

# SOUTHLIGHT 28



poetry, prose, interview  
and illustration

Autumn/Winter 2020/21

## Editorial

Late March, 2020, and we are being introduced to a new way of being – compulsive hand-washers confined to our houses, and to our gardens if fortunate enough to have them, and allowed out only for essential shopping. In the period that followed, many writers and commentators remarked on the unusual qualities of silence in their localities, with the great reduction in traffic and the range of work-related noise. Silence that seemed to last and last, silence you could almost feel on your skin, tactile.

Then, with the reduction in noise came a fresh awareness of birdsong, in all its textures and sound levels. And not just birdsong, but the sounds birds make in and under bushes, foraging, moving through, their settling at dusk. I became conscious of this shift in awareness in noticing the sounds of *individual* passing cars as distinct from the constant barrage and whine of engine noise, and how there seemed to be more birds and more of their music than ever before. I found myself attending to the fine mesh of birdsong that seemed to colour the air, trying to tease it out from the whispers of the silver birch and rowan leaves stirring in the breeze beyond the garden wall. And then the questions I found myself asking: are there more birds than usual, are they just more vocal, have they always been there, do they feel freer and less stressed, have I been listening to the wrong things all along? I would like to think that the answer is yes to all of these questions.

Alongside the turmoil of our personal lives, there was a sense expressed in many conversations that nature was just ‘carrying on regardless’. Perhaps, as Beckett writes in his novel *Molloy*, we had been oblivious to ‘the far unchanging noise the earth makes’, prevented from hearing it by the random and ongoing sounds and intrusions of our day-to-day lives. The relative stillnesses and silences of that spring, and the fresh sensitising that came with it, brought home the wider affordances of nature. Within the writing fraternity, all this may be seen as of relevance largely to nature-writers, whose foundational tasks include close attention and noticing, and then articulating lived experience in a way that allows the reader to vicariously inhabit the settings described. But these requirements seem equally pertinent for writers operating in diverse modes and styles, who are concerned with conveying a credible sense of place and the physicality of the world through which they and their characters move.

Amongst the many troubling narratives of chaos, sadness and loss of the past months, there have also been opportunities for all of us for reflection and refreshed awareness in the changed and changing realities that confront us.

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It is with considerable sadness that we record the passing of John Manson in this issue. John was a friend and supporter of *Southlight* from the outset, contributing essays and poetry – his own and translations of European writers – and participating in readings at our various launch events. He contributed to our very first issue and to our last one, and we are pleased to present here six of his last poems. A splendid appreciation of the spread of his achievements, by Alan Riach, appears on p20. (This first appeared in the Herald, and is reprinted with permission).

**Angus Macmillan**

## Contents

BYRON BEYNON Five poems	3
DAVID McVEY Short Story	4
JOHN SMITH Poem and image	6
SUE McCORMACK Two poems	7
PETER ROBERTS Poem and images	8
MIKE SMITH Essay	9
GORDON SCAPENS Four poems	11
MARILYN MESSENGER Short story	13
JIM AITKEN Two poems	16
COLIN RUTHERFORD Two poems	17
JENNY HOCKEY Five poems	18
JOHN MANSON an appreciation by Alan Riach	20
JOHN MANSON Six late poems	22
MANSON ON THE WING : Angus Macmillan	25
A. C. CLARKE Five poems	28
JEN HUGHES Poem	30
JULIAN COLTON Two poems	31
MAXINE ROSE MUNRO Five poems	32
BRIAN GOURLAY Three poems	34
BEE PARKINSON CAMERON Two Poems	35
BASIL DU TOIT Five poems	36
CLIVE DONAVAN Two poems	38
ANNE DUNFORD Three poems and images	39
PETER DONNELLY Six poems	41
PAUL GOODWIN Poem	43
CHAD NORMAN Four poems	44
FIONA SINCLAIR Three poems	45
NIKLAS SALMI Four poems	47
RACHEL BURNS	49

## Illustrations

Cover : Tom Langlands	
Centre Spread : Tom Langlands	26/27
Tom Langlands : 'Lockdown in Annan Sequence'	11,28,30,34, 43
John Priestley : Photographs	15,17,19
Nell Kokocinska : Photographs	29,31,32, 37,42, 47,49

## Five Poems by Byron Beynon

### Rhyd y Car

I visit a row of workers' houses  
rebuilt on a museum face,  
repackaged and brought here  
these six buildings  
disorientated from their original  
space where mining families  
existed, struggled with iron  
and coal, to survive or fail  
the tests of cholera,  
the breath of depression  
across the weight of years;  
sunshine and rain visiting gardens  
the pigsties and pigeon lofts  
now divorced from their context  
an estate the landlord gladly sold,  
the sour earth beaten  
with the bruised hardships  
each neighbour shared  
in the expired,  
broken light within  
the torn roots of every room.

*In 1987 Rhyd y Car ironworkers' cottages from Merthyr Tydfil were relocated to St Fagans National Folk Museum of Wales. The six houses have been displayed at different periods of their history, namely 1805, 1855, 1895, 1925, 1955 and 1985.*

### The Nurse

Think of the humanity  
behind the mask,  
a gift of patience  
for the enormous task,  
those eternal challenges  
which continue  
to descend  
on the mind's calling.  
The sublime stars  
light you homeward,  
guiding the engaged  
heart from the outer darkness  
witnessed from an incorruptible window.

### Terra Nova

Captain Scott's Antarctic expedition  
enters the polluted mouth of Cardiff bay.  
A gift of Welsh coal  
from the mine-owners  
feeds the bunkers of the Terra Nova.  
Excited crowds move and explore  
their day through Butetown,  
a greeting of flags and sirens  
the hooting of salty horns  
adds to the din  
in a paraphernalia of local sound.  
High-g geared Edgar Evans of Rhossili  
sails south again,  
keeps his final appointment  
with the Beardmore Glacier.  
Titus Oates opens his diary,  
calls the mayor and corporation  
a mob,  
disapproves of the noise,  
sees the telephone operator  
as the only gentleman  
to come aboard.  
Fragments that slowly thaw  
from the history books,  
a ship, a crew,  
the inescapable five  
disappear from the port,  
a polar wind that ruffled  
the vessel from its quay.

### **Jelly Roll Morton**

He rubbed shoulders  
with piano professors,  
those pool-hustling  
years playing hard  
New Orleans'  
sporting houses,  
he knew back then  
all about the break and riff;  
released jazz rhythms  
free as fine doves  
above black America,  
hearing the scope  
beating evenly inside  
a left-handed pulse.

### **The Cherry Tree**

The pink blossom I see  
outside my window  
has entered my head,  
the bark of the tree  
has touched my skin.  
Outwards,  
the roots are hereditary,  
they are growing  
with me.  
Each tree sings,  
each blossom screams  
in a world where history  
is madness.

### **Short Story by David McVey**

#### **Gift**

Daniel McCaig was like many other Highlanders in our community. He had come to the town to find work when things became hard in the countryside and doubly so in the afflicted northern mountain lands. When he arrived with Aileen and three children, he was about 35, strong yet gentle, a man of great gifts. He set up as a carter and wheelwright, having done work of that kind in his Highland home. The family were great Evangelicals in the Kirk and before long Daniel was an elder and served as Church Officer. He carried out his duties with a stoic determination, leavened by a kindness in dealing with the sick and weak and erring.

But there was that about him that caused him some anguish. He had not been here long when he was consoling a neighbour whose child, Colin, a wee, frail spark of a thing, looked like leaving this world for a better. Daniel sat by the bedside, talking in low tones to the father and mother, while the child sweated and wept in his sleep. Then Daniel went quiet for a spell, seemed distracted and pained, and finally said, 'Dinna fear. The lad will get well.'

'Daniel, ye're a kindly man,' said the mother, 'but ye shouldnae say things like that. Don't try to give false hope. Our son will soon be with the Lord and we accept this, aye, and rejoice in it.'

Daniel stood up and made ready to leave, aware that he had given offence. 'I'm no meaning to grieve ye, Ruth, but have faith. Colin will live.'

Within a week, indeed, the child had begun to rally and he was back playing mischievously in the street within the month. Ruth and Adam Blair were fulsome in their thanks but began to spread the word that Daniel was some kind of healer, a man through whom God wrought miracles.

The chatter that spread seemed really to irk Daniel. 'I'm not a healer,' he told one group who had congregated to thank him, 'thank the Lord, to whom thanks are owed.'

Eventually the talk reached Revd Davison, the Minister. He called by one day when Daniel was planing and working wood round the back.

'What's all this talk of the healing of the Blairs' wee laddie?' he asked, not unkindly.

'The Lord healed him,' said Daniel, 'the Lord and Dr Dunn.'

'Aye, Daniel, but Dr Dunn and everyone else were sure he was heading for the kirkyard. Everyone except you.'

Daniel stopped working. 'I didna heal him, Mr Davison. I have not that gift. But supposing I was to say, I knew you would visit me today *before I saw you?*'

The minister looked at him silently for a while and then said, 'You have *that* gift, eh?'

'Gift? Well, I'm no sure I'd call it a *gift*, but I have it, anyway. I'm nae healer. If some hale, healthy body was destined to meet their Lord early I would likely know that, too.'

