboot him ee ken.
Hae wus ower ferr away tae speak tae,
an the road's that busy at that bit.
Ah've nivver ivver seen him afore,
but nae doot hae wus yer dooble.
Ah tell ee, ee suid've seen him.
Ee missed yersel the ither day.

James P Spence

ADAM SMITH

He thought well. He meant well. He lived well.
He deserves this statue by the City Chambers
to the author of *The Wealth of Nations*.

Is he not the father of free enterprise?
He has earned this jacket with eleven buttons,
this cloak, this curled wig, this reputation.

Now his eyes and lips are bronze, to match
the hearts of those who cherry-pick his writings,
leaving out his checks and balances to power.

Jock Stein

**FAREWELL TO THE LUMS
O' COCKENNY**

Grey and white across the sky
fly shrouds and cirrus clouds;
above the Firth, the Fife hills flit
from west to east, and brush
a laid back, painterly horizon;
shore lines match this movement,
picture framing work and living space.
The vertical begins far down, where
hidden shafts lift coal from underground
to make a profit out of power.
Two chimney stacks take over, bound
up and away, cock a Cockenzie snook
at flat earth thinking, lift our hearts,
change landmarks to blue sky marks.

Sailors set their homeward way by them,
golfers guide their forward play by them,
locals spend their every day by them –
but not for long. Already, pylons hang
their empty cables in a sad catenary,
without a whimper, let alone a bang.
The universe tomorrow's horizontal.

Jock Stein

WATTIE SUDDIE

Stood four deep around Mansfield Park
grandstand packed with landed gentry,
school masters, business professionals
and those fortunate to have tickets

when brave young Wattie Suddie
wing three-quarter extraordinaire
ran the oval ball for Hawick Greens
en route to the touch line of victory

was clean and wholesome in spirit
without recourse to trick or stratagem
honoured to represent his country
no matter the conquest or the conflict.

Great War enlisted then commissioned
alongside officers of landed gentry,
school masters, business professionals
and those fortunate to buy position

where he drove courageous incursions
for the Lothians and Border Horse,
the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders
and finally for the proud Seaforth

was respected by his squaddies
wing, hope and prayers aplenty
running over the top for freedom
en route to the touch line of victory

until taken just before Armistice Day
in the blood red of stray artillery
alongside other brave Border lads
scattered deep around the trenches.

Dedicated to the memory of 2nd Lieutenant Walter
Sutherland (1890-1918)

Alun Robert

FLOWERS FOR SHIRLEY

It was a Sunday and it was my day off work. Jesus, I was whacked, you know, and I was just walking the streets, getting some air, and that's when I saw 'em.

It was just an ord'nary Sunday, as Sundays go. Nothing different 'bout it. Just one of 'em Sundays in April and near to May, when the sky is clear and the air crisp as biscuits. I'd had enough of Shirley and her asking me all day to do stuff 'bout the house – cos in her asking, see, Shirley was making a point 'gainst me doing next to nothing all the time, which ain't exactly how it is. So, I jus' took myself out. I thought I might get me a drink up at Coop's bar, if it was open. A few drinks maybe, and clear my head and feel good 'bout myself again. But then for no reason I just walked right on by.

It was a couple of streets past Coop's that I saw 'em. They was maybe in their sixties or seventies. I ain't so good at estimating that kinda shit. Older they coulda been. Old as train-timetables or history books or hills, that's what they was. But though they was real old, they was still sorta young, too.

I'm always telling Shirley stuff like that, saying as how you is ever as young as you feel and not never as old as your years. That's what these two was like when I saw 'em in the street past Coop's bar: young though they was old.

The first that I saw 'em they was dancing, really dancing, there in the Sunday-quiet road, their arms flung wide like they could be flying, and dancing to no music as I could hear or anyone else 'cept them. I must admit that *she* was the one as straight off caught my eye, more than him. She was pretty in a way, sorta soft and slight and her eyes flashing and blue. I sucked in air and my lips was puckered in a kiss. And she was really light on her feet, light as a skipping girl, and

laughing, and wisps of her ash-blond hair was floating all ways like silver feathers.

Shirley's always asking me if I think *she's* pretty and when she asks I tell her for sure that she is. Then she says as it don't mean the same if she has to ask me all the time, and maybe she's right, and maybe I should make the effort to tell her more than I do. Thing is, Shirley's always been pretty and I reckon she always will be. And, well, this woman dancing in the street, she was the same kinda pretty.

Then I noticed *him* and though he was all crumpled and creased, he was also lit up like the young can be. He wore a hat tilted high on his head, and maybe it was 'gainst his thinning hair or 'gainst the sun that was warm for the time of year. And when he stood upright he stood crooked a little. But he was dancing, too. The two of 'em dancing, like they was right out of some old Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers movie, shoes sliding easy on the stone pavement, and neither of 'em looking where they was putting their feet and neither of 'em needing to. And though there was no music playing, I swear that watching 'em I could hear something, a rhythm at least.

Suddenly, I wanted Shirley to see this. I don't know why, but I thought it was sorta important, you know. I thought in what I was seeing was some great secret that Shirley needed to know. It was jus' there and obvious. Jesus, I wanted everyone to see it.

Shirley and me, we go back a fair way. Back to the year dot, Shirley says, which ain't exactly true, but back to school days anyways: me back then writing Shirley's name in blue pen on my arm and pretending like it was a tattoo, which it is now; Shirley putting her hand down the front of my trousers for a schoolyard dare and keeping her hand there longer

than she needed to and fixing me with her eyes and laughing. Shirley's eyes is blue, like the woman dancing in the street, blue as a sky that hurts to look at too long.

Soon as we was done with school, me and Shirley, well then the two of us was running into all our tomorrows and the days after. We got a flat together up on Minto Street, both of us feeling like we was all grown up and nothing could touch us, not ever. And if I remember right, we slept on the floor of that flat for the first three months, or maybe it was six, long enough till we'd saved up some and we could afford a bed. And we ate our dinner off the one plate and drank our water or wine out of the same glass, and we was always kissing and always touching each other, like we couldn't really believe we was so lucky.

'Course, life gets in the way then. It's the same for everybody, I reckon. We got us a couple of kids now, a boy and girl, and though I love 'em both, love 'em both to brass bits, they're a lot of work on top of everything else. And me and Shirley, well, we ain't so wrapped up in each other like before, there jus' isn't the time, and I guess that's only natural. But I wanted her to see this old guy and his lady dancing in the street, cos I thought it was somehow important.

I followed 'em for a while, keeping at a distance so as they wouldn't know. They was like two kids in love for the first time, all silly and not caring that they was; not caring neither that other people seeing 'em would think they was silly. Maybe they was on a second honeymoon or something. I heard people do that these days and it's like starting over or starting new. Or maybe they wasn't really married at all and they was having an affair, though that didn't sit right in my thinking, not with how good they

was with each other, like they'd danced together same as this all their lives. He kept taking her hand and I swear when he did he looked a little taller with it, top-hat-and-tails tall, and straighter, too. And she kept laughing and skipping ahead of him a small ways, teasing like, and 'come get me' in the look she gave the man, then waiting for him to catch up, waiting for love to catch up. They was breathless and pale, like shades of people, but they was happy, too, overflowing happy and happy like no one I ever saw before.

'See, Shirley. It is possible,' I said out loud and to no one.

They went into a hotel finally, one of 'em grand places with the name all shiny brass letters and flags big as bed-sheets flying from the balcony and potted orange trees in the windows. There was a man there, standing for show out front, dressed in a long coat with silver buttons and wearing a peaked cap and ready to open the doors with his white-gloved hands. I didn't think it was right to follow 'em inside, even if I coulda persuaded the man at the door to allow me. Instead, I let 'em go.

After, I bought some flowers from a roadside vendor and he wrapped 'em in pink crinkly paper, a whole sunburst spray of 'em, carnations and dahlias and white michaelmas daisies, and he said some girl was gonna be real lucky this Sunday and he winked at me like he knew me. And I took 'em flowers back to Shirley. I meant to fetch her in my arms and dance her around the living-room a breathless turn or two, just to feel what it was like.

Shirley was sleeping when I got home and pretty in her sleep, too, like angel-pretty or pretty as a picture. I told her so, my lips close to her ears, close enough they was kissing-words. Maybe Shirley was too far in sleep to hear me, but I thought I noticed a smile playing at

the corners of her mouth, like she coulda heard what I'd said.

Kids was sleeping just the same, with Shirley, the three of 'em all curled up together in the one bed, like puppies or kittens in a litter.

I quietly put the flowers in a jar of water and placed 'em beside the bed where Shirley'd be bound to see 'em when she woke.

I switched the radio on in the kitchen, low enough it wouldn't disturb 'em none. Then, with the door pulled to, I danced by myself, pretending like I was dancing with that old lady in the street and her hair flying in smokey silver wisps all ways, her blue eyes flashing like sparks, and the lady laughing, feet sliding in time with mine on the linoleum floor, or mine sliding in time with hers. It was easy pretending, but I reckoned it'd be a whole lot of something else with Shirley, and I thought Shirley would just get it, and she'd laugh and I'd laugh and like that we'd have a little bit of what I saw in that man and that woman dancing in the Sunday-street past Coop's.

Douglas Bruton

SNOWED IN

Tim eased open the front door of the cottage and stared out at the snow. It had obliterated any sign of the path and drifted half way up the garden gate. He whistled to his dog. "Come on Winston, let's get going." Huge flakes began to fall as the pair set out towards the main road and the village. Tim pulled his Parka hood close around his face and his mind turned to Emily; she was going to be really disappointed with her Christmas present, but he couldn't afford anything better.

The main road was completely deserted when Tim reached it. The black labrador trotted on ahead in the direction of the village, then stopped by the side of the road and

began to paw the ground. As Tim approached, the dog looked up and whined.

"What have you found, Winston?" A bright red object caught Tim's eye. He crouched down to get a closer look, but immediately leapt back. The dog howled and resumed digging. Tim dragged it away and stared down at a huge gemstone, attached to a gold ring, which was still adorning one finger of a stiff, frozen hand.

The fingers projecting from the snow were bluish-white, each one tipped with a nail the colour of freshly-drawn blood. Tim cupped his hands together and blew warm air across them. He dropped to his knees and grasped the hand. It felt colder than the snow that surrounded it.

"Dead, long since," he muttered. He peered along the still-deserted road. Fresh snow was beginning to entomb the hand once more. Tim brushed the snow from the ring and examined it for a moment. He twisted it and eased it off the stiff finger. The dog began to bark and Tim grabbed its collar. He scanned the snow-covered landscape, then slid the ring into his coat pocket. "Come on old boy, let's leave her in peace."

Emily was waiting for Tim as he made his way up the garden path. "You've been ages. I was just about to text you."

"Snow's really deep. It's been hard going."

The labrador squeezed past and trotted into the hall, and Tim stamped the snow off his boots and followed. Emily slipped her arms around his waist.

"Oooh! You're freezing. Come and sit by the fire- I've made some mulled wine."

Tim watched the deep red liquid flow into the glasses.

"It's so romantic," Emily whispered, "Snowed in on

Christmas Eve.”

A loud tapping at the window interrupted Tim’s reply.

“What was that!” he cried.

He raced across to the window.

The trees at the end of the garden were swaying in the wind and clawing at the sky.

“What’s up with you?” Emily laughed, “It’s just a blizzard.”

She squeezed Tim’s arm.

“Let’s get some supper and have an early night.”

Tim lay on his back listening to Emily’s deep breathing. He stared at the skylight above his head. It was covered in a thick blanket of snow and fingers of ice had spread across the inside of the glass. Tim listened to the wind whistling through the gaps in the window frame. Then another sound caught his attention; a whimpering outside the bedroom door. He was about to get up and scold the dog, when there was a loud crack above his head. Shards of ice rained down. Tim stared up at the small rectangle of glass. The snow began to clear, as if being brushed aside. The skylight creaked open and flakes of snow floated down onto the bed. A hand squeezed through the gap. Tim saw the bright red nail polish and cried out. Emily stirred.

“Tim! What’s wrong?”

Tim’s gaze was fixed on the skylight. It was now closed and the hand had gone.

“What is it, Tim?”

“N..nothing.... a nightmare... I’m OK.”

“Poor you,” Emily sympathised. She snuggled down and was soon asleep again. But Tim couldn’t take his eyes off the skylight. He decided to return the ring to its owner as soon as it was light.

Tim felt a hand caressing his face and opened his eyes.

“It’s beautiful, my love, I didn’t expect anything like this.”

Emily held out her hand to show off the ring. The deep red gemstone looked dazzling, even in the dim early-morning light. Tim sat up.

“W...where did you find it?”

“It was in your coat pocket. I was searching for the door key to let Winston out. Look! I’ve painted my nails to match”.

Tim gazed at the shiny red nails.

“Emily, it’s..... it’s not yours

Please....give it to me.”

“What do you mean, it’s not mine.

Who the hell did you buy it for?”

“I...I didn’t buy it for anybody...I...”

Emily turned and ran from the room.

“EMILY, LET ME EXPLAIN.”

The front door slammed. Tim leapt out of bed and rushed to the window, but all he saw was a shroud of thick grey mist.

It was almost dark as Tim approached the cottage. Heavy snow had continued to fall all day. Tim had contacted the police at lunchtime and they told him to get back in touch if Emily hadn’t returned by nightfall. He turned to look for Winston, but the dog was nowhere to be seen. He whistled. “Winston?”

He was answered with a bark. The labrador’s black form was just visible back along the road and Tim set off to fetch it. As he drew nearer, he saw the animal pawing the ground. He heard a sound behind him and spun around.

“Emily?” he called.

He peered into the gloom. There was nobody there. Tim knelt down to examine the place where the dog had been pawing. A red object caught his eye. He groaned. He scraped away some snow to reveal a huge gemstone, attached to a gold ring, which was still adorning one finger of a stiff, frozen hand.

Each fingernail was painted the colour of freshly-drawn blood.

THE CLEANING PROGRAMME

Mr Simon Brown, now retired, sat hunched in his old parka, on a cold park bench at 8:30 am, as his family finished their breakfast in their comfortably warm town house, just across from the park. His daughter-in-law had taken him in when his wife died. Her gesture seemed generous. There was, however, a problem.

Simon had tried to get things right. He kept trying. Like the morning when the twins had got up so very early. He saved the day. Granddad’s Special Cinnamon Toast was a winner. He followed HER rules and got the kids involved, beating the butter, mixing in sugar and dusting cinnamon on top. The cinnamon even went up their noses they were so good at the dusting. He carefully cut out bread shaped letters, T for Tom and D for Denny. They ate every last scrap.

That was just before the robot arrived. The box lay in the hall. He studied the label: deluxe model, multi-skirted, six armed cleaning robot, programmable, with automatic timing. *Cleans while you play.*

It was a dalek, with a skirt that could widen and narrow as required. The six arms rotated, at every angle, to lift, dust or polish. It could fill the dishwasher in seconds. Under that skirt it hid sponges and pipes. It could wash. It could suck. The suction fired everything to a tank in the garage.

It was phenomenal.

The rule was he, Simon, had to eat breakfast at 8 am. The cleaning programme started when SHE left for work. Once he came down in his night shirt, but SHE didn’t like that.

On the first day he was late he sneaked into the kitchen. He kept below the robot’s radar, on his

knees, but, in shock he watched as the skirt raised and sucked in his socks and shoes, followed by his toast and jam which fell from the plate as it was whisked from the table to the dish washer.

One day he had tried resetting it, but it refused an automatic restart and rescheduled everything – for later. Then the embarrassing incident of the rubber chicken that flew up its pipe and filled with air like a balloon, blocking the flow. He had taken the robot apart that day, but the engineer had to be called out. Simon should have owned up. He knew that SHE knew it had been him.

Now he watched from the back door as the creature cleared everything from the table and filled the dishwasher, while the suction from its skirt lifted every spec of sand from the floor. Then it began the steam clean and more suction.

He would eat in the garden. He dashed in for a bowl, then for milk, then cereal, but the step was cold to sit on. The robot moved on to the hall. Simon padded over the warm damp kitchen floor in his socks. He threw his parka onto the hall seat and climbed the stairs.

The high pitched thrum, as the robot got stuck into something big, alerted him and, from the landing, he saw the last corner of his parka sucked from view with a gut wrenching rip and burp from the machine.

Then he knew – it was time to move out.

Russet J. Ashby

THE KELSO CHEMIST

From the Edinburgh Evening News and the Southern Reporter, November 1877. A young chemist in temporary charge of J Massey Druggist, Kelso, was found dead in Newcastle, having taken morphia.

“Dear Donald

“I must tell you that I wish to end our engagement. I am so sorry, dear. I know how hard you have been working, too hard my father says, and I fear that in your eagerness to better yourself you have left behind those fine and noble qualities I had so admired.

“I never see you. You are always working or studying or reading. There are evenings in my company when you can barely bring yourself to speak to me, your concentration on your books so complete and exclusive that I may as well not be there. I feel that you are on a journey where I am not necessary, or even wanted.

“I have tried to discuss this, and many things, with you but your temper rises and I am reduced to saying nothing. We were so happy planning our wedding and our future together but now you are out of sorts all the time and I cannot remember when I last saw you smile.

“I am leaving in the morning and will stay with my aunt and uncle in Newcastle. I shall seek a position there. I wish you well.