Often in the years that followed, Daniel would be talking to someone when his brow would cloud and he would excuse himself, unable to meet the eyes of his companion any more. Usually, within a few weeks the person he had been speaking to would be dead, whether through illness or accident. People began to dread talking to him, and he began to dread talking to people. They did not credit him with causing ill-fortune; they just wanted not to know in advance.

Sometimes, of course, his presentiments were happier. If he chatted to a pretty young wife outside the kirk after the morning service and his smile broadened, people knew that he had foreseen a happy arrival for the young couple. But the occasions when he foresaw harm began to weigh on him.

Nobody can know for sure, but it is likely that he foresaw Aileen's death, early, of a heart attack. We can only guess how he suffered from knowing this, and yet being unable to do anything about it. Did he speak to her, tell her what he had seen? Certainly, kind man that he was, he would have done everything he could to make her last days happy; but even if he kept his counsel, surely she would have divined the sadness and melancholy which lay behind his smiles?

He loved his bairns but they grew up, as bairns do, and moved away. Angus, the oldest, became a carpenter in Aberdeen and the lasses, Fiona and Eilidh, married lads from the east, Stirling way and Dunfermline. He was left alone and, save when he was working or in the kirk, he grew to be something of a recluse. Of course, he was different from the usual recluse, being the kindest and most amiable of men.

He was still Church Officer, so he worked hard at being cheerful and welcoming when at services or on kirk business. But he couldn't help but fear that as he spoke, some dread presentiment would come to him about the people he associated with. It became known that he sometimes was seen digging a fresh, earthy burying-place in the kirkyard greensward even though there was no news of any death. But that news would always come.

The Revd Davison retired and was replaced by Mr Carstairs, a thin, piping, high-born fellow who was never popular. 'More like an Episcopalian prelate than a real minister' was one of the kinder things said about him. He was reported to be lukewarm about some aspects of the faith and even to pooh-pooh some of Our Lord's miracles. He and Daniel did not get on.

One morning in November, Daniel was seen labouring, slowly (for he was now an old man), at a grave in the kirkyard. No death had been reported and fear gripped the community but Revd Carstairs jollied the people in his English-like way. 'Daniel is a good man, no doubt,' he would say, 'but he doesn't hold the power of life and death over this community. We must resist supernatural mumbo-jumbo.' Being fairly new to the parish he had not, of course, experienced Daniel's gift at work.

A day passed, and then another. No reports of any deaths came and no one was even known to be ill. A third day passed. People still feared, still saw the raw earth wound in the kirkyard and shivered, but perhaps...

'You see? What did I tell you?' said Revd Carstairs to anyone who would listen. I shall go to Daniel and tell him to rejoice. He has no "gift". He is not a seer of doom after all!'

And, as he had promised, he went to Daniel's cottage and, smiling all the while, banged, as lustily as his weakly frame would allow, on the front door. People stood nearby, watching him. Daniel did not appear, so Revd Carstairs thumped the door again.

No answer came from Daniel. None ever would

## Poem and image by John Smith

### Weighty Words

Silence is a thick fabric stretched tightly. Words lie, solid and immutable - tombstone dense

A surface of carbon

black and intense.

Weighty words, they choke, too heavy, bearing down.

The art is lost, lost moments, lost time,

a lifetime weighed down, gravity strained - Stones on lid, words extinguished

words expleted heavily

Nothing, no worth

nothing, no thing, no control - off line, sequestered suffocated, fearfully

that's it, fearfully. fearfully silent

it's never right.... No need to speak.

A tight silence says it all ....



## Two Poems by Sue McCormack

### Inchland

They call it inchland the saltmarsh at the water's edge earth that sinks under foot a print  
that fills with wet a line of footings catching the sky's grey light shining ovals in the sedge

marking the way back like stepping-stones a lifeline in my wake as the soft moss yields as  
the tide recedes leaving drifts of broken shells pale as powdered bones

and seaweed strewn on swirls of sand pools in the hollows of rocks the far horizon a thin  
silver stripe under a weight of clouds the only sound my shoes sucked into sodden land.

Not far behind where the turf slopes upwards from the shore the path is firm as faith but I  
wandered off it into this uncertainty where the way forward is not the ease it was before

where milk chocolate water seeps into the peat like doubt undermines the solid ground  
under the cord grass the dead stalks of thrift and my hesitant feet

and I think as the wind rises in the bay there is an inchland of the mind and of the heart and  
I am feeling my way in fear testing every step dreading every day.

### Something I Can Do

*For Muriel*

My friend died today.  
She loved life but it left her.  
Everything she was is gone,  
everything warm and wise and mighty  
is no more than memory now.  
She is dead and out of reach  
but I am alive  
and that acknowledgement is something,  
a small thing, I can do for her.  
So, though the life ahead is threatened  
and may never be what was planned,  
though the future is dark clouds  
and I am afraid,  
in this moment, standing on the shore,  
watching the white-flecked granite of the sea,  
my gift to her is to be grateful I am here,  
to be thankful for the wind in my hair.



**Stroanfreggan Bowls Hut**

There are still places like this,  
where time reverses off a slow road,  
unwinds from the turbines on the hill  
and whatever future lies beyond,  
to listen: susurrations of damp and mould  
lifting felt from beds longing to be kissed again  
by Taylor-Rolph, Drakes Pride, Henselite;  
trapped echoes – clack of lignum vitae,  
whispers between skip and hench of lambing,  
prospects for the Dumfries tournament,  
a shout of ‘hog’, their lead calling the head  
as their second kneels to the bed,  
delivers his bowl through the rusting guard...



to where the tee in its house still waits  
for the wood’s slow, tender entry,  
the score frame a clock stopped  
sometime around nineteen ninety,  
patient chairs ready for them to return  
from that night when they switched off  
the light, closed the door, called over shoulders,  
‘see ye next time’, ‘aye, see ye then...’

And you, with your digital camera and time  
to spare, contemplating the aesthetics of decay –  
the pleasing contrast of rust-red roof, once-black walls,  
azure sky, empathetic snow on the Rhinns –  
linger at the broken window for a glimpse  
of a world unto itself, playing by its own rules,  
receding into the distance on a slow road.



**Essay by Mike Smith**  
**Glimmers of Comprehension – Moments of Truth**

Each time I read Basil Bunting's poem *Briggflats* (in *Collected Poems*, Fulcrum, 1968) I find it more powerful. That's not to say I understand it more profoundly.

A curiosity I've noticed in poetry, but not in other literary forms, is that my incomprehension falls into two distinct categories. On the one hand I reject what I don't understand as the poet's failure, but on the other instinctively know that it is down to a lack in me.

Bunting's long poem falls into the latter category and sensing greatness, I guess nothing in it will fall short of notice. Each subsequent reading is like holding a candle (or on good reading perhaps a torch) a little higher in the cathedral cavern of my ignorance. What always shines brightly in that gloom is the sharp writing, both narrative and descriptive, and the crispness of the poet's pungent observations. That there is a unity of thought lying behind this I don't doubt, but as yet I've perceived only the parts, and not all by a long chalk.

Right from the first reading several short sharp truths struck home, standing out from the story, and from the landscape in which he sets it. They were so potent and striking that I marked them in pencil in the margins – something I rarely do, having been discouraged in childhood from 'defacing' books! Here are some of those statements, taken in order as you read:

Pens are too light,  
Take a chisel to write (from pt.I)

It is easier to die than to remember. (pt.I)

He lies with one too long for another,  
sick, self-maimed, self-hating,  
obstinate, mating  
beauty with squalor to beget lines still-born. (pt.II)

Love is a vapour, we're soon through it. (pt.II)

No worn tool  
whittles stone; (pt.II)

We have eaten and loved and the sun is up,  
we have only to sing before parting: (pt.IV)

Then is Now. The star you steer by is gone, (pt.V)

.....Who  
swinging his axe  
to fell kings guesses  
where we go? (Coda)

Even these lines, pulled from the whole because they caught my eye, give some sort of trajectory to the whole, but my guess is other readers would pull differently, and follow a different line. And it's not only content that sings out here. Bunting's use of form, or rather technique, is also apparent, and particularly that most poetic of forms, the line break – the printed page's equivalent of the pause, or not! And not just the breaking of lines, but their endings too are carefully controlled. Why, for example, does the line 'We have eaten...' not end in a full stop? And why is 'whittles' set in slightly? That's not because the page is too narrow for it to be on the line above, but it might be to let the poet eat his enjambment cake and still have it. We are always trying to separate or to join words together, and sometimes to have it both ways, usually to gain an emphasis, or a pause that will allow or trigger a misinterpretation.

As for narrative there are two tales at least woven into this poem. One is deeply personal, a love story spread over time, a lifetime: 'She has been with me fifty years.' That line stands alone, isolated in white space, though couplets similarly picked out before and after give a context.

Another thread tells of battles, and of tales of battle. Aneurin and Taliesin are referenced, and throughout the poem, the tale of Bloodaxe, King of York is woven: 'trampled and hewn till a knife/-in whose hand?- severs tight/neck cords.....'

The landscape of Stainmore serves as a backdrop. Redesdale and Coquetdale, Hawes and Garsdale feature. The poem begins on the river Rawthey. Full of story and place, historical, mythical, personal. The range is wide, and the threads interwoven. Places and people are named, and there is always the hint, and more than a hint in places, of the autobiographical. Indeed, on the verso of the title page Bunting tells us it is 'An Autobiography / for Peggy'.

There's a tag line too: *Son los pasareillos del mal pelo exidos*, which Bunting appears to translate as 'The spuggies are fledged'. John Lennard, in *The Poetry Handbook* refers to this, but doesn't give his own translation, sufficing to say that the use of 'spuggies' asserts Bunting's claim for Northumbrian English to be taken seriously by Southrons. Curiously, as a Northron, or at least a 'Midlandron', it had never occurred to me that it wouldn't be. Either way, I'd still like to know what, if any, the meaning of the original is. Try it on your Google translator, as I have, and you might get an amusing, but essentially unhelpful outcome.

But even without knowing the poet's personal history, without having read all the histories of the heroes, and re-tellers to whom he refers, without knowing the places, a reader can still hear the music that the poem offers. That begins at the very first line, on the horn-blast single weighted syllable that opens this epic, with its accompanying trill, and para-rhyming second line:

Brag, sweet tenor bull,  
Descant on Rawthey's madrigal,

This music we have to sing to get the sense, and it sets the standard for much that will follow, where sense comes at the cost of us having to dance to this poet's tune. In a dozen verses, each of thirteen lines the opening canto, of five plus a shorter ending Coda, imposes an order that is yet flexible and free flowing. Count the syllables, count the words, count the stresses, and you will find that each of these lines is its own, yet the regularity of the repeating number of lines in the verses is not lost upon us. Later cantos take a different tack, but the band has been struck up with this opening theme, and by the time we've read it aloud, we know that it's music as well as meaning we must listen for.

One might quote almost any pair of couplets from this opening dozen verses to illustrate the point. Here are two from the beginning of the sixth:

Fierce blood throbs in his tongue,  
lean words.  
Skulls cropped for steel caps  
huddle round Stainmore

My guess is that were I to put in the time and do the maths I'd find patterns galore in this reading, but that would be to prove only what I already know, which is that the poem sounds grand. The music matches its reach for meaning, whether telling the story of Bloodaxe's encounter with death, or the poet's love making, or his striving for a philosophy to deal with the realities of mortality.

A strong song tows  
us, long earsick.  
Blind we follow  
rain slant, spray flick  
to fields we do not know.

Perhaps I should wait until I know it better before writing about such a poem, but who could be sure they would have such time to spend?

## Four Poems by Gordon Scapens

### What it really means

It's the architect of a truth  
that will be valid  
until the next morning.

It's the reason for a conversation  
trying to change your life  
but only for an hour.

It's the forging of a love  
that will last as far  
as the light of day.

It's the promise of a journey  
in hero's clothes  
only into a wall of regrets.

It's the familiar touching  
of a strange hand  
with a message misunderstood.

It's the hiding place  
when a troubled past  
explores the present.

It's the sadness given a home  
on your everyday face  
when witnesses have gone.

A bottle of whisky  
is an expensive friend.

### Diplomacy

She knows my mind  
like she wrote the book  
but her's has the whims  
of an unmapped scare.

What to wear for a message  
that will search out the eyes  
of an evening at a dinner party,  
is a problem translating time  
we don't really have  
into an alphabet I don't speak.

My attention is obligatory  
in this drama bewitching  
her normal reasoning  
and the comments she begs,  
which I make like pleas,  
are all ignored.

Finally desperate approval  
over one outfit,  
an earlier prayer of mine,  
and I clinch the choice  
with a smile in my eyes,  
hinting at jealousy  
that will adorn other ladies,  
and the way I hold diplomacy  
like a flower.



*Shell of a Church, Annan : Tom Langlands*

## Man on a Wheel

The newspaper draws him in  
to another land's famine  
but his soul is starving  
and he has to play golf.

A doorway bundle of rags  
begs change for existence  
but his mind is drugged  
by lack of small coins.

Pollution curses the Earth  
but solutions must be measured,  
targeted to his prayers  
and not hurt his living.

Disabled are just people  
who are not like him,  
might call out for a life.  
He'll listen when there's time.

Life is an ill-fitting uniform  
marching him to an altar  
to sacrifice his conscience  
for invented birthright.

There's status to consider,  
who in the world he might be.  
He'd like to change the world  
but his hands are dumb.

## Bitter Moon

Cold night, full moon  
sliding into a doorway  
to display the rags  
of a sleeping messenger  
nobody acknowledges.

Everywhere is still,  
the only sound my breath  
accumulating uneasiness.

Head full of sentiments,  
I have no argument  
for lack of answers,  
but in this season  
of biting temperatures  
we are joined together  
by our mortality,  
and it doesn't require  
friendship to ease  
the burden of his life.

Tonight the moon  
has a bitter face,  
shortening the distance  
from me to him.

I return to the car,  
come back to cross  
our different fates  
with the car blanket,  
and a futility of cash,  
pockets echoing helplessness.

**Short Story by Marilyn Messnger**

**Once there were Dreams**

'Until last night it had never changed,' she tells him. 'It was always exactly the same in every detail. Like the dreams you have as a child, the ones that become familiar, some of them so scary that you were afraid to sleep.'

'Not me,' he shakes cereal into a bowl. 'Go on then,' he says, getting up to drop bread into the toaster.

'I can see a door,' she says.

'Inside or outside?'

'Inside. I walk to the end of a long passage to reach the door.'

'Are you sure it isn't a tunnel?' He stares at the cereal bowl, and she sees he has misjudged the quantity of milk to cereal, and it irritates him.

'It's not a tunnel.'

'Often it's a tunnel, with a light at the end.' He takes up a spoonful of cereal. 'Or am I thinking of something else?'

'And when I open the door...'

'What sort of door?' A dribble of milk escapes from the corner of his mouth.

'It's made of planked wood painted black.'

'Planked wood you say? Like in the holiday cottage we took that time, remember? It was supposed to be close to the sea, but was a good half mile away. I gave the owners a piece of my mind.'

'I don't remember the doors,' she says.

'Yes you do, they were stripped pine, lovely finish.'

She can smell the toast. He props the two slices against each other so that they will cool whilst retaining a perfect degree of crispness.

'The door is painted black,' she says, 'and when I open it...'

'It opens straightaway, with no lock or bolt, no security?'

'...and when I open the door, I see another door in front of me.'

'Ah, so the door opened inwards, with space between the two, an inner hall perhaps?'

'There's a third door, then another, and so on. Each door opens to reveal the next one.'

'All the same planked wood, painted black?' He pushes away the cereal bowl, purses his mouth. 'Tricky to get a good finish with black, especially if it's gloss.'

'The doors are all exactly the same.'

'What about handles, doorknobs, latches?'

'There aren't any.'

'There must have been some means of opening them.' He frowns.

'I push open one door after another and yet I don't seem to be moving forwards. I try to imagine an end to them. If I could see the doors from outside, perhaps from above, they might appear as a long column. I imagine them as dominoes, snaking ahead, waiting for someone to finger flick the first one against the second, and then all would topple.'

'Except that doors aren't really like dominoes are they?' He takes the lid from the butter dish, and inspects the surface of the butter for crumbs.

'After a while I feel a rhythm develop,' she says. 'I reach out my hand, open the door, step through, reach out my hand, open the door, step through, reach out my hand...' She draws in a long breath. 'I don't count them. I should have counted the doors. There are so many that I assume they will never end, and I will have to keep going, and never hope that beyond the door in front of me will be...'

'Yes, behind the door? I'm listening.' He spreads butter across the toast, scraping the knife backwards and forwards, pushing the butter about until both pieces are evenly covered to within a quarter of an inch of the edges. 'Course, I never dream. I think it's because I sleep so well. My head hits the pillow, and I'm off, as you know.'

'Last night I stop, and I don't know why. The door ahead is identical to all the others behind me, but I know, in the way that you understand these things in dreams, that this door is important. It's up to me whether I make this the last one. But I also know that this door is locked.'

'You said there was no security.' He cuts each slice of toast into triangles.

'It's clear to me that on the other side of this door, everything will be different.'

'You've lost me now,' he says, 'different from what?'

'It's so simple. Do you see?'

He eyes the folded newspaper. 'It must have been a big place to have so many doors.'