“With all my love, still,

Margaret”

Donald read the letter again. And then again. He checked the signature. It was definitely hers.

He had re-read the letter whenever he could steal a moment from his

new duties ever since it had arrived yesterday morning and it always said the same thing. He had been stunned. This was the last thing he had expected. In fact he had lain awake all night going over her words, and this had done nothing for the headache which seemed to plague him these days.

“Dear Margaret” – *crossed out.*

“My Dear Margaret” - *crossed out.*

“My Dearest Margaret,

“I am astonished to receive your letter. I understood that we were most perfectly matched in ambition and temperament and that you would understand my desire to secure our future...” - *crossed out.*

He stared at the sheets before him. She should have understood but evidently she did not. In fact, he had had many sleepless nights with his studies, all for their benefit – for her benefit – and she was criticising him for not being as happy and carefree as he had been when he was getting a proper night’s rest! He was so tired now felt he could sleep for a week but for the minute he needed to stay awake and alert. He needed to do something.

“Dear Miss Reid

“I am in receipt of your letter of 10th inst. and confess myself to be astonished. You have said nothing to me before of your desire to conclude our engagement and I had believed myself to be in the full process of preparing a secure and happy future for ourselves. Poverty is a hard taskmaster and it behoves all of us to work diligently to ensure that we and our loved ones are not caught in its grip.

"I was raised to understand the value of hard work for the benefit of oneself and one's family and, indeed, my efforts have paid off of late; I have been tasked with the charge of Mr Massey's Chemist shop in Kelso on a temporary basis and feel sure that further evidences of preference will be shown.

I hope that you will think long and hard about the benefits of my conscientious habits and willingness to improve myself, and all that this would bring to our marriage, and I await your reply.

Yours faithfully

D Campbell esq"

That should do it. And he would take a little of Mr Massey's supply of morphia. This was not allowed, he knew, but he would make it up somehow and with a good night's sleep he would be back to thinking straight. He emptied a little into a packet and put it in his pocket. "I'll be back soon." He told his assistant and left to post his letter. He stood for some time outside the post box, undecided about posting but in the end he dropped the letter in. As soon as it was done, he changed his mind. It was too sharp, too formal. It did not say what he wanted to say.

The rain fell steadily but he did not notice. If he hurried, he might reach Margaret's aunt and uncle's house before the post was delivered in the morning. He headed for the coach – he would just be in time – and, finally realising how wet he was becoming, put up the umbrella he always carried at this time of year.

He missed the coach. He should have started earlier, although he had rushed as much as he could. Just another setback, and there was always the train, even though

he would have to wait and he wouldn't arrive in Newcastle until after all decent men and women were in bed.

Sitting in the carriage he shivered in his wet clothes. He could at least have stopped by the hotel and fetched his coat. Too late now and, anyway finally, finally he was falling asleep.

He was woken in Newcastle and turned off the train and he slept on the hard benches of the waiting room. It was not an easy night and his head ached more than ever when the morning came and the station was filled and busy. He began to walk. Too late to see Margaret before the letter was delivered. This had not been a good idea. His thoughts went occasionally to Mr Massey's shop but it seemed that the shop and his responsibilities belonged to another time. All that mattered was Margaret.

Eventually he was on the right street. It was dark. How long had he been walking? He had eaten nothing since the night before and he couldn't even remember what he had eaten then. He needed to think. He stopped at a lodging house and booked himself a room, then called at Margaret's aunt and uncle's house. Only her uncle was at home. Yes, Margaret had received a letter that morning. No, she was not at home. She and her aunt were visiting her cousin but would be back soon. No, he could not wait for her. Yes, if he dropped a note round, she would be sure to receive it.

At the lodging house a servant brought him some paper and a pen.

"My Dear Margaret,

I am sorry for my churlish letter. I must see you. I am staying at Mrs

Whitehead's lodgings and will be leaving at nine in the morning. I must get back to Kelso. I hope you will call on me before then. If you do not come, I will know that it truly is all over between us and I shall not expect to see you again.

Please come

Your loving Donald"

Nine o'clock came and went without Margaret. He remembered the morphia.

Jo Jones

GOODBYE, ISOBEL

It was raining of course. So the whole thing passed in a mizzle of greys and blacks, a slow moving procession, grouped in threes and fours according to friendship, family or other sticky relationship to Isobel. If any of them could see the body in the coffin they might remark that they'd never seen her in red before, never knew her to wear red lipstick, certainly would not have thought of her in red silk knickers, but the coffin had been closed with only her husband, Dick, in attendance. If you looked closely you could see the faintest of smiles on his face but everyone else looked as glum as they should. The church sucked them in, coffin first, borne on the strong shoulders of six hand-some young men who nobody actually knew, but mostly guessed were far-flung nephews. There were latecomers too, mostly men on their own, who may have been hurrying to join their wives after parking the car. There was not much parking space close to the church.

At the back of the church there was more whispering than the minister would have liked. It was the women - girls then - who had worked with Isobel in the department store after they left

school. They had not seen each other for years and had been a little surprised to have an invitation to the funeral in Isobel's own hand. Intimate, manipulative, very Isobel, as they remembered her. She knew she was dying but there was something a little wayward about those black edged cards in Isobel's unmistakable handwriting, more like an invitation to a party than a funeral. Except for the black edges. All those years ago their customers had remarked on her graceful calligraphy, the way she wrote *one blouse, ecru, silk and chiffon, 29/6d*, in a flutter of bold curves, with her fountain pen. It made the purchase more desirable, more special. There had been four of them known by their first floor departments, 'Hattie', 'Slippers' and 'Woolies'. Isobel had been 'Separates'. They had all been interviewed on the same summer afternoon by three senior directors and a personnel officer, told how fortunate they were to be accepted into a venerated family business, and dispersed as the most junior members to their various departments. Being together again stripped the years away and made them prone to giggling, three middle aged women stifling excitement in the back of the church. The minister continued to frown.

Isobel's two sisters stood close together. Millie was weeping, not woefully but in a soft sorrow that was half good-bye and half glad it's over. She leant into her sister's shoulder and was soothed with wordless clucks and sighs. Both girls had loved to visit Isobel in the big house, sitting listening to her stories. Had she really done all those things?

The sisters didn't care. It was so exhilarating to be around Isobel's animation, listen to her throaty laugh as she unravelled another string of recollection. Theirs was

a quiet existence, daughters of the town doctor, not quite clever enough for university, not quite fibrous enough for independent life. They were thirty and twenty eight. Millie worked in the library, her sister in the book shop. Isobel was the most exciting person in their lives. Had been. Millie thought she's just like someone in one of the books now, still vibrant but unreachable. Where would I put her - romance, yes, adventure, that too, autobiography, not sure, perhaps fiction would be more accurate. Millie knew they had seen only a version of Isobel, the one she was willing to share with them, playful, fizzing with incident. She looked around the church at people she had never seen before, people who had also been close to Isobel in some way. Afterwards she would find out, they would talk over tea, share their sorrow and stories of life with Isobel. Millie stared at the backs of the six handsome bearers, now standing with Dick, and wondered if she would dare speak to them. She was fairly sure that Isobel had not mentioned them over tea.

Dick focussed on the coffin to bring the tears the others would expect. He'd done his weeping - at diagnosis, at treatments, at remission, at reoccurrence, at final diagnosis, at disintegration - her death had been welcomed by both of them. Not something you could easily say except in banal phrases. *'A blessed relief.'* That was the most common one on the cards from those who saw her fade away. Since she had been open about it, sending chatty letters out from her bed referring to her illness as a final opponent who was out to get her, very few of those assembled had been surprised. When she told him she wanted him to help organise her funeral it was he who found it hard. *Don't be daft she had said I'm not being brave - when did I*

ever do anything differently? So she drew up lists; of people, those who should speak (and those who shouldn't) of music (lots, nothing dreary), of flowers (lots, as many bright colours as possible) and the shape of the reception. When he queried the boys she said *Don't be daft - we came to such a good solution. If I didn't mind, why should you? I'd like them to carry me - they're so beautiful, so well matched. You always did have good taste, darling.* Had he half-wished they'd say no? Isobel was certain they wouldn't. *No-one will know except you and me and I won't be talking about it.* They were standing beside him now, their sleek and fragrant presence exactly what Isobel had planned. A thought slithered down a Jehovah beam in the stained glass. How will they explain themselves at the reception? In all that milling around and chatter, who will they say they are? He felt a chill at the back of his neck.

Could Isobel have planned some dramatic revenge? Not really accepted their admission of actual desires. Him and the boys, her and the hotel weekends. He'd kept his part of the bargain, dressed her for a weekend away - surely she wouldn't...

No, of course she wouldn't.

The tall man had arrived just after they'd started, placing himself quietly at the back beside some fidgeting middle aged women. She'd said he could come if he liked. Liked! He'd been thunderstruck by the pale word, had remonstrated with her. *You'll have to pretend if you come.* As if they hadn't had to pretend anyway. Isobel had been immovable on that. No public gestures of affection, no threat to Dick, no slur on their position. It's a small village, and utterly merciless if you transgress. We like it here. How hurt he'd been by that *we.*

He'd been her lover for four years, at first suspecting he was not the only one but time had given him confidence. They'd met in a hotel. He was on business, had just finished a difficult meeting and decided to stop over on the Friday night. She'd been in the lounge, sipping Campari on her own, relaxed and alert at one and the same time, wearing a flowing summer dress that the sunlight penetrated, showing the outline of her fine legs. She had smiled at him. *I'm Isobel*. He'd not seen her for a year. She'd insisted that she would phone him, never the other way, and she had, only occasionally less than bright and chatty. Not so many phone calls in the last eight weeks and only one in the last week. *Goodbye then. And thanks*. Once he settled enough to look around he could see there were several men on their own standing a little apart from the nearest group. Men about his age, men well groomed, well looked after. *Once a month, let's not get bored with each other*. For no particular reason he counted the other men like him. Seven. Once a month for four weekends and a day off.

The service ended.

How Isobel would have loved the gathering afterwards. How she would have loved to eavesdrop on the introductions they made, the lies they told each other. Dick hardly spoke to the boys, certainly not as a group. They avoided her eight friends, possibly lovers, who avoided each other. Millie and her sister got into a huddle with the women who had been girls in the department store with her and were told even more madcap tales of Isobel when she was 'Separates' and had a romance with a married window dresser. This information made Millie so uncomfortable she dragged her sister off to talk about flower

arrangements with the minister instead. 'Slippers' hissed at 'Hattie' that they didn't actually know that Isobel had, *well, you know*, with the window dresser. 'Woolies' agreed but said that 'Slippers' had always been prone to gossip and make stuff up if there wasn't anything tasty going. 'Woolies' and 'Hattie' stood closer together, a united front against 'Slippers', who remembered they had always done that. Some very ancient grudges surfaced and soured the atmosphere. Isobel's own sisters and brother coasted around the room enduring the lightest of exchanges, not really wishing to know more than that it was a 'blessed relief' and a 'welcome release' so, in a way, the room was one circulating wheel of platitudes and avoidance.

Dick, faint with relief that people were filtering away without any fresh distress, remembered his manners. He touched the minister's elbow. *Thank you, nice sermon. Isobel would have liked it*. The minister sipped at the sole small sherry he had nursed all afternoon. *I'm glad you liked it but it was her idea*. Dick was slightly surprised. Of all the fine detail she had delineated for the funeral she hadn't mentioned the sermon to him. He thought she hadn't liked the minister who had made short dutiful calls towards the end. *So, when did you...*
The minister cleared his throat. *More than a year ago. We bumped into each other at a hotel...*

Vivien Jones

THE BLETHERIN BAWTIE

Ambrose Bertram Fitzgerald wisnae yin o oor sort! He didnae gaun tae oor scuil, weir the same auld pookit day-claes nor daff

aroud wi us in the schame. A teepical fouthie toon bairn, wee-boukit for his years, fair avised, cowed blond hair wi fernitckles roond his neb, an chowks sprittlet wi plouks. A big 'jessie' the schame bairns cawd him, for his 'mummy and daddy' didnae alloo him tae gaun oot an slaister in the glaur nor hiv troke wi ony o the coorse veelege clamjamfrie, but whan he did bletcher tae onybody, he wis aye on a saipbox blawn his ain horn, yammerin on in his taffie-nebbit pan-laif English, an wis aye heichheidit an braisant.

Ambrose's faither, Charles Bertram Fitzgerald wis nane the better. A richt nairrae-nebbit cockapentie! A wee bauchle o a mannie tae leuk it! Auld-farrant in his cast, oft seen weirin heich sterched serk-necks, dreich broon tweed suits an a muckle lum hat, the speetin eemage o the gentrice langsyne. He wis the new appintit heid-bummer doon the oor veelage Coal Pit. Ordinar, maisters an their faimilies wad hiv steyed apairt fae the wirkers, bidin in the pit Big Hoose, but wi watter sypin throu the ruif an bleck moold growein up the waas, replenishin it wis unner wey. In the short tairm Ambrose, Charles an his guidwife, Florence bade in a tuim cooncil hoose in oor schame. A schame whaur aw the wirkin men wrocht doon the Coal Pit, an aw the marrowless weemen yoked thaimselfs atween the paper mulls an cairpet factories. Wi awbody prood but puir, an neebors mair like stentit faimily, aw the veelage fowk war scones o the same day's bakin. Haein this new hypocrite neebour leevin in the same schame wis bi-ordinar an awbody wis suspecious, nae mair sae thin masel, is thair back yaird an oor back yaird jyned, an a heich widd pailin fence spang the mairch.

Efter scuil an ower the weik-ends A whiles caught sicht o Ambrose daffin aboot in his gairden, makkin oot he wis haein

a guid time, wi a spleet-new bike nor a brent-new toy. Aw the while breengin about an kickin up the stour tae enteece ither bairns tae gowp ower the pailins an bi jeelous. A kent athin masel thit whan the flourish an swither o the new-farrant gemm wis by, Ambrose wad bi lanelie an micht hiv wushed tae bi oot wi the ither bairns makkin deviltrie an gettin aw glaursel, gin it wisnae for his sneistie mither.

This wis brocht hame yin Setterday fornuin whan A wis oot in ma back yaird clappin yin o ma pet bawties. Ower the pailin fence A seen Ambrose haiglin a tortie, cannie-like, it airms lanth, ower the gairden an settin it doon on the ruif o a new jynere-biggit widd box. This wis a stryngge ferlie, for A had jaloused Ambrose's pauchtie mither wadnae alloo him tae hannel sic a 'mingin baist', forby allooin him tae keep yin! Efter A had feenisht clappin ma bawtie A wis kwerious, sae A daundert ower tae the pailin fence, climed up the rails an stertit speirin it Ambrose about his tortie.

"A see you've gotten yersel a tortie?"

"Yes. I bought it from Perciville Fotheringham, a very good friend at school, for five shillings. He's off to America with his mummy and daddy next week."

"He maun hiv seen ye comin, for you tae coff up five bob for a tortie!"

"I can afford it. My father gives me fifteen shillings a week pocket-money!"

"Crivvens! A hail fifteen bob, a weik, tae yersel? A juist get a half-croon!"

"You must be awfully poor? Your family work for my father, don't they?"

"Haurd-up, ay, richt eneuch!" A sixed. "Daes yer mither alloo ye tae hiv a tortie?"

"Yes she does, but I had to promise her to look after it myself. My father bought me a new hutch for my birthday."

"Ay, it leuks nae-baud! Did the jyners chairge muckle siller?"

"Three pounds ten shillings."

"Bletheration! A cuid hiv biggit ye yin fae widd A scroonged fae the cowp? Div ye ken whit mait tae gie yer tortie?"

"Yes thank you! I bought a really spiffing book from the pet shop in Edinburgh, and they sell all the food I need for my tortoise."

"A bet thay div! An chairge ye muckle anaw! A hiv a tortie masel. A wis gien it for nithin lest weik fae Bob Smith, a laddie in ma scuiless. He said he didnae hiv ony time tae leuk efter it noo wi him stertin tae winch daft Aggie! A doot you widnae ken daft Aggie? Likes cuddies mair is torties."

"Why should I know this 'Aggie' person?"

"Naw, A kent ye widnae ken daft Aggie. She's nae baud it sums for a lassie?"

"My tortoise is female and when she lays eggs I could become famous and rich! It says as such in my book?"

"Bit div ye no need twae torties tae lay eggs?"

"Not my tortoise! She is very special, not like the ordinary one that you have!"

"Ma wee tortie cuid be speecial anaw, ye ken!" A replied, raither pit doon.

Ambrose set up his gab, soondin like he spaik throu a moothfae o speins an telt iz hoo wunnerfae he wis, bein a Ephor of his Academy an hoo he cuid screed aff a hail buik o Laitin. A speirt at him whit wis the yaise o lairnin an gabbin in a deid leid like Laitin? He swithert for a meenit syne pit-on bein deaf tae evite the speirin, afore he spaik back.

"Why do you always use that common slang instead of using proper English?"