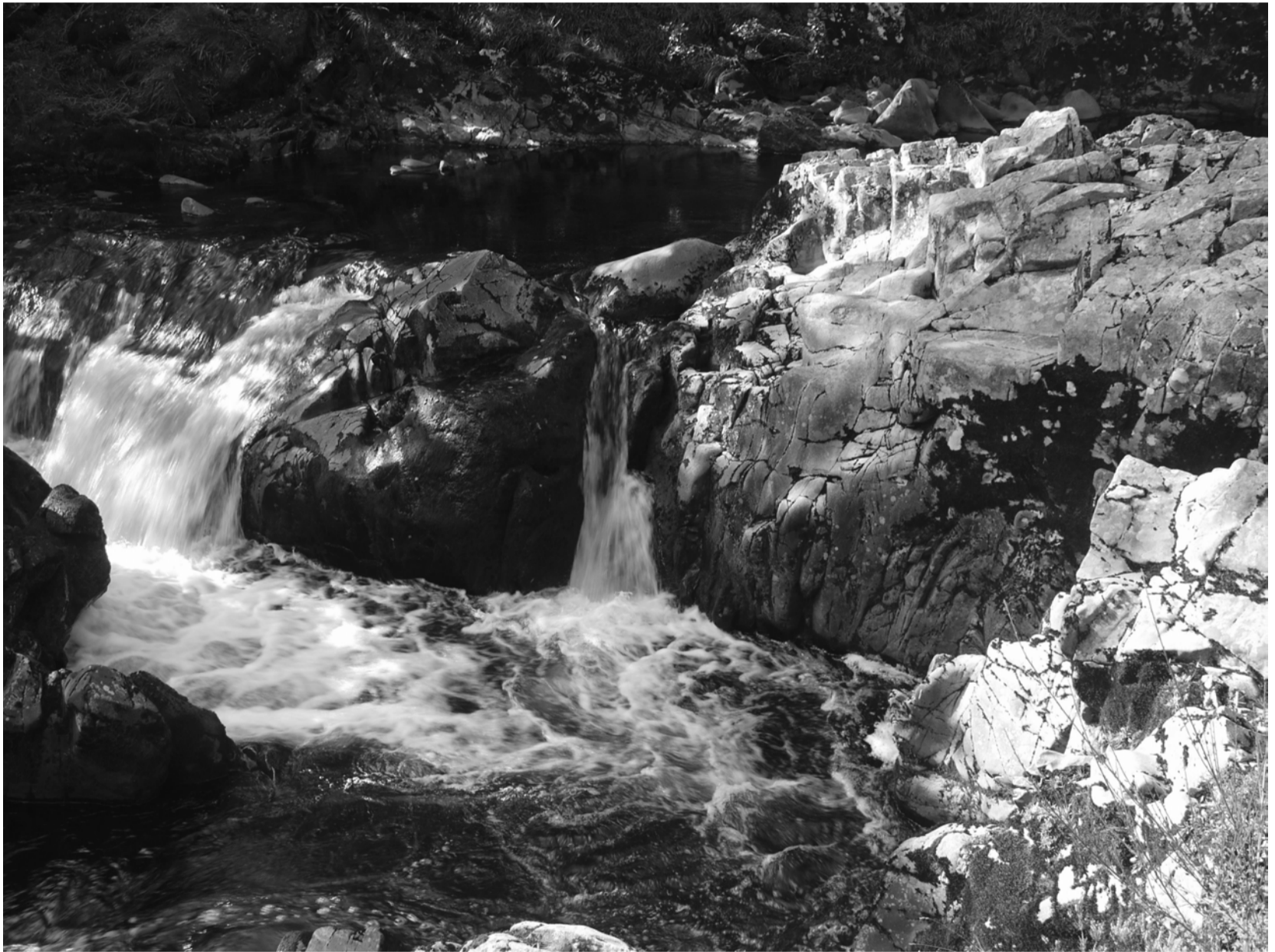
'It seems to me, that I am in a very small place.' she says.

He glances again at the newspaper, as if willing it to move to his hand so that he can blamelessly end the silence that is growing around them and making him uncomfortable.

The knocking on the front door startles them both, it seems to echo around the house, as loud and predetermined as a sound effect.

'Yes,' he says, too loud, the chair scraping harshly as he pushes it back, 'that will be the postman.' In the hall, he calls back over his shoulder. 'Parcel for me I think, and about time.'

That night, she takes a key, and puts it under her pillow. She positions it carefully, with the same hope and expectation as a child with a lost tooth.



*Mountain Stream : John Priestley*



## Two poems by Jim Aitken

### At My Mother's Grave

She lived her life for the largest part  
in the south that meant Edinburgh  
as much as it did London. For she was  
born and bred in the Highlands of the north.

Now she lies in peace at Mortonhall, a far  
cry from the crashing waves and winds  
that she recalled from her childhood. And that  
childhood, robbed so early, lingered all her days.

Things do stay with you. The best part of all  
is the best that you were and now she can  
rest for ever more under the purple heather  
I planted today to give her back her Highlands.

### The Citizens of Nowhere

*'...if you believe you're a citizen of the world,  
you're a citizen of nowhere.'*

*PM Theresa May at Conservative Party Conference, 2016*

Stealthily the night crept in  
like a black padding cat  
all wrapped up in itself.

Ignoring the fading of the light  
the blackbird singing said  
the force of life must win through.

And I thought of the citizens of nowhere  
who continue singing their songs of hope,  
keeping the flame inside alive.

The vans that read *Go Home*  
could not have applied to them  
for they are the citizens of nowhere.

Even though they have lived here for  
fifty years or more, their status is  
as the people without the papers.

Their ancestors were once transported  
across the wild Atlantic waves  
to work for nothing as enslaved chattels.

Now their descendants who came  
to work in our public services  
are the sudden citizens of nowhere.

Like *Joseph K* they stand accused  
of being simply who they are –  
a mere time-served expendability.

Yet the blackbird has no papers  
and needs no permission to sing  
for he is native wherever he flies.

## Two Poems by Colin Rutherford

### the belfast sink

sometimes  
formative experiences emerge  
for no apparent reason

after years labouring on the land  
my father used to surface  
around five in the morning

the sweet scent of tobacco  
announcing his arrival  
and the start of the day

in the depths of winter  
finely crafted patterns of ice  
appeared inside our windows

turning to waterfalls  
pools gathering on the sill  
once the paraffin heater was lit

from the scullery  
the clattering of a saucepan  
in the belfast sink

the shudder of pipes  
as ice cold water  
mixed with oats in the pan

swan vestas were struck  
soon mismatched cutlery  
hit the blue formica table

porridge was served  
with a wee dod of salt  
maybe some sugar

on good days  
the cream of the milk  
gathering in craters across the surface

then, well nourished  
off to school  
for another beating

### ae forest

on this late november morning  
the scent of norway spruce hangs in the mist and  
as I navigate the twists and turns of the water of ae  
a family of long-tailed tits broadcasts its arrival  
their song shrill like a worn bearing  
as they lollypop amongst the rowan and silver birch  
bouncing along amongst the crowns  
searching for a feast as winter approaches

further along the bank  
where a fox has spent the night  
amongst the flattened willow herb  
a hawk mantles its prey  
casting glances, safeguarding  
before dispatching, then moving on to roost  
high up at harestones where they farm the wind  
and drum through the night

there is no solitude on this chosen path  
and as I traipse up the brow  
through a carpet of pine needles I am  
watched over by squirrels rust red from the rain  
there is nowhere I would rather be than here  
this is where I belong  
amongst the creaking branches  
in the southern hills of my fathers



*Dandelion : John Priestley*

## Five Poems by Jenny Hockey

### Power Line Interrupted

We apologise for this temporary breakdown  
in your supply. Figures so far suggest  
it is most likely to be experienced

when seeking to release a bike  
you locked up in the cellar  
some time last year

or stretching lycra over your legs  
with a footpath in mind,  
a downstream current to race,

when itching to dust  
and Hoover your home, poke into corners  
so dark you can barely resist,

when the weeds you might easily tease  
from rain-softened soil  
spring up, spring up, spring up —

and neighbours turn out  
their attics and sheds,  
Whatsapp their smiles to the street.

So it is therefore with regret  
that we must warn our clients  
they will be particularly disadvantaged

when feeling the need to get up  
or speak  
and carry on speaking —

the urge to add more tasks  
to a list we strongly recommend  
they do not write.

During this temporary period  
and with tension so rife,  
we advise all our clients

to slump full-weight onto a sofa  
in their immediate vicinity  
and where possible

to comfort not chide  
those we are led to understand  
will be similarly affected.

### Horses

A rocking horse galloped me  
over billowing trees,  
the night kill of owls —  
we made for the stars.

A clothes horse sheltered  
the home I dreamt  
for my love-worn dolls —  
it held our breath.

### Memo

contact Jo tonight

unasked

Wednesday's wind

reply to Jim

poem to Trish

is stirring shrubs at the top of the bank

a blue-green mass

the tree trunk's yellow green

add jam to Tesco list

Wednesday's breeze

is tickling bamboo leaves

order one extra pint

email Jim

until there is sun about

and branches bounce

and lift and lift

their freight of light

## Viewing my Father

*'We have two chapels of rest  
where you can spend time with your loved one  
in a peaceful setting'*

Resting on a blue gown stapled to the coffin sides,  
your hands are you. I hold them for days  
at the end. I held them every day,  
crossing the road to school.

Whenever they slapped me  
I sat like a rock till they stopped,  
putting the shame on you.

Your hands are punctured red  
like Christ's. It's where the tubes went in.  
Mrs Stephenson tidies you up, tells me  
the hands are what counts.