A wis tongue-tackit, an it taen iz a meenit tae blirt oot thit A wis spaikin Scots. Mebbies he didnae ken it wis Scots, nor wis expeekin

a different repone, onywey he gied iz a deefie agane, syne rattled on in his ain massie wey. Efter ten meenits ma heid stertit tae birl wi him blowin his ain horn an makkit iz feel like a glaikit nyaff. A telt him sum whittie-whattie crack, an daundert back ower tae ma bawtie hut. A wis fair doon o the mooth efter yon veesit an thocht lang an haurd on sindry weys tae saut Ambrose, aw the while wushin A had bin mair eydent an heidie masel. A cuidnae bide his heich-bendit mainners!

It wisnae tull the falloein Setterday thit A thocht cam intae ma heid on a wey tae pey-back Ambrose. A had tryst tae gaun ower tae see Tam Airchibald's racin doos fleein hame fae a race, an tae see his muckle siller cup he wun lest weik. Winnin ower tae the doocot A wis taen-like thit Charlotte, Tam's dauchter, wis cawin the fleein doos doon, an makkin thaim eat peas fae the luif o her haund. Charlotte wis eildit wi masel, an wis the bonniest lassie in the schame, wi her lang reid hair an glossie pirls, plettit doon her back like a cuddie's tail. Her mither maun hiv spent oors wi a kaim an brush makkin the pirls ticht, for Charlotte kent she wis guid-leukin an wad thrum like a cantie baudron whan ony o the aulder weemen gied her ruise. A wis fair taen-on watchin Charlotte an the wey she wrocht the doos, but it wis Tam A had come ower tae see.

"Hoo'se yer doos daein, Tam?"

"Ay, nae baud. Whit fettle yersel?"

"Ay, brow!"

"Whit ir ye efter cadgin the day?"

"A'm no aye on the skech whan A daunder ower tae see ye, ye ken!"

"Ay, A ken. A wis juist haein a baur wi ye. Sae whit micht A sell ye the day?"

"Weel! Weel! A'm no buyin! A cam ower tae scroonge aboot half a dizzen doo eggs thit ye telt iz you war takkin awa fae yer 'doo-sitters' the day?"

“Ay, nae bather. The ‘sitter’s’ eggs juist gaun in the midden onywey, whan the guid burds lay. Thare nicht juist bi five eggs left mind?”

Efter haein a leuk it the doos fleein an respeckin the muckle siller cup, A thankit Tam for the five eggs an cairried thaim back ower tae ma ain gairden whaur A laid thaim in the box aside ma tortie, happin thaim unner a haunfae o hey. A cuid hear Ambrose makkin oot he wis haein a guid-time playin some gemm or ither ower in his ain yaird, an this gaed iz the inlat tae stert ma pliskie.

Hingin ahint the door, on a roostie airn cleek in uncle Tam’s tin hut war twae wee collars. Thay war makkit fae the tongue o ma auld buits jyned wi a serk-stud an a wee lanth o raip. A taen yin collar doon aff the cleek, daundert ower tae ma bawtie hut an fessent it roond the neck o ma white bawtie, like ye wad wi a wee dug. Syne A carried the bawtie oot the hut an set it doon on the gress, keeping haud o the lanth o raip. Juist is Ambrose wad steer up a stushie tae bi taen tent o, A did the self-same bi daunderin roond the gairden wi the bawtie an bletherin awa tae it in a lood vice. It wisnae lang afore Ambrose taen the bait an A seen him climin up his side o the pailin fence tae hiv a wee deek ower.

“Why have you put your scruffy rabbit on a lead?” speirt Ambrose.

“Juist giein it a daunder roond the gairden.”

“I didn’t know rabbits went for walks!”

“Ay, bit this is ma special bawtie.”

“It just looks like an ordinary rabbit to me! How is it special?”

“This is a speecial heidie bawtie, it can blether tae ye!”

“I don’t believe you! Rabbits can’t talk! Can they?”

“Clim ower here an preen back yer lugs!”

“I’d better not. Mother would be most annoyed with me if she found me over talking to ragamuffins like you. She say’s I should’nt fraternize with you’r sort!”

“Weel, A’m no haiglin ma bawtie ower the pailins intae your yaird!”

“Just hold on a minute and I’ll be quick.”

Ambrose gied a sklent scance ower his shouder tae mak shair his mither wisnae leukin, syne climed ower the pailin fence an dreepit doon amang the weet rhubarb shaws, whaur yin shaw empied its watter doon Ambrose’s trooser-leg makkin him fair roused.

“Lord preserve us!” curst Ambrose.

“Ir ye aw richt, it’s juist a puckle watter?”

“No! My trousers are soaking wet, and it’s all your fault!”

“It’s naethin tae dae wi me! A thocht ye wantit to hear ma bawtie bletherin?”

“I’d better go home and change out of these wet trousers.”

“Ay, weel, A’ll no mak the bawtie gab for ye!”

“What can it say anyway? Talk in that working-class slang language probably! It looks just like a common rabbit to me.”

“A’ll show ye! Juist apen the door o ma tortie hut an pou yon hey tae the yin side, an A’ll shuv the bawtie in an she’ll gab tae the tortie!”

Ambrose did whit A askit an poud the hey tae the yin side exposing the five doo-eggs, an immediately lat oot a yowl o surprise.

“Crivvens ... your tortoise has laid five eggs!”

“Dinnae bi sappie-heidit, it cuidnae?”

“Look for yourself, there are five eggs!”

“Ay, richt eneuch! A wunner whaur thay cam fae?” A said wi a straicht face.

“Has nobody told you about the birds and the bees?”

“Ay, oh ay, A ken aw about the burds an the bumbees bit you war gabbin on about torties. A dinnae ken ocht about torties! A’ve nae siller tae buy yon buik!”

“My tortoise has laid seven eggs, two more than your common one!”

This wis Ambrose makkin oot thit his tortie wis better. A kent it wis a lee, but A juist went along wi it tae tak the rouse.

“Weel you’ll bi on yer wey tae makkin a bing o siller!”

“Yes. Can’t stay here all day, must dash, things to do. Toodle pip!”

“Div ye no want tae hear ma bawtie gabbin?”

“No, probably wouldn’t understand it anyway! Slang rabbit talk, what next?”

A wis richt prood o masel for swickin Ambrose efter him bein sae heich-heidit an impedent, bit felt a bittie vext thit oo cuidnae be freens contrair tae oor differences. For the lave o the day A gied it nae mair thocht, an keppit thrang reddin-oot ma baists an gaun tae the shops for ma mither’s messages.

It wis gray derk that same nicht, the ile-leeries war winkin, the lift wis hivvie an a cauld frostie haar wis fawin ower the gairdens. A wis haen a sate on the stair-heid juist ootby oor back door, blecknin ma shuin ready for the scuil on Monday, whan A was stertelt bi a stushie in the rhubarb, like a deleerit stirk in a muck midden. A cuidnae mak oot the makker o the splore, nor whit sculdudderie wis gaun on, sae A shuvd ma shuin tae yin side an hunker-creept doon the steps, haudin ticht tae the airn raivel. Doon on the gress A steyed athin the bleck shaddaes o the privy-hedge till ma een war yaised wi the derk. It wisnae lang afore the bumfly set o Ambrose wis plain is parritch an his bummlin gate

kythed he wisnae kenspeckle in the derk. Ambrose breenged straucht forrit tae ma tortie box, birlt the sneck an apent the door. Syne he poud the hey tae the side an ingaithert the five doo-eggs intae a wee bowlie he wis cairryin. Is he wis about tae hap ower the tuim mak-up 'tortie' nest, he had juist herried, the girnle chooks fae nixt door stertit a camsteerie stramash. Yin chook maun hiv drapt aff its spaik, afore fawin tae the flair skraichin wi fricht. This set aff a collieshangie o dementit kecklin an flaffin o weengs fae the ither chooks, lood eneuch tae wauken the deid. A cuid see Ambrose teeter for a meenit an coorie doon in the shaddaes tae evite bein seen. Syne whan the yammer sattelt an whan he wis certain thit naebody wis gowpin oot thair windaes, he liftit a leg back ower the pailin fence haiglin his ill-gotten eggs.

A steyed in ma hidie-hole in the sheddaes o the hedge, fair dumfoonert! Sic a unnerhaun wey tae ack! Ony thochts A had thit oo nicht bi freens went oot the windae, an ony thochts o giein Ambrose a bittie hey nor a laittuce for his tortie tae eat, wis by. Ma birse wis up, reekin A wis it whit A had juist seen, but cuid dae naethin about it, bein juist ma wird agin his, an whae wad believe a wee tike like me!

It wis ower fower weik fae the time A played the 'gabbin bawtie' pliskie on Ambrose an the mindin o it had gaun oot ma heid. Yon wis tull yin mornin while A wis haen a bletcher wi Charlotte on the scuil-bus an the nem 'Fitzgerald' wis brocht up. A priggitt ma lugs an taen tent o whit Charlotte telt iz:

"Ay, ma brither Eck has left the scuil noo an has gotten hisselt a job doon the 'Poultry Research Station'. Weel ye ken whit? Thray, fower weik syne a 'Mr Charles

Fitzgerald' brocht in five eggs thit he said his son's tortie had laid, an cuid thay pit thaim in a incubator for him? Eck thocht thay leukit like ordinar doo eggs. Weel he shuid ken, he's bin haunlin doo's an doo's eggs aw his days! Is ye ken, Fitzgerald's yon stinkin new heid-bummer doon the Coal Pit, sae Eck juist zipped his mooth an said naethin. Hooiiver, lest weik the eggs birdit an juist is Eck had thocht, thay turnt oot tae bi doo-swabs an no wee torties. Whan Fitzgerald cawd in the ither day, he wis gien a flee in his lug for wastin thair time. Eck cuidnae lang-lug ony mair o the crack, bit whan Fitzgerald left he wis gey crabbit-leukin an had a richt beamer on his dial!"

Ambrose wad bi stammygasterd whan the eggs turnt oot tae bi doo's eggs an maistlike taen a flytin that nicht fae his faither, but A'm shair his rummlegumption wadnae alloo him tae say he stealt the eggs fae ma tortie box. Whit ham an haddie crack he telt his faither maun hiv bin a lee, is juist him an masel kent the truith, an A nivver telt onybody. This wis oor saicret, an is the auld freit says -

"Oo lat that flee stick tae the waa!"

Iain McGregor

BESIDE MYSELF

'Where did it all go wrong?' The thought was like a pestering voice inside his head. He would often hear it at mental downtimes such as queuing at the supermarket checkout or waiting for the traffic lights to change.

Travelling in a lift was another necessary but time-wasting activity which left his mind open to invasion. 'I'm in the wrong job, living with the wrong woman. I feel as if I'm living someone else's life entirely.'

The lift slowed and then stopped with a judder at an intermediate floor. The doors opened hesitantly, creaking loudly as they did so. The man inside the lift could see no one waiting to enter. 'Oh, come on,' he said, hammering at the 'G' button on the illuminated control panel. Lifts didn't make him nervous. He was always nervous – however hard he tried to hide it. By way of a distraction, he drew a passport-sized photograph from his wallet and glanced at it. The woman in the picture was certainly attractive, if not a little pensive looking - her smile concealing an exhaustion brought about by overwork and not much pay.

Just as the lift doors were about to come together, a man's arm thrust between them, forcing them open again. 'I'm so sorry. Just caught it in time. Ground floor?' asked the man as he stepped inside. He was smartly dressed and appeared relaxed despite having clearly rushed to catch the lift.

Without looking at the newcomer, the anxious man responded. 'Yes. Ground floor.'

The lift resumed its journey. It was not until the relaxed man turned towards him that the anxious man was able to take a good look at his fellow passenger. He could not believe his eyes.

'Aaargh!' The scream merged with a loud crashing noise from above as the lift ground to a halt between floors.

The anxious man slowly peeled his fingers from his eyes. He thought for a moment that the mirrored walls of the lift were playing tricks with his vision so he looked sideways at his own reflection. His worst fears were confirmed. Standing next to him in the mirror was the image of himself, albeit somewhat better dressed and smarter in appearance.

'Haven't we met before somewhere?' said the other, with

an air of relaxed calm.

'I must be imagining this. It isn't happening. This just isn't happening,' exclaimed the anxious man.

With the manner of someone whose daily routine regularly included being trapped in a lift with his doppelganger, the relaxed man scanned the lift control panel for an alarm.

'This should fix things,' he said, pressing a red button.

'Shouldn't there be a sound - like a bell ringing, or something?' asked the anxious man.

Without responding, the relaxed man reached into his inside pocket and produced a mobile phone.

'Hmmm. No reception,' he said, with only the slightest note of irritation.

'What do you mean, "no reception"?!' screamed the anxious man. 'I'm stuck in a lift with my complete double, and I'm claustrophobic!'

'Yes, I know,' said the relaxed man.

'How do you know?'

'Well... I can tell these things about people,' he responded.

'People? People?! But you're... you're me,' insisted the anxious man.

In an attempt to pacify his increasingly distraught companion, the relaxed man acknowledged their startling similarity.

'Well, I'll admit we do bear a resemblance...'

'Resemblance?' spluttered the anxious man. 'Look at us both!'

The two men looked into the mirrored wall.

'Look! We're the same!'

The relaxed man studied the other's clothes and hair. 'Well... not quite.'

'But look at our faces!'

'Well, you could be me but... we seem to have lead - how should I put it? - very different lives.'

'You're telling me!' shouted the anxious man as he staggered back,

looking at the other with disdain. 'I bet you've never had to worry about anything! Where the next penny's coming from... Women. Women! I bet you don't have any problems with women. You probably operate a queuing system!'

'Well, not exactly,' said the relaxed man, laughing. 'But hey, you look like me. You obviously can't have any problems in that department either.'

The anxious man looked directly into the eyes of his double. 'Oh, I may look like you but I'm not you. You're me! You are the person I wanted to be when I grew up.' He became increasingly irate. 'Instead, I have a crap job, a girlfriend who doesn't love me...' He started to cry. 'I bet you spend more on a haircut than I earn in a week.' He slumped to the floor and sat with his head in his hands.

The relaxed man sat down beside him and looked up at the ceiling. 'Where did it all go wrong?'

The anxious man looked at him disbelievingly. 'What did you say?'

The relaxed man responded. 'I just wondered... Where did it all go wrong?'

'I'll tell you exactly where it all went wrong! I wanted to study, to follow a career. "You should take the opportunities whilst they're there", they said. "Grab life with both hands", they said. There was a time when your parents wanted you to stay on at school and get a university degree. Now it's all about quick money and security - and children.'

'So you didn't take the apprenticeship?'

'How did you know about that?!'

'Well... if your parents were worried, there must have been some kind of opportunity you missed out on.'

The anxious man studied the other man with suspicion. 'Yes there was,' he said, hesitantly. 'A

small investment firm offered me a position straight from school. Maybe, if I'd taken it, I'd be solvent. More than solvent. Like you.'

'And maybe if "T" hadn't taken it...' The relaxed man's words were interrupted by a loud noise from within the lift shaft.

'What was that?' asked the anxious man, gasping for air.

'Maybe someone's trying to reach us,' responded the relaxed man with a note of uncertainty in his voice.

They both stared at the ceiling in anticipation of another noise but the lift shaft remained silent. The relaxed man looked at his expensive watch. 'I'm going to be very late.'

'A business appointment?' asked the anxious man, trying as hard as he could to remain calm.

'No... I was supposed to meet my girlfriend - well, fiancé, really. She usually only waits for twenty minutes or so before she storms off in a huff.'

'You're not married, then?' asked the anxious man.

'Not as such.'

'Why *would* you be? All that money, all those women after you. Why settle down?'

The relaxed man smiled to himself. 'Life isn't as simple as that.'

'I bet it is for you,' said the anxious man, sarcastically.

'How long have you been with your partner?' asked the relaxed man.

'Ten years - one year of bliss followed by nine years of "when are we going to get married? When are we going to have children?"'

'Well, if you're so unhappy why don't you leave her?'

'I was going to. I had it in my head that I'd tell her today. I was going to meet her this afternoon,' said the anxious man with a hint of regret.

'You were? But not now.'

'I just don't know if it's the right thing to do,' said the anxious man.

'If I were in your position, I'd try and make it work.'

'Oh, would you,' he responded, cynically.

'Yes, I would. You say she doesn't love you but she's clearly determined to stay in the relationship.'

'She only wants to stay in the relationship because it's too late to find someone else to have kids with.'

The relaxed man looked at the other directly. 'Sounds like she's too good for you.'

'What do you know about it?!'

'My fiancé wants children too. And I was thinking of... well, moving on.'

'Well, why haven't you, then?'

The relaxed man became philosophical. 'You don't know what you have until you no longer have it,' he said.

Another crashing sound struck overhead. The lift creaked and the two men felt a slight downward shift as the lift rocked from side to side.

'I don't think I can stand this any longer,' said the anxious man, succumbing to his stress. He stood up. 'Help! Help!'

The relaxed man winced a little. 'Just try to keep calm. Someone will find us.'

'Not before I've gone completely out of my mind!'

'Or mine...' said the relaxed man, under his breath. 'You know,' he continued, 'I'm starting to see this encounter as an opportunity - a chance to put to rest some ghosts from the past.'

'What do you mean?' asked the anxious man, manically prodding the buttons on the lift control panel. 'Well, you see me as all that you might have been had you made a different decision when you were younger,' suggested the relaxed man.

'Yes. And?'

'And... Now we've met.'

'If you think we should be taking this nightmare hallucination seriously, then yes, we've met,' said

the anxious man who was now attempting to prise the control panel from the wall of the lift with his fingernails.