## White Chrysanthemums

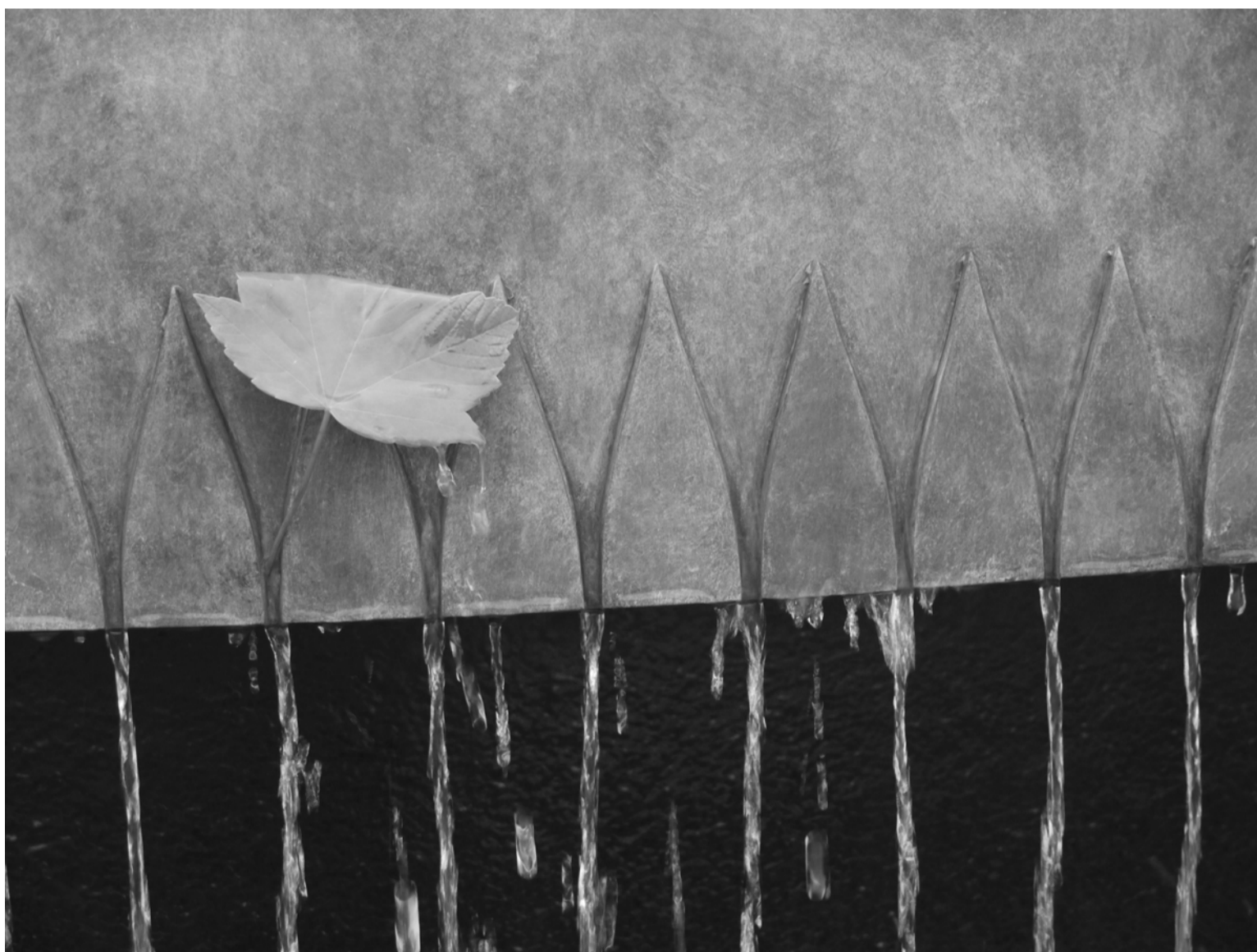
Place us here in place of her  
in the bedroom at the back,

yellow gold  
seeping into white.

Place us here to call her home,

yellow gold  
fading into white.

Replace us here every week  
till we are all you have.



*Sycamore Leaf : John Priestley*

## John Manson (July 20, 1932-August 3, 2020)

### An Appreciation by Alan Riach

John Manson, who died at five minutes after midnight on Monday, August 3rd, comfortably and at peace, was a poet, translator, critic and literary historian, publishing over fifty articles on Scottish and European authors. His most significant impact was as editor, first, with David Craig, of the 1970 Penguin *Selected Poems* of Hugh MacDiarmid, then of *The Revolutionary Art of the Future: Rediscovered Poems* by MacDiarmid (2003), which provoked front page news due to the controversial nature of some of its contents, and then most importantly, of the 627-page *Dear Grieve: Letters to Hugh MacDiarmid (C.M. Grieve)* (Glasgow: Kennedy & Boyd, 2011). His own poems were published in *Stabs & Fences and Later Poems* (also Kennedy & Boyd, 2012). In 1995 he was awarded the Scottish Arts Council's first bursary for translation. He was awarded the 2011 Saltire Society Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun Award for services to Scotland at a ceremony in



Langholm in 2012, the same year in which he was elected as an Honorary Fellow of the Association for Scottish Literary Studies.

His was a life out of the limelight, away from celebrity and devoted to scholarship and provision for others through his attention to literature and political ideals. It is an extraordinary story of selflessness and commitment.

He came from a crofting family in Caithness, born on a croft on the coast of the Pentland Firth on July 20, 1932. His great-grandmother was among those cleared from Strathnaver. In 1941 his father died leaving his mother, a deeply religious woman, to bring him up alone. John grew up helping his mother working on the croft, whilst excelling at school. There is a raw, moving elegy for her in *Stabs and Fences* and many of the personal details of his life are the prompts for piercing, minimalist poems in that book. He was Dux at the Miller Institution, Thurso, 1948-49 and became a much-loved father and grandfather, delighted to meet his grand-daughter Kira a week before his death.

In 1950 he went to Aberdeen University to study English Literature and Language, attending David Murison's Extra-Mural lectures on Scottish Literature in 1952-53, where he encountered the work of Hugh MacDiarmid and as he said, "followed the two strands of Scottish and European (and World) literature ever since." He also began to read "from a Marxist point of view" and started writing. His political consciousness developed in the era of the Korean War, colonial repression in Malaya, Kenya, and what was then British Guiana.

In 1955, he and his mother moved to a small croft in Sutherland. He qualified as a primary school teacher, going on to work in Fife, Edinburgh and Dumfries and Galloway. Early years in Caithness, he said later, had been difficult, but Sutherland he remembered fondly, and he enjoyed his teaching career. After retirement in 1990, his work as an independent scholar and researcher meant that Edinburgh, and especially the National Library of Scotland, were at the

heart of his intellectual pleasure and commitment. He moved to Kirkpatrick-Durham, Dumfriesshire, in 1975, where he lived modestly until moving to a residential care home near Kirkcudbright on Christmas Eve, 2018.

Wide reading in Russian and European literatures developed his interest in working class and politically engaged literature, including Martin Carter, Antonio Gramsci, Alan Sillitoe, Arnold Wesker and George Orwell. The political intensity of his interest was reflected in his own work as essayist, poet and translator.

After visiting MacDiarmid in February 1955 at Brownsbank, the small cottage near Biggar where he lived with his wife Valda, John set about his work of literary archaeology. He met David Craig at Aberdeen University in 1951 and their co-edited *Selected Poems* of MacDiarmid, while a slim volume, had the great virtue of making the best poems immediately accessible to a broad international readership.

John's research went further. In 1990 the National Library of Scotland purchased the archive of material collected by Kulgin Duval and Colin Hamilton. John worked through it, finding what he described as "important poems" that had remained unpublished. This led directly to the posthumous publication *The Revolutionary Art of the Future: Rediscovered Poems* by Hugh MacDiarmid, edited by John, Dorian Grieve, MacDiarmid's grandson, and myself. It made front-page news when some of the poems of the early 1940s were sensationally described as calling for the "imminent destruction of London". MacDiarmid was making headlines a quarter of a century after his death.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1991, John described himself as "a non-Party Socialist" and emphasised his belief that "politics is part of the public life of the times" and "an important aspect of culture". He was sharp to note that the literary side of politics tells a complex story. His sensitivity to such complexities was exemplary.

For John, MacDiarmid was "the most important literary figure in Scotland in the 20th century" because he was not only a great lyrical and satirical poet but was also a national regenerator through his anti-imperialist writing, who had "enormous influence on other people", an influence that "extended to the worlds of art, music, history, language, philosophy, politics and economics as well as imaginative literature." John's endorsement of MacDiarmid's committed optimism led him to detailed repudiation of lazy accounts of the poet's extremism. His research made public the details of shifting commitment and wayward statements, dating, tracing and tracking his political engagements and pronouncements, giving them historical contexts and human understanding, rather than click-bait headlines.

He also worked extensively researching the work of Lewis Grassie Gibbon, and championed James Barke's novels *The Land of the Leal* and *Major Operation*. He translated several international writers, particularly Pablo Neruda, Louis Aragon, Paul Eluard, Cesar Vallejo, Eugenio Montale, Constantine Cavafy and Victor Serge. Many of his translations and essays were published in small press magazines and pamphlets, whose recovery remains a project for a devoted scholar which is bound to yield highly valuable intellectual reward.