'So now we can be friends,' said the relaxed man with a reassuring smile.

The anxious man began thumping the lift doors with all his remaining strength. 'That's it! Someone get me out of here!'

Undeterred, the relaxed man continued. 'Or rather, we can live the rest of our lives in the knowledge that, whichever decision we made, we're both alive, healthy and have someone who loves us. Now that's not a bad result is it?'

The anxious man paused. 'I think I'm going to be sick.'

'Okay, I know it sounds corny...' said the relaxed man.

'No. I think I really am going to be sick.' The anxious man fell to his knees and threw up. At the same moment, the lift began to descend smoothly and quietly as if its journey had never been interrupted.

The relaxed man quietly exhaled and waited patiently for the lift to reach the ground floor. Just as it did so, he put his hand on the shoulder of the kneeling figure beneath him. 'Think about what I said. It may mean something to you one day.'

The anxious man was inconsolable. 'Wake up! Please wake up,' he muttered to himself.

The lift came to a halt at the ground floor. There was a brief pause before the doors began to open.

'Where did it all go wrong?' The unsolicited thought returned. 'Maybe it didn't. Maybe... all is as it should be.'

A smartly dressed woman and a man in overalls had been waiting at ground floor level for the lift to arrive. The man was carefully replacing tools into his

toolbox whilst the woman stood directly in front of the lift doors waiting for them to open. She looked more relaxed than she had appeared in the wallet photograph - less anxious and visibly more affluent. She wondered how her beloved must be feeling after such an ordeal. She gave a broad smile as the lift doors finally opened.

'You waited,' said the relaxed man as he stepped out of the lift.

'Of course I did, Darling,' said the woman as she put her arms around him.

The man in overalls peered behind them. 'Just you in there, Sir? Thought I heard voices.'

'Just me,' said the relaxed man, his gaze fixed on the woman's face. They took each other's hand and started along the corridor towards the exit.

'Tell me, Darling,' asked the woman, 'I know you don't like to talk about it but how on Earth did you manage in there with your claustrophobia? You must have been terrified.'

The relaxed man smiled. 'I was beside myself.'

Tim Nevil

A CREATIVE DREAM

Even in my wildest dreams I hadn't expected to encounter such a vision! Multifaceted, strange, creative.

But this did happen on the morning of 21 October, 2014 – the dream came to me barely an hour before waking. It was vivid and powerful:

I was standing in front of an audience of about thirty or so members of Borders Writers' Forum – at the Holy Trinity Church premises – hardly a mile from where I live in Melrose. I was giving a talk entitled *Tips for Aspiring Writers*.

During the talk I was repeatedly pointing towards the back of the hall, the area where most of the enthusiastic newcomers were sitting – everything was going very well.

About halfway through the meeting, a woman sitting in the front row suddenly got up. Waving her hands in the air and facing the audience, she announced: "I am sick and tired of his antics," pointing at me. "He is virtually addressing only the people sitting in the back rows – as if we in the front don't exist. This is the height of rudeness. Don't you think so?" She then looked around, as if expecting approval – but none came from the startled audience. In fact, she was totally ignored. Huffing and puffing, she then picked up her handbag and stormed out of the building.

But who was that truculent woman? I had not seen her previously. There was now an awkward silence – I was too shocked to utter even a word. With all the confidence I could muster, I found myself unable to resume my talk. Soon, I was surrounded by my colleagues, who thanked me for my calmness in the face of the provocation.

The next moment I awoke in confusion. Yes – I had just experienced a very unusual, oppressive and mischievous dream.

Over the following weeks I read an assortment of books about dreams but got nowhere. I wondered if some dreams are a reality. The memory of the lamentable experience lingered in my mind. Should I adopt a *laissez-faire* attitude about the entire episode – or should I do something about it?

No, I can't take it lying down, I resolved. Not doing anything would have amounted to accepting defeat. The least I could do was to write a resume of my talk. The audience, not least the fledgling writers, must have been eager to learn from it.

Here is, then, the A-Z of important pointers to creative writing. Some of the tips are self-explanatory and hence are not elaborated on:

A (agent, avoid, artistic license, anecdotes)

- It's not essential, but it helps if you can afford an agent.
- Avoid libellous writing and copying from others.
- Anecdotes make writing more interesting and readable.

B (books, browse, bibliotherapy)

- Extensive reading is the key to good writing. No writer should be without the *Writers' and Artists' Yearbook* – the most important writing resource.
- Make a note of good book-titles, browse blurbs and observe cover designs. Prospective buyers have only a few minutes to make a choice. They usually look at the title, the blurb and the first few lines.
- Why not make a foray into bibliotherapy? Be a literary healer by writing about

present day problems.

C (connect, craft, conflict, clarity, credibility)

- Writing is all about making connections – connections between different events happening at different times. The other four form the kernel of good writing – craft being most important, as the others stem from your writing skill.

D (be different, diary, dialogue)

- Readers welcome something different. If your interest extends beyond run-of-the-mill topics, you could write about subjects like the paranormal, the afterlife or metaphysics. Remember, Helen Macdonald's *H for Hawk* was awarded not only the 2014 Costa Book of the Year award but also the Samuel Johnson prize.
- A diary forms the building block of ideas and helps in formulating anecdotes, travel writing and memoirs.
- A dialogue brings the characters to life thus making the story natural and readable.

E (e-publishing)

- Writers now have a choice: with the advent of this revolutionary way of getting published, one does not have to depend on the mercy of traditional publishing houses.

F (flashback, foreign words, freelancing)

- Do explain the foreign words if you have to use them.

G (grammar, graphic novel)

- Writing a graphic novel is not every writer's dream. But if interested, make a foray into this interesting adventure.

H (humour, help)

- Humour is the spice of writing – use it.
- Help is almost always at hand. All you need to do is ask a trusted colleague to help you (with editing, for example).

I (illustrations, interviews, inspiration)

- Consider illustrations a part of your writing.
- Interview or seek advice from established writers. A few years ago I arranged to meet an eminent Scottish writer to share in his writing skills. "Life's not always about love, happiness and enjoyment," he emphasised. "Do not forget horror, sadness, betrayal and life's other posers."
- There are several sources of inspiration but the best one is the encouragement - if it comes your way - from established writers or publishers who are well-versed in the tricks of the trade.

K (knowledge, of)

- It is helpful to have some understanding of the workings of the complex world of publishing: copyright, contracts and libel issues.
- Be acquainted with the tax you would have to pay on your royalties.
- Know how to sell yourself - sometimes, selling your books can be more difficult than writing them!

L (letters)

- Private correspondences and letters are invaluable for memoir writing - as an aide-memoire.

M (mystery, music)

- Interest in music enhances one's writing skills. Writing is interlinked with music and painting.

N (networking, novel:

counterfactual, non-fiction)

- Networking is important - it can help resolve niggling issues more easily.
- Write a counterfactual novel if you are adventurous and well motivated to do so.
- Market research is a must in non-fiction writing.

O (organise, observe, orthography)

- Organise your writing routine. Writing in fits and starts is not a sin. Keep a record of articles sent - to whom, when and where - with telephone numbers. Be observant while critically analysing people's day-to-day activities.

P (photographs, professionalism)

- Photographs are immensely helpful, especially if you are planning to write your memoir (never forget your roots - your roots come to your rescue if all else fails).

R (reading, resources, rejections)

- Read regularly, often critically. Don't judge a piece of writing by its title. Recently I read a piece about a Bentley convertible (of no interest to me) but the article's enchanting prose, packed with conflicts and several twists and turns, was an interesting read. Read translated books of foreign languages - we live in a global village, after all.
- It's unnecessary to reply to any rejection letter. You need peace of mind to get on with your writing. Don't allow a rejection slip to rankle.

S (secrets, seeding, self-publishing)

- Seeding: for the sake of the credibility of the story, forewarn the audience delicately about crucial impending events. It's not the same as revealing a secret - just the opposite. A secret should be kept as long as it is possible to do so.
- It's worth attending national or local workshops on self-publishing.

T (technical, time-management, tweaking)

- Do ask for the help of an appropriate professional if you are including material you are not well-versed with.

- Tweaking - for best results, final pruning of the text should not be forgotten.

V (verse)

- We writers learn a lot from reading poetry: it helps in choosing appropriate and powerful words, metaphors and rhythm. Inclusion of a poetry piece should be seriously considered in any prose-work.

W (write, words, what if, writer's block)

- Write what interests you: fiction, non-fiction, poetry. Be a playwright, an illustrator or a translator. And, if there is no financial consideration, write something which will endure and be remembered for decades and centuries. The writings of Homer, Proust, Fitzgerald and Twain are shining examples.
- Use clear and weighty words.
- Writer's block does exist. If you are afflicted, slow down or even stop writing for a while. After a period of rest, resume writing slowly.

All literary rules can be broken if necessary. All said, the bottom line is this: to write well, you need to read regularly and extensively; and your pursuit should be underpinned by passion and skill for writing.

It's now early October 2015, almost a year since I had that dream. But somehow I don't envisage an unpleasant edge to it. It's ironic, then, how our thoughts and feelings evolve, reshape or even alter over a period of time.

Raghu B. Shukla

THE CASE OF THE COLOURED KIPPER

(with apologies to Marlowe, Hammet et al.)

The melancholy building was two storeys of nothing in particular that had got itself stuck between a cut price suit emporium and an Asian drapery, with a dark narrow lobby as dirty as a chicken yard. Etched on the grimy glass panel of the third door was “De’Seesed and partner” except De’Seesed was deceased – he’d retired two years earlier with a donated .38 slug in his blades. I let myself into the smoky room and snarled a good morning to Kitty Rapture. She leaned over and switched off the smoke machine.

‘Well you look like something my cat brought up,’ she said. Her tongue was sharp, but her figure was round and did things to men. I kicked open the bottom drawer of her desk, trickled two inches of bourbon down my tubes, kissed Kitty on her lush red mouth and set fire to a cigarette. I looked at her ears, liking the way they were joined to her head.

‘Any customers?’

‘A dame called McClumphy came to see you. A looker. Had a big rope of oyster fruit round her neck. Said she would be back’.

I shimmied to the inner office where I lay down on my bunk and took another snort of the red-eye. Five minutes later an ash blonde with eyes the colour of split peas crashed in. Her chest was heaving and she looked good that way.

‘Mr Trowel?’ she gasped. I made a noise that could have been ‘yes’ and waited – I wanted to play it safe.

‘Mr Trowel,’ she panted, ‘you – you’ve gotta help me.’

‘Call me Tam,’ I said as nicely as I could.

‘Tam,’ she said rolling the sound around her kisser. ‘I don’t think I’ve heard that name before. Where you from?’

I dummied up; I figured I wasn’t giving anything away for free. Her sultry eyes narrowed. I could see she was enjoying the muscular twitching of my shoulders.

‘Oh Mr Trowel, Archie thinks I’m trying to poison him, but I swear the kipper was already orange. If only I could find out how they had coloured it. I offered them money but they wouldn’t tell!’

‘Take it from the beginning babe,’ I suggested.

‘Well, you’ve heard of the golden Shakudo Nanako Goto?’

I shook my head.

‘It’s a valuable tsuba....Then it disappeared for nearly five hundred years until it turned up last August where a second-hand book dealer named Steele sold it to my husband.

‘....And now it’s gone,’ I finished.

‘No,’ she said, ‘well at least it wasn’t an hour ago when I left home.’

I leaned back on my stool and studied her legs. She had a pair of gams to tighten any man’s throat. The big rope of oyster fruit shimmered round her neck. I inched along the wall and took a quick gander out of the window. A thin man was reading a newspaper outside a shop two blocks away. He was wearing an Armani beige coat, an Armani beige hat and Armani beige trousers. He was a one man Armani.

I let my cigarette burn down my fingers until it made a red mark. I studied her legs again – this was going to be trickier than I thought.

‘Last night I brought home kippers for Archie’s dinner - from Tesco’s. You know them?’

‘Bits of fish, yellow in colour?’ Her eyes darkened, lightened, got darker again. ‘How did you know?’

‘I haven’t been a private op nine years for nothing sister! Go on.’

‘I knew something was wrong as soon as Archie screamed and threw his plate at the wall,’ she sobbed, ‘I tried to tell him it was supposed to

be orange but he’s been suspicious of me ever since. More so since I made him take out the special life insurance.’

‘How much?’

‘Three hundred thousand – in case he died of fish poisoning. Oh Tam,’ she gasped, ‘help me, you gotta find out who dyed the kipper!’

‘But what’s in it for me?’

‘Anything you want,’ she whispered, but I grabbed her handbag removing her of five thousand sheets.

‘This’ll juice the boiler, get me a new bean-shooter and some shells,’ I grunted. ‘Oh, bye the way - how does the golden tsubu tie in with the kipper?’

‘It doesn’t,’ she sighed, twisting the rock on her finger, ‘I just put that in for glamour!’

I leaned out and grabbed her wrists and pulled her towards me, ‘I always go for dames named Pocahontas – it was my mother’s name,’ I said.

‘Where’d you learn my name?’

‘I haven’t been a private snoop twelve years for nothing, babe.’

‘I thought you said it was nine?’

‘It just seems like twelve,’ I held her until she went blue on the lips, and then pushed her out the door. Then I slipped a pint of corn-juice in my pocket, picked up a deck of luckies and went to look for a book-dealer called Robin Steele. I knew he didn’t have anything to do with the kippers, but in my business you don’t overlook anything.

The thin Armani man had taken the slip by the time I got outside, so I hired a hack to St Boswells, cut over to Newtown, bussed to Kingsknowe then hitched to Selkirk. Somebody could be tailing me so I doubled back to Newtown and hopped a crate to Gala Bank Street, where the second-hand bookshop was.

A greasy sap with a cable sweater told me his name was Steele. His eyes became twisted when I asked if he had anything on

fumousus heringus or the common kipper.

'You got the wrong handle mister – you're tooting the wrong ringer,' he squirmed.

'Maybe some spinach'll smarten you up,' I said as I folded a blue note and scratched his chin with it. 'There's more of this for anyone who knows why Pocahontus McClumphy's kipper was orange.' His eyes got small, big, then smaller again.

'I might talk for a tenner.' He nodded through to the back. I took a step forward. Four seconds later my head went off like a Harlem sunset. When I came round, I was licking the floor with my kisser and big Jock from Lothian and Borders was leaning over me.

'Someone coshed me,' I grunted.

'Yeah, his name was Oxford. Oxford unabridged and he held up a copy of the dictionary. 'You tripped, and this fell on your brain cage.' He pointed over to where Robin Steele lay slumped over a sweaty pile of westerns. 'He passed out cold when he saw you take a fall.'

I covered up, letting Jock play his game. I wasn't showing my hand until I knew what game I was playing. I sidled off to Macarie's where I spent the next twenty minutes shooting caffeine and thinking. I was sitting next to a punk who could have been Northern Latvian, but wasn't. I set fire to a gasper and headed out. I needed to get to a horn. I found an empty blower booth and put a call through to a geezer I knew over Grundison Heights. Worked a small delicatessen counter in Morrison's. It took a while to get the juice because it was a bad line and the dick had been dead two years, but I don't give up that easy.

By the time I got back to the office, via Earlston and Charlesfield to cover my tracks, all the pieces were in place. Or so I thought until she appeared from my wall cupboard with a heater pressed

up against my beezzer. It was a Derringer multi-barrel rotating striker with a .357 Magnum cartridge.

'Get them up gum-shoe!' Pocahontus McClumphy's voice was colder than an icebox but her Armani dress was smokin' hot. 'So - you found out about the tainted kipper?' she sneered.

'Yeah – easy. It was Sunset Yellow E110 with Tartrazine. And all you had to do was add a slug of *nux vomica* commonly recognised as a member of the *Loganiaceae* family, or Strychnine - to your husband's fish. You knew it wouldn't show up when the croaker did the post-mortem! It would be masked by the monosodium glutamate allergy your husband had! Then you and playboy Chris Tobalz would collect on the policy and lay low in Peebles till the heat died down. But you didn't count on me!'

'You,' she laughed, 'what are you gonna do about it?'

'This.' I snarled as I twisted the rug from beneath her and she went down like a fish. The bullet whinnied past me into the roof as I scissored over the desk and pinned her to the wall.

'Tam.' Suddenly her body was soft and the voice was limp. 'Don't turn me in. You cared for me – once.'

'Too bad Pocahontus. You'd only double-cross me again.' I said.

'Oh darling, don't you see we'd be real good together. Don't call copper!'

There was a silence in the room, only broken by Kitty's breathing against the keyhole. I picked up the blower and dialled through to the Lothian and Borders Police clubhouse.

For ten minutes after they carried her away to the cooler I sat alone in empty silence, only broken by Kitty's breathing against the keyhole, watching the lights

outside come on, then off, then on, then off and on again. I soaked my pipes with some giggle juice and made for Kitty's desk outside. She scowled at me from her copy of 'National Enquirer'.

'Need me any more tonight boss?'

'Nope,' I answered and dropped a pair of C's on her lap. 'Here - buy yourself some new glad rags and ice for those fingers.'

'So Tam - you figured out the red-herrings?' Kitty sneered, folding the bills down into her cleavage.

'No red-herrings babe,' I smiled, 'just an orange kipper.....'