The major project of his later years was the massive selection of letters addressed to MacDiarmid in the National Library of Scotland and Edinburgh University Library, *Dear Grieve*, which was short-listed in the Saltire Society Literary Awards. It comprises over 500 items from correspondents as diverse and distinguished as T.S. Eliot, J.D. Fergusson, Sir Patrick Geddes, Allen Ginsberg, Seamus Heaney, F.R. Leavis, Ezra Pound, Herbert Read, Muriel Rukeyser, Bertrand Russell, Dylan Thomas, Dame Sybil Thorndike, Alexander Trocchi and W.B. Yeats, as well as family and close friends. It amounts to a biography at-one-remove, charting MacDiarmid's life through his engagement with others. Throughout, John's presence is manifest only in the unfailingly helpful editorial apparatus. His personality is felt through his own selflessness.

The historian and poet Angus Calder once said to me, "John Manson is a saint." By which I think he meant utterly self-effacing and attentive in his devotion, and genuinely illuminating in what he uncovered. A friend wrote to me: "he ploughed a long and sometimes lonely furrow for MacDiarmid, whom he revered whilst also being unflinching and meticulous in his accounts, warts and all. A classic lone researcher. That's a light gone out." His political allegiance was firm but almost always unobtrusive. Another correspondent emailed me: "John Manson was a fine and decent comrade and a seeker after truth." MacDiarmid's daughter-in-law Deirdre Grieve commented, "He always seemed the most selfless, honourable and intellectually rigorous of men and without parallel in his understanding of the MacDiarmid mind in all its manifestations."

He was good-humoured and appreciative in conversation, eager to enjoy good company and the occasional meal with friends, of whom there were more than his modesty might suggest. Humility need not disguise magnanimity of sympathy and dedication. John Manson's achievement and example are lasting.

### Six Late Poems by John Manson

#### Last meeting

Unspoken you showed  
That you were full of the belief  
That we would never meet again  
Neither in this world  
Nor in another world  
In another shape or form  
Since you had seen an angel  
And I was not a believer.  
'Grumble we may but go we must',  
You had said on a different occasion.

We passed that over.  
A kiss on your brow said it all.

We still held out hope  
For my next 'break'  
And there were always letters before then.

You passed away in your sleep –  
Too soon, for me, as ever.

I had tried to breathe new life into old words.  
What should I have said?  
I had not lived long enough.  
I did not recognise enough about our lives then.  
I was only forty-five –  
Not the eighty-five I needed –  
And I was still well.

#### The Pen

*un jeu d'esprit (mind play)*

Pen, where are you?  
You were here a second ago –  
Lying across my desk,  
Look around – you're not there.  
Try the floor – you're not there either.  
I cannot afford to lose you,  
You let me communicate  
On record.

I try the narrow space  
I can find between  
An arm and the seat of my chair  
Below used tissues.  
There is something round  
But it may be something else  
Like the cord around my cushion.  
No it isn't.  
You are there  
And I can write.

*In contrast, Pramoedya Ananta Toer spent twelve years on Buru Island without pen or paper, and without charge, during the regime of President Suharto. While he was there, the author outlined in his head the character and situations of Minke, an Indonesian boy who went to the Dutch School in the 'Buru Quartet'.*

## **A Dialogue in Space: A Fantasy**

They once had a dialogue in space  
Unacknowledged and unadmitted  
For more than a year  
From different directions  
And at different times –  
An elderly patient and a young nurse.

But although the dialogue was faint and random  
There were threads which could be joined.

From his direction one of the threads was the recognition  
Of a whole conscience and not an alternating  
Or rolling conscience.  
'To thine own self be true.'

He tried to imply this, at first hesitantly and uncertainly.  
And she heard it and said it too in her own time.

End of Dialogue.

## **Ah'm aye tellan ye, Karyn**

Ah'm aye tellan ye, Karyn,  
it seems,  
not as a pedant  
but as a friend  
three times your age.

We both belong  
to the Twentieth Century  
I, to the 1930s – Hunger March –  
and you, to the last decade.

I was born an only child  
in a household of three adults.  
my parents and an uncle.  
No hitting was allowed.  
I had no toys.  
In 1936 they discussed  
Tuberculin Testing for cattle.  
Nothing was kept from me.  
I learned to read  
from the *John o' Groat Journal*  
broadspread on the flagstone floor.  
Francisco Franco started the war in Spain.

In 1938 I attended my first lamb sale  
clambering over the rising tiers.  
'How much am I bid?' screamed the auctioneer  
and banged his gavel.  
38/3 for our ewe lambs and 33/3 for wethers.  
The Munich Agreement was signed in September.  
Peace in Our Time? with one dissident  
in the House of Commons.

My mother and I walked to the school  
for the fitting of our gas masks.  
We were getting ready,  
remembering the First.



## Hallucination

The hands of my watch were so slow in moving one evening between nine and eleven when I had nothing to do that I began to wonder whether they had gone away somewhere else between these times. Did they have their own hallucinations perhaps in which they were jerked temporarily from their bases to another place such as the ruined Austro-Hungarian church as I had once been with the same night nurse? The minutes will certainly fill the same space as Alfons Bytautas's surreal clock face in his illustration of my translation of Paul Eluard's *'Le Front Couvert'* in *Chapman 68*.

### ***What's the Time? (to John Colling)***

I'm awake but not moving  
except to revolve the yellow from my eyes  
to widen the range of their sight.

Later, from my elbow on the left-rail  
and across the sand-coloured floor  
I am aware of the showroom  
at the back of my bedroom.

*What's the time?* My watch-face is unclear.  
My mobile is not on the charger.  
I could ring but do not need the milk.

I thought I'd had a good night's sleep,  
but I hear the night nurse on his rounds exclaim:  
*'It's two o'clock in the morning!'*

And we're still in this land.

## **Manson on the Wing : Angus Macmillan**

*I was standing chatting to John at half-time at a Poetry Doubles event at the Robert Burns Centre in Dumfries, when, out of the blue, he said 'I'd love to have a football at my feet, and dribble and kick it down that long corridor.' This was the first I knew of John's interest in football, and it immediately gave me the idea of a poem, in the form of a football commentary. The readers that evening were Alan Riach and Rab Wilson, in a very enjoyable session chaired by Davie Kelly, the Literature Development Officer. In the post-reading discussion, there was reference to Hugh MacDiarmid's sharp and abrasive side, and questions as to what Robert Burns would have made of all the developments that later became attached to his name.*

### **Manson on the wing**

We're approaching injury time  
at Poetry Doubles, and the ref – Davie Kelly –  
he's had a good game – is allowing five more minutes.  
But will there be a winner?  
Here comes Manson, drifting in from the left –  
always the left – the ball glued to his feet  
jinking round the bookstands, round  
the ice cream fridge and past the reception desk.  
Heavy tackle there from a coat-stand  
but he shrugs it off. There's a buzz of anticipation  
from the crowd, as he feints to the left  
and after a quick one-two with Wilson –  
what a performance he gave tonight –  
he rounds two defenders with a step-over  
and a sonnet and Oh dear  
he's knocked over all the wine bottles –  
no full-time drinks, then. But on he comes  
and – goodness, that was a wild lunge  
from MacDiarmid – he'll be in trouble for that,  
his second yellow – he'll be off... bit of a nasty streak  
in his play these days. But Manson's still on his feet  
the ref plays the advantage, there's just no stopping him ...  
Exchanging passes with Riach – who's been inventive  
and intelligent throughout – he takes out three more defenders  
with a nutmeg, two step-overs and a villanelle – oh look,  
he's done it again, bit of deja vu there.  
Now he's approaching the eighteen yard line...  
he steadies to shoot ... the crowd on their feet ...  
as Burns comes out to narrow the angle but, ah,  
poor Rabbie, never saw it coming.  
Never saw the ball either. Top left corner.  
Right in the postage stamp! Sheer poetry!

*Robert Burns Centre 21.09.09 Poetry Doubles: Alan Riach & Rab Wilson*

**Four images of Dumfries and Galloway**  
**Tom Langlands**



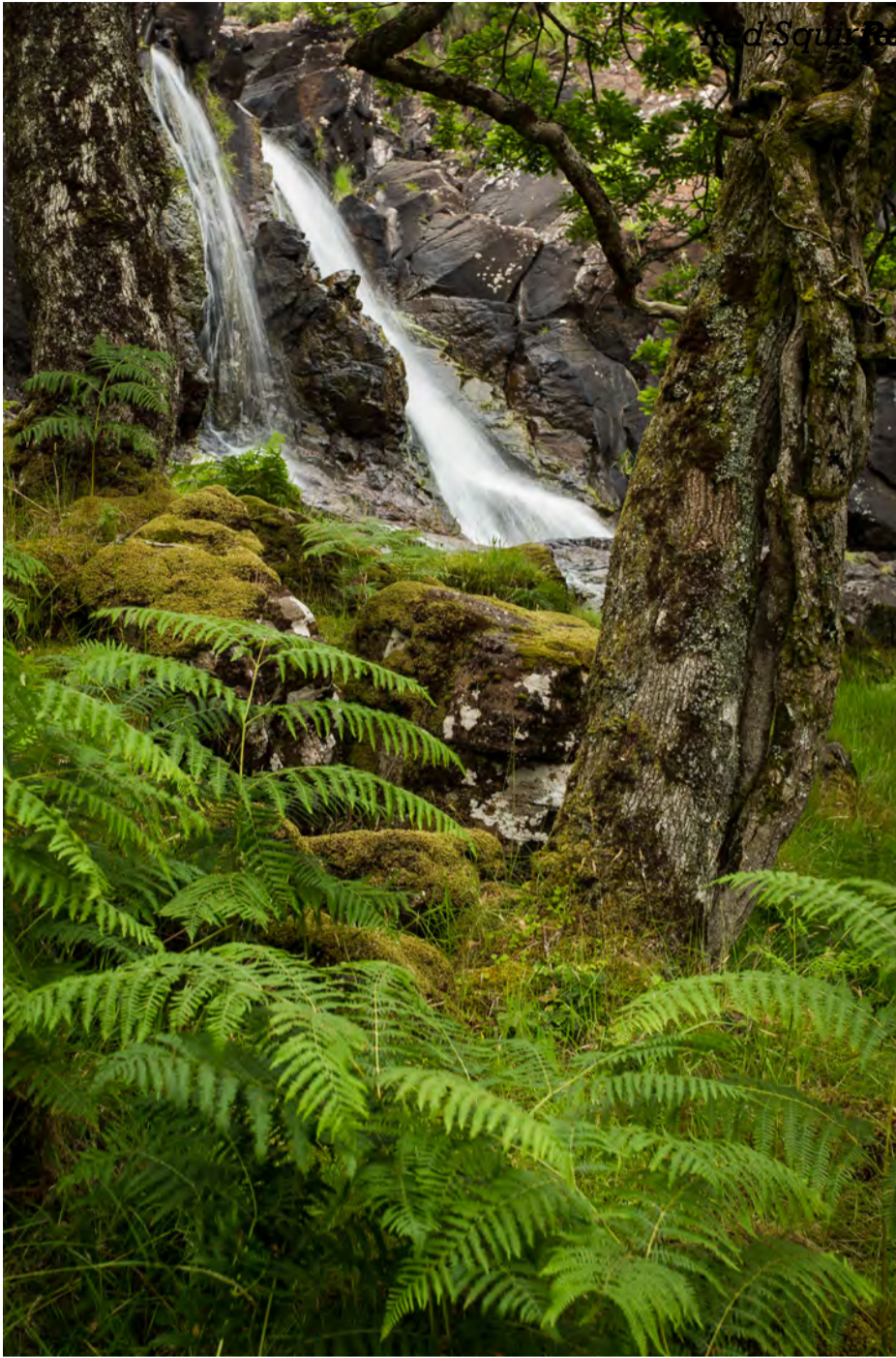
*Powfoot Dubs*

Tom Langlands is a retired architect, award-winning photographer and writer. His work has appeared in publications at home and abroad. While poetry creates its own imagery he uses his photography to inspire his poetry, and vice versa.

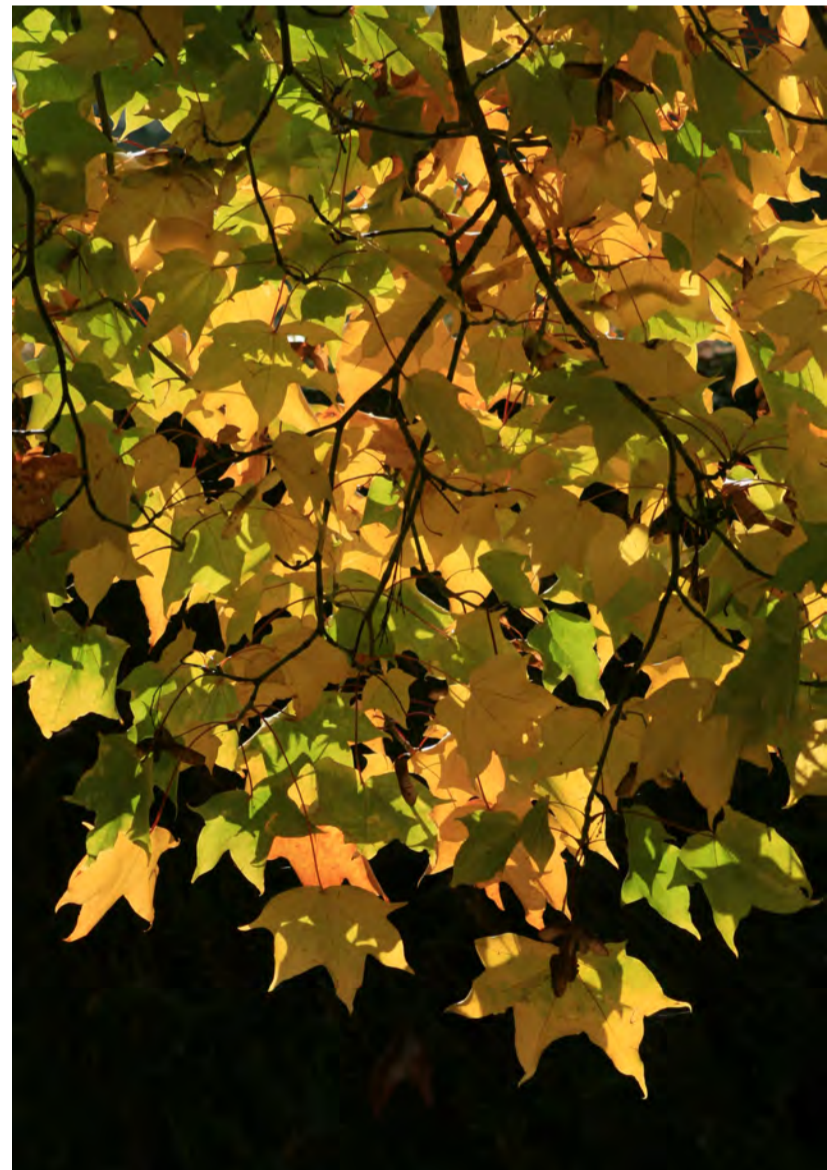
[www.tomlanglandsphotography.com](http://www.tomlanglandsphotography.com)



*Red Squirrel*



*Woodland Stream*



*Autumn Gold*

## Five poems by A. C. Clarke

### Rimbaud's First Communion

You stared at me first from an opened book  
one sleety afternoon in a Burgundy town.  
You stare at me once more from the same photo.  
Memory had airbrushed your brother,  
placed your mother square behind you.

Memory had it right: she's in every detail  
from Sunday straitjacket to oil-slicked hair  
which she'll have searched for lice, steel-combed  
to its ruled parting. She'll be the one  
who gave you the prayerbook you clutch to your side,  
bound the white sash round your arm as if staunching a wound.

Do I read, Arthur, a hint of truculence  
in your ten-year old eyes? Won't be long  
before your angel pout turns scowl,  
your curls, set free, run wild. You'll be off  
for the nicotine-stained bars of Paris  
absinthe and poetry. You'll do your damndest  
to smash the bone-china while there's time.

When you come back, in a sealed carriage,  
to the petty town, the church you turned your back on,  
you'll have two mourners, one of them Maman.



*Lockdown in Annan I : Tom Langlands*

### Anniversary (triolet)

Daffodils on my mother's deathday.  
In the park a woodpecker thrums.  
Two magpies flirt, a squirrel darts away  
heady with spring on my mother's deathday.  
Ducklings paddle along a waterway,  
a small child tosses crumbs.  
Daffodils on my mother's deathday.  
In the park a woodpecker thrums.

### A window

From this angle the window frames the windows  
of the dentist's waiting room, you can see through  
  
to the eau de nil décor, guaranteed to soothe.  
If you crane you can make out the back porch steps  
  
where the Polish dentist can sometimes be seen  
taking a furtive smoke. On Tuesday mornings  
  
the van with the twining serpents waits  
for discarded sharps, bloodied cotton wool.  
  
You can't see the dustbins stuffed to the brim  
nor the rubbish heaped by every back court gate  
like an offering to the gods of chaos.

## Out of time

Since the calendar stopped  
I reassemble the days  
like a shuffled pack.

There is no right order.  
I reassemble the days:  
a card for a magpie

a card for a roe deer.

There is no right order.  
A card for a ragdoll stranded

on an unplayed golf course

a card for a dead golfball.

I reassemble the days:

a card for a missed phonecall

a card for a mistimed laugh.

There is no right order.

I reassemble the days.

## Glen Garr

You think these April slopes autumnal?  
It's the first flush of spring which glows them,  
the soft gaze of a sky that promises

the gift of rain. They'll take it to themselves  
as we, zipped up in waterproofs, refuse to,  
being of a race that rules straight lines across

rebellious ground. See how  
the cloud-fed burn, mocking such rigidity,  
insinuates itself into the glen

lips the feet of a hill, caresses  
the right-angle of a stony wall,  
flows with the shape of the land.



*Outside In : Nell Kokocinska*

**Poem by Jen Hughes**

I want to put my teenage years in a box  
And forget them  
Like my childhood, where memories  
Are vague snapshots and  
Mostly remembered through photographs.

I want to put my teenage years in a box,  
And hide the box in the attic  
Glance at it when I'm getting the Christmas tree,  
If I need to pick out a nice memento  
I can't bear to look inside at the sad and ugly.

I've tried to pack my teenage years into a box  
But the person I was won't  
Go in without a fight.