Louise Thomson

THE FROG DOWN THE WELL

Sally-Ann Higgins was a witch. Hugh knew she was because she had told everyone in her posh English accent.

'And that's why you have to do what I tell you, or I'll turn you into a frog and throw you down the well.'

She had a book of spells, a jotter she had taken out of Miss Macintyre's cupboard one playtime, and decorated with coloured stars.

She was in the class above Hugh, but at playtime every day she would come and find him and make him hand over his lunch money. Hugh would try to hide himself in ever more secret places but there was always someone scared enough or treacherous enough to tell on him.

Then one day she said it wasn't enough.

'I want £5 tomorrow.'

Hugh felt hot and prickly. 'I haven't got £5,' he said.

'You'd better have by tomorrow. Or I'll turn you into a frog and throw you down the well.'

That afternoon, Miss Gordon asked Hugh if he was feeling all right. He shook his head and she told him to go and lie down on the settee in the staffroom. Hugh seized the opportunity. He searched in the cupboards, in the desk drawers, behind the cushions. But all he found was tea, coffee, a bottle of milk and a packet of digestive biscuits.

When he got home, he told his mother he needed £5 for the school the next day.

His mother laughed. "What, are you buying it?"

"It's for our summer trip. Miss Gordon said."

"You mean five shillings?"

"No, she did say £5, and I've got to take it in tomorrow."

"Oh, stop looking so worried! She's made a mistake."

"It wasn't a mistake!" said Hugh. "I've got to have £5!"

"Don't be silly. I'll give you five shillings."

The only hope now was his father. Hugh stayed awake until long after his parents had gone to bed. Then he crept down the hall and started feeling through his father's jacket pockets. The only things there were a packet of cigarettes and a lighter.

Scarcely breathing, he slipped into his parents' room, just able to make out shapes with the moonlight coming through the cotton curtains. He made his way to his father's bedside table and patted his hand across the surface to find the wallet. Something fell with a crash and his mother sat up.

"Hugh? What's the matter? Tom, wake up!"

She got out of bed and switched the light on.

"Hugh, what's wrong?"

Hugh stared at her wordlessly.

"Come on now, you've been sleep walking. I'll get you back to bed and tuck you in."

* * * *

Hugh was hiding behind some bushes when Sally-Ann Higgins found him and pocketed his lunch money.

"And where's my £5?" she said.

Hugh was shaking. "I don't have it," he said.

"Right," said Sally-Ann. She produced her book of spells.

"Wait!" said Hugh. "I can get you something better. I can get you my mum's jewellery. I'll bring it in tomorrow, honest."

Sally-Ann stared at him. "I don't want your mum's scabby jewellery. I'll give you one last chance - £10, tomorrow. If not, you're going down the well."

After playtime, Hugh, who was normally top of the class at mental arithmetic, got all the answers wrong, and then when they went on to English, he failed to parse a single sentence correctly. He hardly even noticed Miss Gordon telling him off for daydreaming.

At lunchtime, he concealed himself where he could spy on Sally-Ann and her gang. She was scaring a group of infants, showing them a daisy-chain and telling them that she was slitting the daisies' throats. The infants began to cry. Sally-Ann and her gang started to chase them, herding them in one direction and then another, making them cry even louder.

Hugh sneaked round to the bench where they had left their schoolbags. He retrieved Sally-Ann's book of spells and then left school by the back gate. He had never played truant in his life before, but then his life had never been at stake before.

Out of sight in a hollow beside the river, he looked through the book and found the spell for turning people into frogs. It was a potion made of dog's pee, cow dung, pond scum, nettles, and spit. It took him a while to collect everything, but he followed the instructions precisely, mixing them

together and saying the magic words. Then he sat and waited, heart thudding.

Suddenly there was the frog, hopping along, and he threw his jacket over it.

"Sally-Ann Higgins," he said, "I'll throw you down the well yourself."

Olga Wojtas



©Marianne Bailey

INTERVIEW WITH PAT MOSEL

Author, Editor and Former
Journalist

Pat wrote her first short story at the age of nineteen while studying for a Bachelor of Journalism degree. She continued to write fiction alongside her newspaper career, her arrival in Britain from Africa nearly forty years ago, and while living in different parts of the Borders since 1980. To date, she has published two novels and numerous pieces of journalism, and short stories.

In this interview with Iona McGregor, she talks about her literary career.

Let's start with a little about yourself. You were born in Zimbabwe and you lived in South Africa.

Yes. As on my birth certificate I was born in Southern Rhodesia, which became Rhodesia and, at Independence, gained the name Zimbabwe, deriving, as I understand it, from the name of a marvellous stone enclosure, remaining evidence of a very ancient civilisation in the heart of the country.

I left my homeland when I was eighteen, to go to uni in Grahamstown, Cape Province, South Africa. And apart from working during my vacations for newspapers back home, it was only much later that I went back to visit the newly independent Zimbabwe.

You gained degrees in journalism and English Literature from South African universities. In what ways do you think that your work as a journalist has influenced your fiction writing?

Although I trained as a journalist, I think it fair to say that my first love was always English Literature and I have a BA Honours degree in English Literature.

Although journalism has given me huge and varied experiences, in some ways, journalistic style hindered my progress as a creative writer because a news story is succinct and usually has an acknowledged structure. It's hard to believe, but there was a time when I wondered whether I ever would write at length!

It must have been a challenge working for the Anti-Apartheid Press in South Africa.

It was tough and sometimes heart-breaking seeing racism close-up. It was like an extension of my participation in student protest against Apartheid, only on a professional level.

The up-beat side was that I met some very interesting people, such as Nadine Gordimer, Ayn Rand, Gary Player and Margot Fonteyn. I was also the only reporter on night duty in a large newsroom when word of the North Sea oil find came through, never guessing that one day I would live in Scotland.

You now live in the Scottish Borders. Have you worked in journalism here? And what other writing projects have you been involved in since then?

Lots. For some time I was self-employed, running my own freelance editorial company. I've been involved in the production of brochures and newsletters; have written many a press release and magazine feature article. I'm very proud of the fact that I wrote the Bedrule section of *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland*, which is in the Borders library system, along with my two novels. I contributed to a Borders-focused book, a limited edition, called *A Celebration of Nature through the Seasons*. I also began to edit other people's manuscripts, and this I still do.

What made you move from journalism to fiction writing? Your first novel was *Ruth*. What influences do you think played a part in the writing of this novel? Can you tell us a little about the book?

I think you are talking about the differences between factual writing and fiction, and the challenge of combining the two in one book. Apart from the historical framework, *Ruth* is such a mix of fact and fiction that it would take an expert to separate warp from weft.

For instance, I describe Ruth as a young child dropping a tiny African baby on the floor. This did happen, but the consequences were not so dire. It is meant to encourage the reader to look at guilt as a thing that can be fabricated, especially amongst children. I hope that my novels can be read on both a superficial level and at a deeper level.

In the book, I also wanted to counter some of the rumours and illusions about Rhodesia as a country. Clearly, it was grossly undemocratic to deny the African the vote, but there was no 'holocaust' under white majority rule and slavery had been abolished when Rhodesia was founded. Often, servants were treated as part of the family.

The concept of reality plays an important part in this novel.

I think it very important that people learn to ground themselves. This is not the same as differentiating between truth and lies but it more akin to coping with virtual reality. With our background of movies, television viewing, marketing and media bombardment and the constant evolution of technology, we need to keep a grip on the real. In *Ruth*, we have to decide whether or not a ruby-studded pistol is actually possible.

You have published a second novel *Jerusha's Tricks*. Was this a more difficult book to write?

I wrote *Jerusha's Tricks* after I wrote *Ruth* but published it first. It was, in effect, easier to write

because out of a germ of an idea grew the character of Jerusha and she led the book. I consider her fun, with her outsize figure, her playfulness, her determination to be herself even whilst shifting her own goalposts. She is positive and optimistic. As one character says; 'Jerusha would celebrate the blossoming of a single daffodil if she could.'

I chose to include a gay couple as people with their own ideas about relationships and sexuality. In the background, I was also working through in my mind the controversy about the ordination of gay priests in the Church of Scotland. The book explores the idea of love as conqueror in both a light-hearted and serious manner.

What genre are these books? For the most part, you have chosen the Scottish Borders as your setting. Why?

They can both be described as whodunnits, but, more than that, they are crime stories that hold up a mirror to society.

Several readers have told me they especially like reading about the Borders. *Jerusha's Tricks* is set in an imaginary village near Abbotsford. *Ruth* is set in a part of the Borders that I came to know well as I lived there for over twenty years. Who could fail to be enchanted by the undulating countryside of the Borders?

That having been said, some of my short stories are set in Africa and some of my future writing may well be set in the continent of my birth.

What other writing projects do you have in mind?

I have just submitted a radio drama to the BBC about a woman with problems who, on the spur of the moment, decides to go missing

from her comfortable home in Edinburgh. She takes a bus ride into the countryside and is befriended by two adventurers and a retired psychiatrist. While her family is desperately worried and the police search for her, for a brief period she experiences the excitement she craves.

I have more ideas for fiction but have not yet decided which to follow first. I am in the process of writing a non-fiction book, the subject of which is under wraps at the moment.

What do you think is the main purpose in writing?

To communicate. For instance, I believe that a novel is only complete when it has been read.

You have had a very interesting literary career. Have you any advice that you would like to give aspiring writers and, in particular the younger generation of writers?

The old adage holds good: if you want to write, read. Read as much as you can. Read the books you like. Cultivate curiosity. Collect experiences. Observe people. Hold on to your dream but be prepared to work hard. There are plenty of creative writing courses that will give you some rules of prose writing, such as show don't tell or the ins and outs of point of view. One of the best pieces of advice I got was to let the writing drive you rather than you drive it. You might want to try writing in longhand first, as I do with creative writing, not for journalism. It's old fashioned and slower, but it is a different thought process. You write with your hands as well as your head.

You can buy Pat's books on Amazon or reach her on her website www.patmosel.co.uk

ARABIC THEATRE AND MEYERHOLD BIOMECHANICS

In the Spring 2014 Issue 24 of *The Eildon Tree*, Robert Leach reported on **an International Theatre Festival held in Erbil, Iraqi Kurdistan** he attended, emphasising the importance of physical performance - the body of the actor - in bringing truth to performance, as exemplified by the great Russian Theatre Director Vserolod Meyerhold. A member of the judging jury in that event was the Director Fadil Jaf, who recently came to the Borders to give a talk and Workshop about this.

Fadil Jaf is a theatre director, trainer and teacher of directing and movement. Former Dean of Fine Arts College Salahaddin University in Erbil, Kurdistan he currently teaches in the drama departments of Sallahadin, Duhok and Ishik Universities. Dr. Jaf is one of the Trustees of the Arabic Theatre Institute, a theatre researcher and an adviser to The Ministry of Culture. He has directed Shakespeare, Strindberg, Mrozek, Koltes, Beckett and has conducted workshops in Meyerhold's biomechanics in several drama schools in Sweden, Finland, Britain, Morocco, UAE, and Iraq. He is fluent in Arabic, Swedish, English, Kurdish and Russian and holds a Ph. D. in St Petersburg, Russia and an M.A. at London University, Goldsmiths College. Interestingly, born in Kirkuk, his first studies were in Baghdad, in film, theatre, arts and music which gave him a holistic view of theatre at the commencement of his career.

Arabic Theatre has a centuries old history, originating in story telling such as *The Arabian Nights*, shadow and puppet plays - the latter is recorded as being seen by Salahaddin during the Crusades. In the 19th and 20th Centuries Arabic playwrights of stature emerged, particularly in Damascus, Cairo, Beirut, Morocco and Tunisia with influences from French, Italian, Spanish and English Theatre. Morocco and Tunisia producing the most radical theatre with Syria producing strong political theatre by Sadallah Wanus who was influenced by Bertolt Brecht. Peter Brooke was impressed with theatre he saw in Iran describing this as *Holy Theatre* in his influential book *Empty Space* which speaks of *Immediate* and *Rough Theatre*, following Meyerhold's concept of *Straight Line Theatre, Playwright - Director - Actor*, where the Spectator is the 4th creative or dimension present.

The workshop covered theoretical aspects of Meyerhold's theatre, his method of acting, his method of directing and movement and biomechanics. The practical part included the principles of movement, plasticity, the relationship between body and space and Meyerhold's *Études* including *The Handshake, The Slap* and *Throwing the Stone, The Parade*. The *études* (exercises) all have four stages of movement, *otkaz*,

posyl, *stoika* and *tormoz* and we all were shown how to build a movement with these four parts and then enacted these.

The point is that every movement of the actor requires to be : 1)Exact 2)Efficient (Expressive) 3)Aesthetic – thus conveying the Illusion of Reality. It needs to express a Goal, and Achievement of Goal – The Full Stop (*Stoika*).

The Actors role is improvisation based, but Meyerhold's system is based on the tempo of music, *crescendo*, *largato* etc, **musicality** is the essence of his system and stylisation, taking the essence of the scene, leaving the details. The *Études*, therefore are set to music, related to Eastern movement forms similar to *Tai Chi*. Meyerhold was also a trained ballet dancer appearing with Nijinski and Focine so his knowledge is firmly based in experience.

The word *plasticity* in relation to the actor is explained thus – imagine a simple yard long stick - this can be used by an actor to fundamentally change perception – it can be a weapon, a stretcher, a ladder – simply by how it is used. Other small props such as masks can similarly be used.

The importance of using body language is fundamental in *Meyerhold Biomechanics*, using this the actor plays into the *Superobjective* of the character.

One practical benefit from actors using this system is that rehearsal times become much shorter as the character has been fully delineated beforehand. Of note also is that the great Russian Film Director Eisenstein was profoundly influenced in his work by Meyerhold, whom he revered.

It is work and theory that seems rather *off piste* to many in the West, but we had a day showing us a different way of theatre, full of fascination and impact like no other.

Carol Norris

WHY DID JONAH SWALLOW THE WHALE?

A Film In Memoriam

A short 8 minute film by Joy Parker

You Tube link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ftmGGMr3sGo>

Scottish Borders Filmmaking Initiative supported by Visual Artists Award Creative Scotland, SBC & D&G Council.

The title of this film are the words of Joy Parker's grandmother recorded in her case records at some point during her 45 years inpatient stay in Bristol Lunatic Asylum where she died.

This film is a concluding piece of a two year project undertaken by Joy as a commemoration of her grandmother's life. An earlier performance of *Gertrude* at the Eastgate Theatre Peebles was reviewed in *The Eildon Tree* in Issue 25 Winter 2015. Although very short, this is a masterly, truly evocative film, fully conveying the tragedy of this life with a quality of restraint that results in profound stillness, contemplation and peace.

Beginning with words from Emily Dickinson:

One need not be a Chamber to be Haunted

One need not be a House

The brain has Corridors surpassing

Material Place

We experience a beautiful soundscape. Hymns Gertrude played on the piano, here played by Dorothy Alexander, water falling in fountains, trickling in streams & down the overflow from a bath drawn in the asylum, floating on which is a glass holding a flickering candle moving with the overflow, the sound of sea surf, as water rises in the asylum corridors, echoing *the continuous flow of incoherent speech*, a case note entry read by Rob Hain.

A seaweed filled rock pool, we see grapes, a lemon, a halved pomegranate, a banana & an apple emerging and slowly decaying and disintegrating with infestation of insects with time lapse photography, a graphic image of Gertrude's deteriorating mind. *Becoming more demented* the case note says towards the end.

An inconspicuous green apple appears in shots throughout, clearly a symbol unifying the course both of Jonah and Gertrude herself.

I have religious mania was the diagnosis and *Jonah and the Whale* was part of this obsession. Robert Leach reading, juxtaposes text from the *King James Bible* ending with *and vomited out Jonah upon the dry land*.

This is a superb example of integrated interdisciplinary working and is poetry in film.

Carol Norris

PERFORMANCE POETRY AT STOWED OUT

The Stowed Out Music Festival has been going from strength to strength over the last few years; and with 2015's addition of a new spoken word stage, there was more opportunity than ever for Borders writers to get involved, with a total of sixteen poets performing over the course of the event. Curated by Borders poets Thomas Clark, Bridget Khursheed and Sara Clark, the spoken word stage saw some of Scotland's top poets perform alongside the best of local talent.

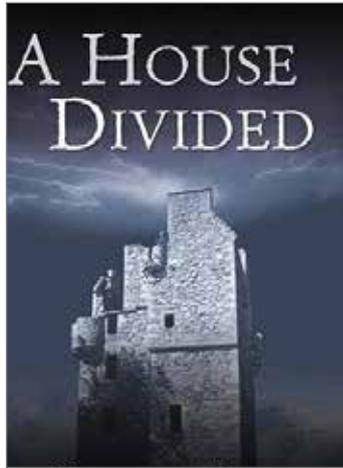
It was a real year of firsts for Stow; the first trains to pull into Stow in many a long decade; the first spoken word festival event; and to kick everything else off, the first ever poetry slam to be held in the Borders. The Stowed Out Poetry Slam was held in the Mac Arts Centre in Galashiels in the run up to the festival, and gave talented locals the opportunity to compete for cash prizes and, more importantly, a reading spot at the festival itself.

Eight poets from across the region turned out to strut their stuff in the highly innovative slam format, which sees tight time limits adhered to and poetry performances judged by members of the audience. With only three places at the festival up for grabs, competition was fierce, and the standard very high. After almost two hours of top quality poetry, the poets who came out on top were David Hendry, Stuart Jones and, winner overall, Calum Bannerman. All three would go on to reprise their winning performances to a bumper audience at the festival itself.

And they were sharing the bill with some fantastic names. Dorothy Alexander, Anita John, Bridget Khursheed, Thomas Clark... some of the best poets the Borders has to boast of. But in its headline acts, the festival was able to offer up poetry from three of the most well-known and exciting performers in the country today. Award-winning Scots writer Rab Wilson treated the audience to some rousing performances from his upcoming collection "Zero Hours", whilst Colin Will, one of Scotland's most well-travelled and seasoned festival performers, for the first time linked up poetry and sax in a hauntingly beautiful sequence of lyricisms of the seas. All this before the spoken word event was concluded with a fitting bang by the amazing Harry Giles, one of Scotland's brightest and busiest new talents.

All in all, a fantastic start to what will hopefully be a regular feature of the Stowed Out Festival; and, almost as importantly, with the next festival set to benefit from the reopening of the Borders Railway, one which has put the Borders firmly back on the performance poetry map!

Sara Clark



A HOUSE DIVIDED

by Margaret Skea

Sanderling, 2015
ISBN 978-0-9933331-0-1
478 pages
Historical novel
£8.99

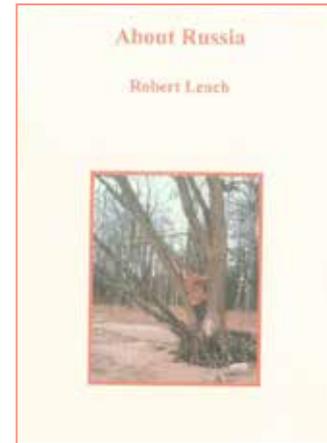
Readers of Margaret Skea's first novel, the *Turn of the Tide* were left in suspense at the end when the main protagonist, Munro, has to leave Scotland in a great hurry. In this sequel, we can catch up with him and his family some six years later, when Munro (who finally acquires a Christian name on p466) is with the French army and his wife Kate is being sheltered under an assumed name by the Montgomerie family in Ayrshire. The action is specifically dated to 1597 a tumultuous period in Scottish history, with the reformation well established, with extensive witch hunts, when the south of the country was effectively lawless with family feuds and reiving and when Scottish soldiers were fighting with the French in their war with Spain. All these themes are picked up in the book, which shows the result of the author's intensive research into this period, not just into broader political and military events but also the details of surgery and medicine and the conduct of witch trials.

The characters are very well drawn. The leading protagonist is Kate, making a living for herself and the children as a *wisewoman* and herbalist, though not averse to carrying out a bit of surgery. She comes across as a forceful person –perhaps a feminist before her time, concerned with domestic abuse and access to higher education. Her children as they approach adolescence and want their independence are also well described. The men appear to be more of their period, with their concerns about property, trade and their position at court, though well prepared for physical action or subterfuge when required.

The pacing of the book is excellent. At the beginning some scenes are rather slow- especially those expressing boredom - but the pace quickens in Parts 2 and 3 and is well maintained. It becomes a real adventure story and there are vivid descriptions of fights, chases and escapes. It is, however, not all action since there is also an examination of the psychological tensions felt by various characters (and shared by the reader) as to what course of action to take, as when Kate is swithering over whether to go to France with her husband or to the King's court at Holyrood, which could have fatal consequences for her.

The book finishes with the Munros' problems apparently resolved but we must hope there are more adventures to come in a subsequent story. There is enough of the backstory given in this book to make it a good stand-alone read, but to get the full benefit readers would be well advised to read *Turn of the Tide* first.

Peter Hoad



ABOUT RUSSIA

by Robert Leach

Q.Q.Press (Collections) Rothesay
Isle of Bute
First Published 2015
ISBN 978-1-909289-12-3
Pamphlet
31 Pages
£4.00

In this timely collection of 21 poems by Robert Leach, the Foreword states:

For generations, Russia has been demonised and denigrated by politicians in the west who have an axe to grind, an agenda to pursue.

Like any country and any people, Russia and Russians are complex, and we need to respond to a reality, not to the devious fantasies of propagandists.

I have spent several periods of time in Russia over the last forty years. These poems offer a personal view of that fascinating country and its imaginative, artistic peoples.

Robert Leach is not a Russian apologist, he has a clear eye on the problems and wrongs emanating from both past history and present times and his poems are not propaganda, but resonate with a truthful account of his actual experiences living in the country in several different times.

Of the poems, three refer to episodes in history, the two World Wars, 1918: *The Comrades Return*, the last verse of which:

*Till Petrograd,
And the grey news sheet
proclaiming
Hope*

Then 1945 *Love and Revenge* and *End Of War* from which:

*By his clumsy boots :
A few dandelions, a few
Curls and squirms
Of green. Just spring
Which happens every year.
And Hitler's dead.*

On the day of Stalin's death, also as it happened, *The Day Prokofiev Died*, we have:

Koba (nickname for Stalin) was gone.

*But if you listened hard enough,
You might have caught that day
The squeak of a gulag gate
Opening...very faint, very far away,*

The other 17 poems are from his own witnessing as *Memoire*.

In *Memories Of Moscow* - the last verse:

*I construct this ragged cloud
Which drags across
The moon of memory.*

In another poem *In Search of Happiness* (the Title of Victor Rozov's 1960 play, later filmed as *Noisy Days*) - The author finds a tear *wets his eyelash*, the cause is:

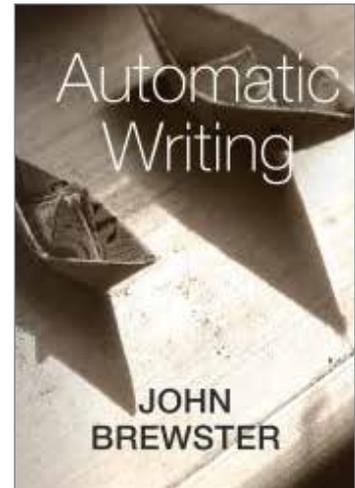
*The clanking slowdown
Approaching stations big with
Carved peasants, and the
Traipsed wetness, smeared like
tears,
Across the fake marble platform-
it's*

*The crammed-in people with
heavy greatcoats,
The scarlet-lipped and fur –
collared women,
The men with parcel, briefcases
pouched
And baggy as their faces,
The pale students with their
Endless webs of spidery Cyrillic
On thin yellow pages - it's*

*Osterezhno! Dveri zakryvaetsa!
(Take care! The doors are
closing!)
And the train lurching off again,
Accelerating into darkness.*

We have in this short pamphlet, a highly literate author and a poet, bringing his human observation to Russia from direct experience of the country, in a sequence of apposite and thoughtful poems, lacking the cast of cynicism and prejudicial thinking which has so marred many previous offerings about Russia.

Carol Norris



AUTOMATIC WRITING

by John Brewster

Cultured Llama
ISBN: 978-0-9926485-8-9
74 Pages
Poetry

Automatic Writing is a deceptively simple title for this quietly complex first collection by Fife based John Brewster. It's a lively mix of poems about real life concerns – childhood, love, death, sex, loss, and religion, as one might expect from a poet with a First in Divinity from St Andrews University.

Real life situations are delivered in well crafted, subtle verse. Sometimes there is a preoccupation with extremes – death by suicide for example – and occasionally the narrative is lost in private meanings which are somewhat difficult to fathom. Still, Brewster writes with lyrical musicality, particularly in colloquial Fife Scots, and he comes at his subjects from unexpected angles – see *Glass Eye* for a glass-eyed view of a one-eyed man - that reward effort on the part of the reader in piecing it all together.

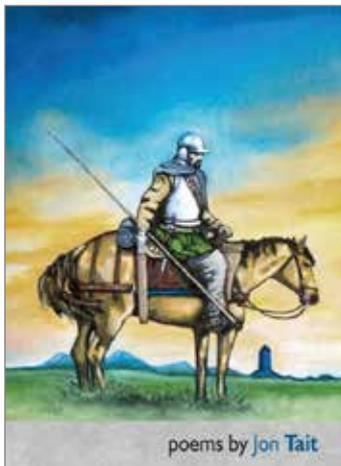
*When I am not in his head
I am in the velvet box.*

*His head is not as forgiving
but it keeps me in place.*

*I have a friend beside me
who squirms at such confinement.
(Glass Eye)*

If this is 'automatic writing' it's automatic writing with a great deal of poetic thought, originality, humour and depth behind it. With a select glossary of Scots words with which to steer the uninitiated, this stands as a highly enjoyable, thought-provoking first collection.

Julian Colton



BAREARSE BOY

by Jon Tait

Smokestack Books.
ISBN: 978-0-9929581
124 Pages
Poetry

Less a modern take on Scott's *Border Minstrelsy*, as suggested by the blurb on the book's cover, *Barearse Boy* is more by turns a lament and celebration for a fast disappearing, still enduring male working class world stretching from Northumberland through Cumbria and Dumfriesshire and on up to the Scottish Borders. The eponymous *Barearse* is the settlement near Town Yetholm

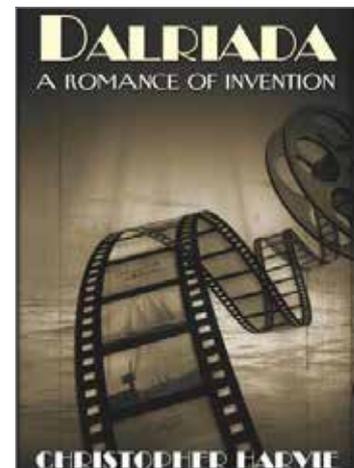
from where Tait's reiving ancestors can be traced. This collection's terrain is instantly recognisable to many Borderers: the underpass mosaic to Kinmont Willie in Carlisle, the chippy in Amble, the pit and steel communities, untold football grounds and football teams such as Ashington and Alnwick, right through to a piece set at Galabank Stadium where this reviewer spent a year of his footballing life toiling for Annan Athletic. Tait generally writes in a bluff, straightforward, lyrical foregoing, no nonsense prose style and at times it can feel like you're getting a lecture from Billy Elliot's big brother as this Postal Worker union rep highlights strikes and scab labour, football brawls involving Man City fans (nowt to do with me this time), rave culture at home and abroad, pub life and the daily grind of making a crust by good working class folk. It can be a bit unrelenting, particularly in the storytelling more enjambment prose style set pieces where ampersand is often substituted for the word 'and'. But if for some this might come across as stereotypical flat caps and whippets pontificating, they'd be wrong. While Tait admittedly has a romanticised view of Scotland and the Scots, his love for northern working class life and its people is palpable. Well before the end of the collection Tait's almost novelistic personal portrayal had won me over. Beneath the apparently disposable, almost primitive style there is a great sophistication at work here. Tait might attempt to give the impression he's a working class Jack-the-lad, beer swilling, pill popping, ball hoofing slob, which indeed he might be, but he's also a kind of Northern working class beat poet who has a wonderful empathy with nature as displayed in his brilliant and touching prose piece *Cosmic Gratitude*:

*...I move the warm shaking
body gently off the tarmac & onto
the grass by a hedgerow hoping
it feels more natural & I sit on
the road talking quietly until his
breathing stops & with a heavy
heart I'm hoping that I've given
the fox some comfort in it's final
moments & though I'm not a
religious man I'm wondering if
in some Shamanic way the foxes
spirit has been released & a few
days later as we drive around the
bend on the road & I'm retelling
the story to the brunette girl
behind the wheel I just catch a
glimpse of the white tip of a red
tail darting into the thick green
gorse bushes on the hillside . . .*

(*Cosmic Gratitude*)

Collections like *Barearse Boy* might be currently considered unfashionable, but it takes a great deal of skill and nerve to pull off a collection like this.

Julian Colton



DALRIADA

by Christopher Harvie

Edinburgh, Capercaillie books, 2015.
ISBN:978-1-909305-66-5
£8.99

A Romance of Invention, says the very exact subtitle. Christopher Harvie has a distinguished record of fact and the interpretation of

fact, and it has stocked his mind richly with character and incident which spill into romance and invention, though (like Scott) he anchors his invention with a number of “real” historical characters, real events, above all the looming disaster of the First World War.

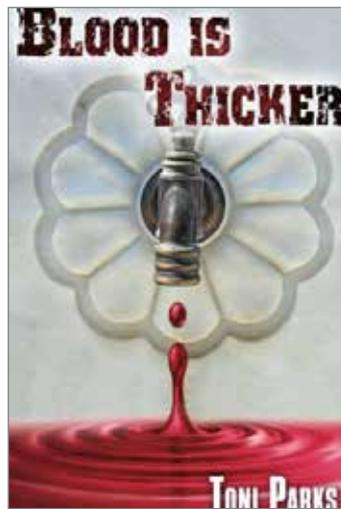
No other writer could have pulled off this fizzing plot which reflects, or refracts so many of Christopher Harvie’s interests – early twentieth century history anchored in England, Scotland, Germany; the industrial landscape of Scotland in the early twentieth century as Europe gears up for war; a plot which takes in both sides of the Atlantic quite accurately reflecting the massive build-up of influence, long-range ordering and political decision making which the imminence of war involved. A historian of such eclectic interests is well equipped to show the preparation for war in this kaleidoscopic way.

But Christopher Harvie’s interests inform this extraordinary book in other ways. A knowledge of German is almost assumed, though the book works perfectly well without it. A keen interest in railways is a help, right down to the hot bearings which can immobilise even a polished heroic steam engine of the early decades. Perhaps the sound effects of a cable car in Edinburgh are a little misjudged (people tended to hear a rumble all the time under the street, not just when a tram was coming). But the dazzling breadth of the historian’s interests, his fluency in languages, his interest in unusual people, his imagining of the reality of a period in its complexity is outstanding. The plot loops so much that to say much more would be to betray the pleasure of reading it. Language, too, is caught with

fluency in the verbalising of English, Scottish, German speakers. John Buchan is an acknowledged influence, and Harvie (like Buchan) catches not only the individual quirks of a speaker’s language, but the social pointers which tell you about that character’s background.

Dalriada is a challenging read in the sense that the reader has to be on high alert. But the reward of keeping up with it is real satisfaction. Those who know the author can hear his restless energy in every page and appreciate the width of his erudition as well as the success of this new foray into a romance of invention.

Professor Ian Campbell



- 1) Blood Is Thicker
Published 2013
- 2) The Dizyogotic Twins
Published 2014
- 3) Cause and Effect
Published 2015

by Toni Parks

Double Elephant Associates,
Orchard Cottage, Lanton, Jedburgh,
Roxburghshire TD8 6XS
£7.49 Vol 1, £7.99
Vol 2 & 3.
ISBN: Vol. 1 978- 0- 9926261- 0-
26261- 0- 5, Vol. 2 978- 0-
-9926261- 2- 9, Vol. 3 978- 0-
9926261-3-6.

Toni Parks has written these three detective/thriller novels from 2013 to 2015 after he retired to the Scottish Borders, which is the setting in part for this Trilogy, though there is outreach to London, Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Naples & hinterland, and Rome, in the course of the narrative. The story involves three main characters, Emma, a heroin addict, and prostitute, from a deprived council estate in Edinburgh, a scatter brain, who is very irritating in Vol 2, *The Dizyogotic Twins*, when travelling around Europe with her newly discovered twin sister, the academic & expert in psychological profiling, Jessica. They both are escaping from crime syndicates, enabled by the *Spiy Web of Prometheus Conglomerates*, a Mafia like set up, facilitated by an Internet surveillance system, which follows the hunted girls using email connections and card purchases across Europe.

In Vol 3 *Cause and Effect* the scatter brained addict is amazingly rehabilitated from her dangerous lifestyle by near death experiences and the love of her newly discovered twin sister, but also, importantly, a medically discharged Police Officer DI Barnham, who has been involved throughout the Trilogy.

The characters of these three main protagonists are well drawn especially in Vol 1 and 3.

The plot is carefully drawn and elaborated over the three Volumes and though far-fetched is gripping – especially the discovery of the identity of the Serial Killer in the Borders - *The Breakfast Killer* - as the Media would have it, in *Blood Is Thicker* (Vol 1).

The dialogue between the characters, though, sometimes seems heavily laboured and unrealistic, peppered with cliché and corny comments as well as a seeming imperative to list all the names of all the Designer products each character is wearing or carrying. This is irritating and detracts from the books' overall experience.

It is best to read Vol 1 *Blood Is Thicker* before Vol 2 *The Dizygotic Twins* for understanding the characters more fully and empathetically.

Overall, an interesting series of three books as a trilogy, especially for residents in The Scottish Borders, who will find the venues and characters especially interesting.

Carol Norris



HAIRST

by Rab Wilson

Friends of Ettrick School and
Weproductions
ISBN: 978-0-9550987-0-3
Poetry

This short collection of seventeen poems by the first James Hogg Creative Residency Fellow Rab Wilson is tastefully produced by Border artist Helen Douglas. With

an introduction by Richard, Duke of Buccleuch, the book collects together the poems written by Wilson during his stint in Ettrick and Yarrow. Never less than enjoyable, this collection most saliently highlights what an exceptional poet Wilson is when writing in Scots. Unlike some Scots practitioners his writing is natural and unforced and has great linguistic depth and density. It doesn't matter if you're English like me and don't always get the precise meaning of a word or term or don't have a Scots dictionary readily to hand. Often the joy of this collection is contained in teasing out the general feeling of a particular piece or revelling in the writer's skill in making the Scots words rub off each other in a very lyrical poetic manner, which in turn leads to an overall apprehension of meaning.

*Oan a plinth, the fuit of
Chapelhope Hill,*

*The Shepherd sits and views the
braes o hame,*

*This statue biggit tae his
fawmous nem*

Richtly celebrates poetic skill.

*Ae haund hauds the cruik that
kept ye siccar,*

*Fordin burns in spate at lambin
time,*

*Body waarmly hapt in plaid o
rhyme,*

*Yer ettle aye to be 'Jamie the
Poeter'*

(The Hogg Monument)

As the more 'English' prose style poems don't quite match the Scots pieces, this reviewer couldn't help but wonder why Wilson doesn't write exclusively in his

native Scots tongue? Perhaps an understandable fear of being marginalised and being pigeon holed might be the answer, but the more nuanced, poetically tuneful Scots pieces, often in Wilson's favoured default sonnet form, lift this collection above the level of localised historical and social reportage. Sometimes the tone of this collection is perhaps just a touch pawky and there are a few pat endings, but Wilson's command of Scots is such that one can only conclude his already firmly established reputation is set to soar even higher.

Julian Colton



INTAE THE SNAW

By Thomas Clark

Lighthouse Pamphlets
48 Pages
ISBN: 978-0-9928573-7-0
Poetry

Lang socht fir hus indeed cam at last! This byordnar wee slim green volume o poetry in Scots aiblins hansels in the vanguard o a new generation o young Scots poets scrievin in Scots. Thomas Clark haes produced here a collection o owersettins in miniature o some o the greatest poets an poems tae be haunded down tae us frae antiquity. An bauldly settin oot his stall frae the first he states that

nae glossary is provided til the reader – an believe him, ye dinnae need it! These gems sing lustily in their ain leid!

Ah'm writin this review in a week whaur an ex-leader o the SNP hus caa'd fir programmes in Scots oan BBC Alba – an why no? Scots is bi faur the greatest o the *lesser used languages* (ah despise that EBLUL term!) spoken in Scotland. Sae why dis it no get its share o airtime?

Tammas Clark gangs some wey tae explainin this in ane o the best setten oot essays oan the Scots leid ah've read in raicent times in the introduction tae his braw collection. He taks the *language is a dialect with an army and a navy* airgument an expands it in surprising directions; *Scots, like most other languages has a voice of its own. It's a tough but tender language, pugnacious and practical. And few native speakers would consider having their marriage ceremonies conducted in Scots.* Why hae we Scots alloued oor leid tae be taen awa frae us? Julius Caesar kent that ane o the best weys tae destroy a people wis tae tak awa its language. But Clark gaes oan; a badly mauled an eroded Scots *At some point has to contribute meaningfully to its own upkeep.* He then states: *This collection, I hope, can be a down payment against that.* An certes, it is!

The poems theirsels sweep across the millennia o human existence; race, creed an nationality. Frae *the pre-Columbian city-state of Texcoco to the Tang dynasty of China* tae the early Christian Anglo-Saxon o The Exeter Book, the poems speik auncient an timeless truths...

*Aw ma life ah hiv luved this toon.
A cuirious thrang haes gathert*

*roon ma cairt.
Honour an riches ah've chase't lik
fleetin clouds;
Ah leukt awa, an twinty springs
haed past.*

Frae Ouyang Xiu

*Ootside the windae, wind blaws
straucht the snaw;
Howdlin wae the stove, ah'll
waucht ma wine;
How like a fishin-boat, caught in
quate onfaw,
Ah sail, in sleep, doon throu
autumn rain.*

Frae Du Mu

Bede's Deein Wirds

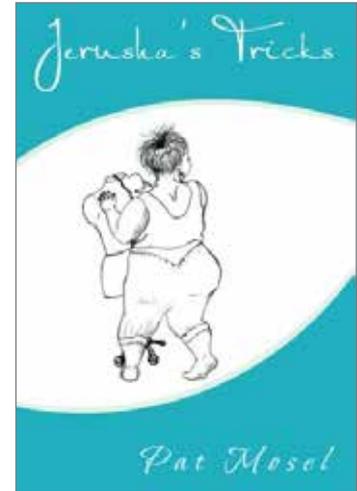
*Afore that gastrous, hertscaud oor
When aw are cawed, unwillint,
tae be judged,
Think smairtly oan it, mon. Ye
needna pit oan
Ye hivnae gied it thocht – is it
upstairs, or doon?
Cause tak it frae me – houiver
black yer hauns
They'll no get any cleaner wance
yer gaun.*

*Frae Epistola Cuthberti de obitu
Bedae*

Likesay, timeless, auncient, an yet... they souch in oor lug as gif they wir whispert frae leevin tungs!

Here is yer leid! Vieve an alive! Tak it tae yer hairt!

Rab Wilson



JERUSHA'S TRICKS

By Pat Mosel

Author House, 2013
paperback
ISBN: 978-1-4918-0086-7
498 Pages

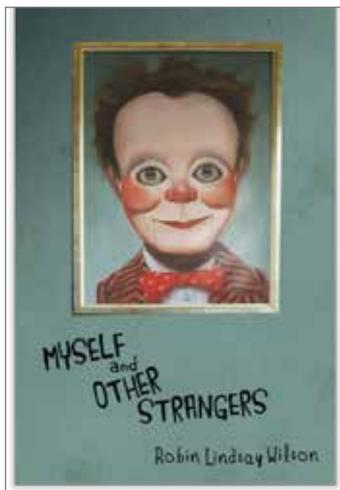
Scottish Borders readers will enjoy this intriguing novel written by local author, Pat Mosel. Set in the imaginary village of Kirkfield, near Abbotsford, the story begins with Jerusha Burnett, thrice married and now a widow living in her late husband Hamish's spacious property at Kirkfield House. The delightful, curvaceous and forty-something, Jerusha shares her home with a gay couple, James and Oswald. She loves playing practical jokes and on April Fool's Day 2010 she buries a dressmaker's dummy in the garden fully aware that both James and Oswald are watching from an upstairs' window. However, the practical joke goes horribly wrong when the police uncover a skeleton of Hamish's first wife, Françoise Burnett also buried in the garden at Kirkfield House. The novel has an impressive cast of characters all of whom are both believable and entertaining but the star has to be Jerusha who changed her name from Mary to

Jerusha, the perfect wife. She now wants to be the perfect widow but with the uncovering of the body in the garden after a fourteen year cover-up, who is to blame? And was it murder?

This is a contemporary novel which poses some interesting possibilities, all of which keep the reader guessing to the last page. The dialogue is particularly well done and there is a fair amount of humour throughout. There are plenty of day to day mundane events which help set the scene and add realism to the novel, for instance, visits to various Galashiels coffee lounges and the local shop at Kirkfield; walks along the Tweed; Melrose and of course, the attempt to hide the 'murder' of Françoise as a suicide at Coldingham Beach.

This novel is an appealing one and a real page turner.

Iona McGregor



MYSELF AND OTHER STRANGERS

by Robin Lindsay Wilson

Cinnamon Press
ISBN: 9781909077836
73 Pages
Poetry

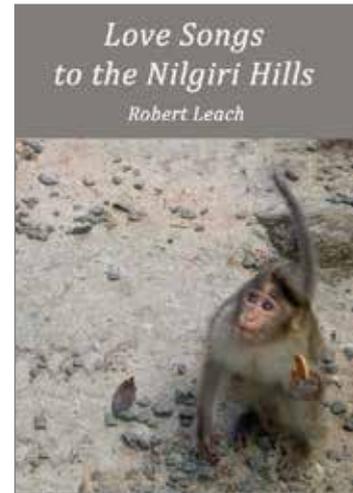
Another poet who is no stranger to the pages of *The Eildon Tree* is the excellent craftsman poet Robin Lindsay Wilson. This fine collection, which often thumbs its nose at precise meanings and definitions, best realises its full potential in the moments when Wilson shakes off the almost entirely abstract and allows real scenarios, actions and emotions to drive or underpin these always interesting well-constructed pieces. Here there are no wasted words or images and the poetry emerges almost effortlessly in unpunctuated sentences that run into each other as if by second nature:

*The shower curtain
grows a bacillus –
it caught the spores
by falling in love
with a plastic bath*

*its kiss drying
is the sagging pace
of parting and loss
(The Cooling of Water)*

Of course this effect is the result of much working and reworking. It rarely comes by accident. Other strong pieces proliferate including: *Vocation, Nemesis, The Threatened Bride, Learning to Buy Flowers, Holding Flowers, Skye Blues, Grudge Match* and *The Problem with Girls* to mention just a few. Wilson sticks to his writing principles and reaps the rewards of a collection which finishes very strongly. *Myself and Other Strangers* warrants a second reading just to sniff out the nuances and connections one might have missed the first time around, ideally on a warm summer's day on a café terrace with a glass of wine to hand.

Julian Colton



LOVE SONGS TO THE NILGIRI HILLS

by Robert Leach

Dionysia Press
76 Pages
Poetry
ISBN: 978-1-903171-47-9

*To see a world in a grain of sand,
And heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your
hand,
And eternity in an hour.*

This timeless quatrain from William Blake's *Auguries of Innocence* serves as the perfect introduction to Robert Leach's *Love Songs to the Nilgiri Hills*, a poetry collection in three sections which equals far more than the sum of its parts. Not a word is wasted in this dazzling collection of poems which juxtaposes images of nature with the encroachment of man, and thereby blurs the line between the two.

More than once in reading Leach's poetry I was reminded of Wordsworth. His worlds are real, almost touchably so, and he resists the temptation to simply describe nature – instead he places us right in the midst of it. There are no clichés in his portrayals of the natural world. He sees it with fresh

eyes, the eyes of a wise, amazed child - and whilst at first glance you could be forgiven for thinking his themes familiar, to do so would be a grave mistake. His is a natural, conversational and observant style, which masterfully captures the smallest details with a painterly eye - the ebbing of life from a dying fish as it wriggles in his hands, the shocking contrast of a dead fox's tail against the tarmac. Leach's use of metaphor here is as skilful as it is effective. Take, for example, *A Walk on the High Moors*, in which a plastic bag snagged on a fence morphs into an animal to be rescued, an invader to be removed from the landscape.

*An orange plastic bag
Shrieks, slaps the barbed wire
fence it's snagged on.
It rattles like a Gatling gun,
It flaps like a trapped bird.*

Leach seems particularly interested in the porous nature of boundaries, a theme to which he makes frequent recourse. The grey areas which exist between the natural and the manmade, the human and the animal, wakefulness and sleep, even between one moment and another – these are rich spaces in which much of Leach's most fruitful work is done. In this collection, memories are things so vivid that they step right out of the poet's past and into the reader's present – the first puff of a cigarette taken by a child long ago lingers in our own throats through the poet's skilful invocation of its bitter redolence, the sound of a steam train shudders forth from the furthest reaches of his memory. Boundaries, as the poet sees all too clearly, are simply connections of another kind, and the connections Leach makes between one image and another are surprising, intuitive and, for want of a better word, poetical in the truest sense.

On the basis of this collection, Robert Leach stakes a claim to be one of the best English-language poets in the Scottish Borders, and certainly establishes himself as being amongst our leading lights. Any serious collection of modern Scottish poetry would be impoverished without this volume.

Sara Clark



SUMMER'S LEASE

by Sara Clark

FeedARead.com Publishing 2015

167 Pages

ISBN: 978-1-78610-175-4

This is a novel written from the point of view of Alex Warren who is forced to sell his family home after living there all his life with his dysfunctional and controlling parents (now deceased) and his agoraphobic brother.

Clark carefully weaves a poignant story around the memories that come into Alex's mind starting with the funeral of his father who was buried in the back garden of the family home. Alex, now completely at mercy to his irrational fears, recalls his one day of freedom when, aged thirty-four, he managed to escape the confines of this house located in rural Suffolk to follow his father

into the English city of Ipswich. Here, lonely and desperate to make a connection with a woman, any woman, Alex had a series of adventures, all of which are vividly described and going on in his head.

The opening lines set the tone and much of the subsequent descriptive prose is poetic:

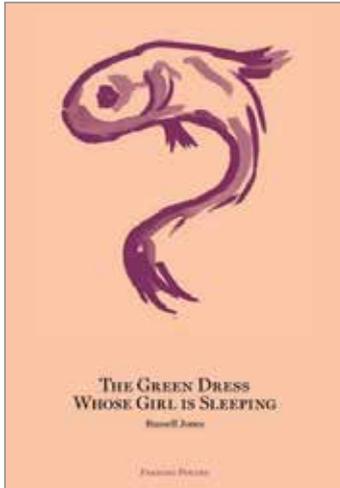
*Looking out from the black
emptiness beyond the glass, it's
hard to believe there's a garden
out there...*

As the story is written in the first person, I feel this has added greatly to the immediacy of the action and this technique brings the reader into the drama and cleverly into the mind of the unfortunate Alex.

At the end of this thoughtful novel, I was left pondering the existential loneliness that modern life, in particular technology, has imposed on those fragile beings who are unable to cope and are consequently inhabiting a fantasy world with all its possible psychological dangers.

This is an impressive debut novel from a very gifted writer.

Iona McGregor



THE GREEN DRESS WHOSE GIRL IS SLEEPING

by Russell Jones

Freight Books
ISBN: 978-1-910449-37-0
71 Pages
Poetry

For much of *The Green Dress Whose Girl Is Sleeping* this reviewer admired the beautifully written and deftly paced work on show by the talented and extremely promising Edinburgh-based poet Russell Jones. Here were wonderfully constructed sonnets, all manner of observations on religion, science, love and daily life with flashes of writing brilliance delivered in a readily assimilated, easily digested pleasing voice. Even when the subject gets deep, as in a reflection on a seabird drowning in oil in *Down on the Beach*, Jones' is a consummate stylist:

*It's almost beautiful in its end
as the water strips away
its feathers to make a coat
flapping in the wind.*

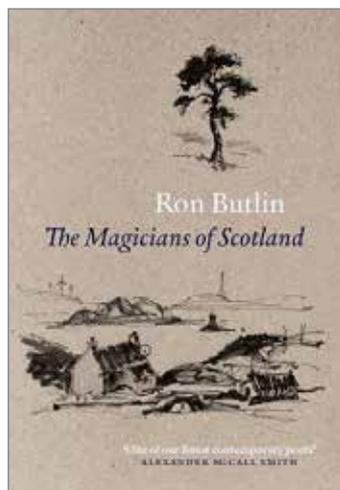
*We watch the light die as it fails
to dive, to float, to fly, to fight.
Its robust call wanes under
our slick dark gaze, until
it's sharp movements slow,
shake and sink and stop –
beak down, eye wide*

*and white and we
standing there
watching.*

(Down on the Beach)

Yet there were reservations. Despite an endorsement on the book's cover highlighting the humour, tenderness and compassion, I wasn't always feeling it. Much of the collection felt somewhat sanitised - too inoffensive and slickly vacuous, occasionally bordering on glibness. In particular I would single out the following: 26 *One Word Poems*; the concrete poem *Star*; some less than engaging haikus; and *The Bang*, a dialogue between Alice and Atlas (two opposing protons in the Hadron Collider). It's only as the collection draws to a close that the true extent of this poet's potential surfaces, as emotion breaks through like a tsunami when the poet writes about the death of his Nan, his sister's experiences in Afghanistan and real people such as war veterans or the homeless, presumably in and around Edinburgh. *The Green Dress Whose Girl Is Sleeping* is Jones' first full poetry collection and this promises to be a poet capable of producing something really remarkable in the future.

Julian Colton



THE MAGICIANS OF SCOTLAND

by Ron Butlin

Polygon
ISBN: 978-1-84697-291-1
109 Pages
Poetry

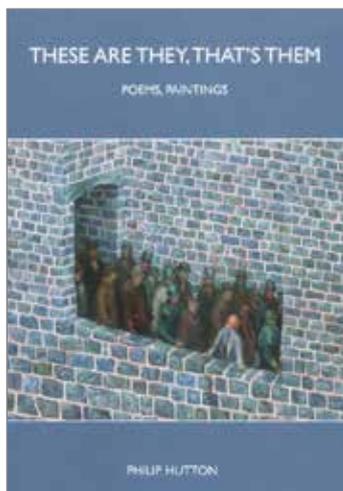
The Magicians of Scotland is intended as a whistle stop tour of Scotland's past, present and future taking in selected seminal figures, events and places, some well-known and others a touch more obscure and unexpected: Skara Brae, Roman Occupation, the Balmoral Clock, the Loch Ness Monster, Wilfred Owen, Elizabeth Blackadder, Professor Higgs, the Lockerbie Bombing and the Scottish Referendum. All get the idiosyncratic treatment as Butlin comes at the subject from unexpected directions. He writes with such an engaging, easily assimilated and winning style that it is easy to overlook the fact that the collection does at times skim over subjects rather than drill down to their core. In particular, the first of the collection's three sections, *Magic Places*, appears to be mainly project work which the ex-Edinburgh Makar, and erstwhile Hightae village resident, has seemingly collated for the purposes of this book, including poems for the passenger stops on the Edinburgh tram route and pieces inspired by the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow.

Which brings one to wonder if, when writing these, Butlin had been swayed by project aims and the interests of stakeholders, or if he is simply reflecting Scotland's current inward looking self-absorption? Most Scottish writers are prone to it at the moment. It's only when the second section, *Magic People*, unfolds that this wide-ranging and ambitious collection really starts to

accelerate, and assumes proper substance, as Butlin nails his political colours firmly to the mast with thoughtful well-written set-pieces on Burns, James Simpson, Chopin, James Hutton, Prophet Peden and Flanders fields. The later political poem *Trident Mantra*, in the final section *Magic For All*, makes its point forcefully. The collection does dwindle away somewhat into less engaging and slightly indulgent, more prose type pieces such as *How To Save The World*. This takes the form of an on-line questionnaire, and like other poems in the collection wrestles with the issue of our increasingly digital age.

Butlin persuades more with clear, lucid writing and conceptual imagination than by turn of phrase, image or force of rhythm. Whatever the reservations one has for the cogence of some elements of *The Magicians of Scotland*, it has to be conceded that by the conclusion Butlin's intelligent and thoughtful writing flair wins through leaving the reader with the feeling of having experienced a coalescence of disparate parts, as if by magic, into a unified, immensely readable and enjoyable collection.

Julian Colton

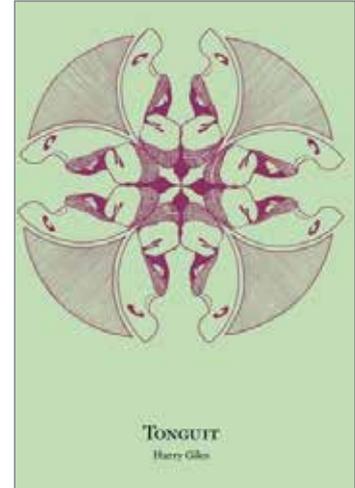


**THESE ARE THEY,
THAT'S THEM**
Poems, Paintings
by Philip Hutton

Self-published
ISBN: 9780956288417
72 Pages
Poetry

Regular readers of *The Eildon Tree* will be familiar with the poetry of Peebles-based writer and artist Philip Hutton. His written work, and *These Are They, That's Them* is no exception, is a pleasing mix of ruminations on art, artefacts, photography, childhood, philosophy, travel and all manner of quirky subjects which capture his literary fancy. His poems are generally quite long and photography is an appropriate pre-occupation as Hutton likes to get up close and personal to his subject matter. Lavishly worded and layered, maybe sometimes overly rich like magnificent confections, ex art teacher Hutton has such a pleasing, likeable narrative voice that the reader rarely objects to being taking on a cultural journey or listening attentively as the poet imparts his knowledge and personal wisdom. Illustrated throughout by Hutton's own artwork, this book will be appreciated greatly by those who know and admire his work and offers a fascinating entrée for those coming to it for the first time.

Julian Colton



TONGUIT
by Harry Giles

Freight Books
68 Pages
Poetry
ISBN: 978-1-910449-36-3

Remember when you were at high school, and you were made to write these essays about whether, I dunno, euthanasia should be legal or something, and you dutifully set out the arguments for both sides – then, when you got to the last paragraph, you still didn't know what the right answer was, so you just wrote something like *as you can see there are many different sides to this argument* because you were embarrassed that you didn't know what to think and, in fact, that you were having to think about it at all?

Pedagogies of uncertainty is what they call them in academic-speak, those uncomfortable spaces that we sometimes venture into where we don't know everything, and we know we don't know, but we still have to take action anyway. Unsettling though they may be, those are the places where we do most of our *actual* living; and, not coincidentally, the places where Harry Giles seems to do most of his writing.

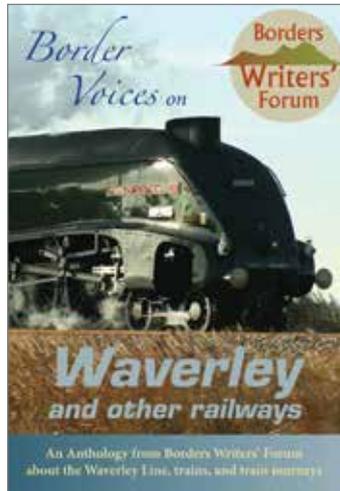
All of which kind of makes a review of Giles's debut collection *Tonguit* gloriously beside the point. It's not that it isn't good; it's that it's so good that discussing its merits as poetry just seems a bit limiting and, well, *daft*. It would be sort of like reviewing a lion maybe, or a waterfall.

And it would be easy to get all reductionist and glib and say that these are poems about the Scottish political landscape or the personal psychodrama of consumerist lifestyles or what have you; but it also would be dumb and unfair and utterly miss the point of Giles's work, which is that what something is 'about', be it a poem or a book or an entire nation, should not be so simple to define and so facile to discuss as we routinely insist on making it. Describing what Giles's poems are 'about' is a bit like sewing a suitcase handle onto a Rembrandt; it can be done, but why would you want to? Unless what you value in art is, I dunno, portability.

Although, having said that, these are poems which you carry with you. *Your Strengths*, a list of questions compiled from DWP capability assessments which winds up instead as a heart-breaking chronicle of human frailty and those who would exploit it; *Supercut*, a stitching together of all the death scenes in the *Game of Thrones* series into a Tarantino-like sequence of gorgeous but ultimately numbing violence; *Brave*, a questioning, quixotic navigation of the myriad contradictions of modern Scotland; these are poems which become part of your mental furniture. Still, unlike most of the things inside our heads, Giles's poems don't wind up there just because they look nice, or because they really tie the room together. They're necessary. They make their own space.

Tonguit is the best new collection of 2015.

Thomas Clark



WAVERLEY AND OTHER RAILWAYS

by Borders Writers' Forum

ISBN: 978-0-9567128-3-7

88 Pages

Anthology

The Eildon Tree's Waverley Lines competition was just the tip of the iceberg when it came to celebrations of the reopening of the Borders Railway last year. Amongst the many artistic expressions of joy at the return of our train service was the Borders Writers' Forum's very own anthology, *Waverley and other railways*.

Comprising a fairly even split of poetry, fiction and non-fiction, this eclectic collection approaches the concept of railways from a number of different directions. *The Eildon Tree's* own Carol Norris covers all the bases with a beautiful poem on the view along the East Coast line, as well as a reflective and often amusing consideration of the service bus journey to Edinburgh which has now, at a stroke, been rendered a thing of the past. It is only natural that, with the

return to the Borders of a wonder unseen since the childhood of even its older residents, many of the pieces here should have a nostalgic feel to them. Anita John contributes two very different but equally moving poems on past journeys, whilst Robert Leach's similarly impressive triptych is equally effective in recalling experience through the wise eyes of the present.

But the anthology covers the gamut, and not all of its pieces are set in the past. Bridget Khursheed is particularly adept in *Borders railway*, perceiving the opening of the railway as the (almost literal) closing of a wound, a healing process in which the doctors are workmen in high-vis vests, a quotidian detail reminiscent of Larkin. Christopher Harvie, meanwhile, implements the past as a launchpad for what is yet to come, using the biography of engineer Sir James Brunlees as a kind of blueprint for the future. For those of us who live here, it is easy to think of Edinburgh as the end of the line. This collection reminds us, time and time again, that the true terminus for the railway is here, in the Borders.

It's impossible to cover all the pieces here which are worthy of your attention, but what this attractive collection really does bring to light is that, with the opening of the railway, another fantastic creative community has been linked up with the rest of the country after a long period on the sidelines. In celebrating the Borders Railway, this anthology really winds up celebrating the Borders itself, and proves itself a worthy ambassador to be sent on up the line, bringing news of our achievements to Waverley - and beyond.

Sara Clark

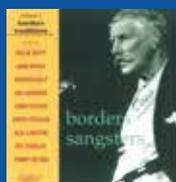


Border Traditions CD series

The Scottish Borders boasts a rich musical heritage, as well as a cracking contemporary scene.

From the Border Ballads to our very own Border pipes, the Eildon Hills and all around are alive with the sound of music. We've the finest fiddles, accordions, harps and pipes, as well as songs and sangsters.

Songs and Ballads



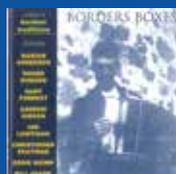
Folk hero Bob Dylan revealed the secret of his phenomenal success – the Border Ballad!

Like many, he has drawn inspiration from the 'Minstrelsy of the Scottish Borders' collected by our towering literary genius, Sir Walter Scott.

Whether in song, story or drama, those ballads are still a lively part of the Borders cultural scene today.

The Borders Sangsters CD showcases that special place where music and poetry meet.

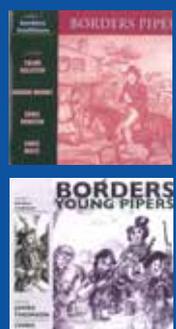
Accordion



Whether it's weddings, sessions, gigs or country dances, the accordion is right at the heart of Border life. It goes without saying that we've plenty of traditional players who can turn a great tune.

Hear the magic of the beautiful box on the Borders Boxes CD

Pipes



The Border pipes are unique to this area. These cauld wind pipes have a warm, sweet sound, with just a hint of wild and wistfulness. That sound is being rediscovered and taken to new heights by Borders players today.

The Borders Pipes CD showcases a rounded mix of established figures and new talent and features bold and at times stunning arrangements. Wonderful music to enjoy!

The Borders Young Pipers CD is packed full of good tunes and inventive arrangements.. In Chris Waite and James Thomson we have young musicians who are clearly at ease with their own tradition.

The Borders Traditions CD series is an Arts Development Project produced by Dr Fred Freeman.
All CD's are priced at £11.50 (including postage & packaging)
Please contact:
Arts Development, St Mary's Mill, Selkirk TD7 5EW
Tel: 01750 726400
Email: artservice@scotborders.gov.uk

Dr Fred Freeman has been the driving force behind the Borders Traditions Series by bringing together some of the area's finest musicians, singers and song writers. Fred is a highly respected authority in the traditional music and song scene in Scotland with a long standing career as a researcher, lecturer, arranger and producer. His recent accolades include becoming an Honorary fellow of the Scottish Association for Scottish Literary Studies and being appointed as a visiting Lecturer of the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.



Full programme to be announced in April



 BREWIN DOLPHIN
**BORDERS
BOOK
FeSTIVAL**
where words come alive

HARMONY GARDEN · MELROSE
SCOTTISH BORDERS
16-19 JUNE
2016



**A wonderful four days of talks,
discussions, food & drink, live music,
comedy and more for all the family**



FOOD VILLAGE · STREET MARKET · BOOKSHOP · CAFE · WIFI

BOX OFFICE: 0844 357 1060
WWW.BORDERSBOOKFESTIVAL.ORG



BIOGRAPHIES

RUSSET J ASHBY

Russet J Ashby is a new writer. She is developing a writing style and writing skills through short stories and aspires to completing a novel. She is part of the Kelso Writing Group and she writes as part of *Women Who Write With Elves*.

HELEN BODEN

Helen is a Yorkshire-born, Edinburgh-based writer, editor and teacher. She has poems in *New Writing Scotland*, *Butcher's Dog*, *Mslaxia* and *Dactyl*, and has collaborated with a number of visual artists. helenbodenliteraryarts.wordpress.com.

DOUGLAS BRUTON

Douglas Bruton has been published in many nice places, including *The Eildon Tree*, *Transmission*, *The Delinquent*, *Grasslimb Journal*, *The Vestal Review*, *Ranfurly Review*, *Interpreter's House*, *Flash Magazine*, *Brittle Star Magazine* and *Fiction Attic Press*. He also does well in competitions.

MICHAEL DAVIS

Originally from Plymouth, Michael now lives in the southern uplands of Scotland with his partner and springer spaniel. He currently works as a civil servant in Glasgow.

SEAN FLEET

Sean Fleet enjoys writing poetry, short stories and non-fiction for adults and children. He has been spending much of his time on a renovation project in Berwickshire, but hopes to devote more time to writing in the near future.

DAVID HENDRY

David studied at Aberdeen University, and works as an IT consultant. He lived in south east England until he was fourteen, but has spent most of his life in Scotland since then, in the Borders since 1999.

PHILIP HUTTON

Philip Hutton was born in Peebles and has lived on the High Street for thirty-three years. He studied painting at Grays School of Art, Aberdeen, and has exhibited and taught art in the Borders. He is a participant in the School of Poets, based at the Scottish Poetry Library.

ANITA JOHN

Anita John is a poet, short story writer and creative writing tutor who has run courses for Edinburgh University, the RSPB and Abbotsford House. "*Child's Eye*," her debut collection of stories and poetry is available from Amazon. She is a lead poet for the ongoing Scott's Treasures Project and blogs at www.anitajohn.co.uk.

JO JONES

Jo Jones moved to Kelso earlier this year from Canterbury, where she lived for over 20 years. She is originally from the Lake District and specialises in short stories and poetry.

VIVIEN JONES

Vivien Jones has two short story collections and two poetry collection in print. She is one of three editors of *Southlight*, another literary magazine from the south west of Scotland, and has a role as a Literature Animateur in Dumfries and Galloway - East, charged with encouraging new writing.

ROBERT LEACH

Robert Leach has written plays, poems, travel books and theatre books. In the last months he has published two new poetry collections, *Love Songs to the Nilgiri Hills* and *About Russia*, both reviewed in this edition of *The Eildon Tree*.

DAVY MACTIRE

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

JOHN MCCANN

Retired from a career in education, John McCann lives in South Lanarkshire where he continues to build a garden. Recently he could be found working in Oman. He maintains a daily photographic blog, enjoys the challenges of creative writing and has made contributions to various local readings.

IAN MCDONOUGH

Ian McDonough was born and brought up in Brora on the East Coast of Sutherland. His first

full collection *Clan MacHine* was shortlisted for Scottish First Book of the Year, and his latest collection published by Mariscat in November 2014 – *A Witch Among The Gooseberries* was runner up for the national Callum McDonald Award.

IAIN MCGREGOR

Iain has lived in the Borders for 38 years. Writes mostly short stories in South/East Scots. Widely published in the *Lallans* magazine. Winner of the 2013 Robert McLellan Cup for best short story written in any Scots dialect.

BARBARA MEARNIS

Editor for *A Rocha International*, Barbara has written three biographical books on pioneering naturalists. She spends as much time as possible recording dragonflies, moths, butterflies and birds in Dumfries & Galloway and is working on a collection of peatland poems.

LESLEYMAY MILLER

LesleyMay Miller is an artist and poet. She combines her words and visual art in ArtistBooks, sculpture and in soundscapes. She created her sculpture garden in St. Boswells. She now draws inspiration in living by the coast.

TIM NEVIL

Tim Nevil is a writer living in the Scottish Borders. Having worked on TV scripts and factual features, Tim now concentrates on writing fiction and is currently working on a collection of short stories as well as his first novel.

JAMIE NORMAN

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

JANE PEARN

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

PENNY REID

Penny Reid is 'Emerging Poet' for Appletree Writers, mentored by Roy Moller with her first collection to be published in 2016. Publications include 'Speak Out' 2014, *Raum#2*, and performances at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival : Spoken Word Sundays.

IAN RICHARDSON

After winning Waverley Lines Ian was encouraged to write more poetry and has had three pieces published. Ian has enjoyed many holidays in the Borders. Recently he was delighted to find that his grandmother's family farmed at Newstead near Melrose.

ELIZABETH RIMMER

Her first collection *Wherever We Live Now* was published in 2011 by Red Squirrel Press. Her second collection *The Territory of Rain* was also published by Red Squirrel Press in September 2015. She blogs at www.burnedthumb.co.uk.

ALUN ROBERT

A Scots born prolific creator of lyrical verse. He has achieved recent success in poetry competitions, been included in anthologies and featured in the web. Influences extend from Burns to Shakespeare, Kipling to Betjeman, Dennis to Mazzoli.

CHRYS SALT

Chrys Salt, has authored four full collections and four pamphlet collections and was awarded an MBE for Services to The Arts in 2014. www.chryssalt.com

HAMISH SCOTT

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

FINOLA SCOTT

Finola Scott's poetry and short stories have appeared in anthologies and journals in the UK, including *The Lake, Hark, Dactyl, Raum*. Her work has won & been placed in UK competitions. Finola is delighted to be one of five poets selected for this year's Clydebuilt scheme.

RAGHU B SHUKLA

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

JAMES SPENCE

Originally from Jethart, James wrote recently published, *Scottish Borders Folk Tales*; has three poetry collections out, and was included in Border Scots poetry anthology *Jorum*. Scots translation work includes graphic novel *Unco Case o Dr Jeckyll an Mr Hyde*.

JOCK STEIN

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

LOUISE THOMSON

I write silly stories to raise a smile,
A librarian to trade (have been quite a while),
The high school in Selkirk is where I'm found
A grand wee school – the kids are sound!
I'm not very serious - writing is fun,
I'm an open book (excuse the pun)
To just raise a giggle is my goal,
For laughter is medicine – it heals the soul.

OLGA WOJTAS

I'm a journalist and writer in Edinburgh, and won a 2015 New Writers Award from the Scottish Book Trust. I also read one of my stories at the Edinburgh International Book Festival under the auspices of the City of Literature StoryShop.