I want to cut ties with my old self and  
Let her float away from me  
But she won't let me.  
Even as I write these words  
That little voice sobs

*Please not yet.  
Don't leave me in the dark.*

Whether I like it or not, she made me  
Into the person I am today.

I want to put my teenage years in a box  
More than anything  
But I cannot close it if I want to learn from them  
And grow.



*Lockdown in Annan II : Tom Langlands*

## Two Poems by Julian Colton

### What Do Men Want?

*'I don't find intelligent women attractive'*  
He says deadpan serious to the clever woman

At the pleasantly unpleasant social gathering  
Poking his dumb dover sole with a thumb

Three courses, wine and crisp linen napkins.  
Which suggests he would prefer to kiss a dummy

So long as it has a winsome girly face  
Lush strands of blonde hair and a big buxom.

Assuming she doesn't talk back  
Tries to construct a convincing argument

Pass some witty allusion around the grouping  
Form a tenuous human connection

He'll be happy, contented, attracted.  
I guess it's the ancient modern male condition.

Men everywhere will soon be coveting robots  
If they have a smooth vineer and curvy body

And conceal their wired in intelligence.  
*'There's a woman I know has a sex machine*

*No kidding, you wouldn't want to see the photographs.*  
*She says it cuts the man problem out of the equation*

*Stops them jackbooting all over your affections.'*  
Touché, but what kind of world is that to live in?

### Snail

A burden of a shell upon its back  
Living the illusion property offers security.

Vulnerable this carapace crack owning class  
To the evolved beaks of predatory birds

Ripe feast challenge, tap, tap, takeaway food.  
Mollusc conceit such need for insurance

Forsaken by blacker liquorice slugs  
Slipping and sliding, unprotected on fat bellied path.

Waiting for rain in hot sticky July  
Fate glued to single-self condominium

Rolling a trail across the centuries  
A solitary snail life for existence sake?



Validation : Nell Kokocinska



## Five poems by Maxine Rose Munro

### She's building a tower

One stone for every day  
she is ok. This one  
is from a loch.

She reached into cold water  
and took it home,  
the first, her chosen

foundation. It sparkles  
darkly. The second  
came from a hill.

Under uprooted Ash,  
between exposed roots  
that fed still-living tree,

broad, flat, and coloured  
earth. Her third  
a broken, river-rounded

section of tile, taken  
from a garden.  
Terracotta, pitted

yet smooth to feel  
when held against cheek.  
Next, reddish slate

from a shore below castle,  
slipped from turret above,  
part of the roof.

Its fall shaped it  
into a heart  
that echoes her own

romantic notions. One day  
she will find a stone  
belonging to the sky,

it will be blue. Or white.  
Her tower will be done.  
She will rest.

### What she seems

Just like an upturned tree,  
that's what she is. Collapsed,  
bare of new bark, growth  
seems an impossible task.

Limbs that played tig  
in youthful twists are trapped  
in skeletal parody. Static –  
there's nothing new here.

But look close and you'll discover  
exposed roots that still carry  
water to tree, leaves that deliver  
reaching for the skies

from branches run aground, heavy  
on the grass. And there, hidden,  
are bird nests, their precious  
eggs camouflaged, secret.

Surprising, not what she seems,  
exactly like an upturned tree.  
This is what she is. And life  
runs through her.



*Graceful Retirement ; Nell Kokocinska*

### **On Becoming A Snow-woman**

Go out late in the day when the snow falls,  
wrap up warm, it'll take a while.  
Sit on something not too cold,  
slow your breath, your heart.  
Watch the sky emptying  
of torn-up cloud bits,  
hold off, be silent, be still,  
because at the edge of time  
is where you are now, all your life  
you were walking towards this moment  
and now - here you are, you're not so frightened,  
though you thought you would be.  
Remember all the good things  
you've made, over time.  
Let's make this last one your finest,  
give them a snow-woman that will melt  
without tears, leave behind only the best memories.

### **Dark Matter**

I shall read my poems at midnight,  
when there is no one there to tell  
me I don't know what it means

and if the stars listen or not  
I will not care. The moon won't  
be invited to hear my voice.

Perhaps I shall whisper, mayhap  
I'll shout each line loud, stress  
all the unstresses. If I want to

I can for it will be in darkness alone  
that I will read. The white banded  
badger does not bother with page

or stage so I can pantomime  
like a clown or be librarian shy,  
my words will not touch him.

I shall read my poems at midnight.  
Each and every one. And when  
I am done, well, then. I'm done.

### **Antarctica and the Milky Way**

Binary extreme that speaks, each to the other  
twinned together, balanced  
reaching up, reaching down  
emptying  
each into the other,  
and there are fossils, under ice, under earth,  
  
and space is rushing away everywhere  
but here, where life fails  
to get in the way and boundaries fall to nothing  
where space waits for her soul mate,

and the light lasts  
until the dark, too, lasts  
so long  
under hard earth, under sharp ice, fossils,

and barren land of mosts –

most cold most wind –

exhales,

stretches a body of mountains and frozen water  
and hidden, unknown fossils  
up to touch

the half he lost when an atmosphere grew between them  
the half he has kept in sight,

and look, he will say, one day, I have a gift  
fossils I have  
stored under rock, under snow  
just for you.

*Author Note:*

*A binary system is one in which two stars are gravitationally  
bound to each other.*

### Three Poems by Brian Gourlay

#### Freiburg in August

On a juliet balcony in this temporary apartment  
I'm nearly blinded by the sun as the oppressor driving his chariot

Across the virgin sky. I'm lost. Lost in the black labyrinth  
of this barbarian language; it vandalises the tongue, is apt

To desecrate the sacrosanct rules of grammar and language,  
storming like the Valkyries. Here, I can't claim refuge

From the complexities of the modern age. The August heat's as fierce  
as a black hound with fangs and can't be mellowed. The noise

Of the morning rush hour invades the auricular chamber  
like a barbarian horde overrunning civilisation; the timbre

Of the day's already disconcerting with disharmony  
on the march. On the radio there's a four-part harmony

Played by the exile Rostropovich on the cello;  
he's accompanying his wife Vishnevskaya the soprano

And she's singing the *Sanctus* from Britten's War Requiem.  
The papers report the flight of the Serbs evicted by Operation Storm,

The closing of the last door on five hundred years of history,  
the terror of the Croat other as they reconquer without mercy.

The news unsettles. To escape I'll stroll in the Fluchtlinger Park  
and hope not to fall upon an asylum seeker, then walk back

Over the concrete-arched bridge that goes over the railway line, just in time  
to hear the announcement of the late running of the Inter City to Cologne

And suddenly realise the August morning is already departing from the platform  
and I'm a last chance refugee running out of luck and time.



Lockdown in Annan III : Tom Langlands

## School Uniform

On my eleventh birthday, no more, no less,  
I was led to Kelly's Drapery on Irish Street  
to be fitted out for a first school uniform

By a man in horn-rimmed glasses  
who dog-whistled when he spoke  
and knew how to take the measure

Of me. Marshalling the rack,  
he commandeered a blue blazer  
that overpowered my short arms

And manacled my wrists:  
"If it's too long, we can always shorten it  
for him, and sure enough he'll grow into it

In time. He must be due a spurt."  
"He hasn't started yet," my mother said,  
"He's only just turning eleven as of today

And he'll be the next to the youngest boy  
in his year so the Principal said."  
"He'll have to hurry up,"

The salesman spoke like a major to a private.  
"Hopefully, hopefully, he'll catch up,"  
My mother smiled and patted me on the shoulder

On this august occasion as the summer sun  
aged in the late afternoon sky  
and I was already too young and too early

To escape the prison  
where too soon I'd have to grow up  
Before I knew it.

## Two Poems by Bee Parkinson Cameron

### Truth

If you listen hard you can hear my voice,  
Reverberating in any hall of your choice.  
If you close your eyes and open your heart,  
Then I shall come to you, never to part.  
If you wish for me with every inch of your soul,  
Then two shall become one; singular and whole.

## What Remains

Through the narrow eye of dawn  
the rain-heavy clouds darken to the timbre  
of mascara mixed with the stain  
of a lonely tear;

The dial has been turned down  
on the voices and the champagne  
has gone flat. You know that everyone's gone  
and what's here to stay is the distant cousin

Of the sibilant murmur of the sea  
as it whispers in a shell you once picked up  
on a faraway beach on a windy day  
and then dropped and forgot about. Wake up

---

## It. Means. Nothing.

As you stand over the ashes of what you have destroyed; panting,  
We lie still, we wait to rise like the phoenix in flame.  
Though we repose, seemingly dead, our voices carry on the wind,  
A chorus rising that you cannot ignore.

For one god you believe that you kill, thousands will continue.  
Death of a fashion and its subsequent rebirth  
is something we have accepted,  
And it does not frighten us, you do not frighten us.

At the end of the day as the sun sets,  
The truth reaches out to embrace you,  
The coldness in her arms and her voice reminding you,  
That you will always lose.

## Five Poems by Basil du Toit

### Scrambling for Scotland

Someone's been given Pennsylvania,  
another speaks for the whole of Maine;  
this one has the rights to Minnesota,  
that other is grateful for windy Winnipeg.

There's been a scramble to be crowned  
laureate of wheatlands and litoral zones –  
all the best ones have gone; there's just  
not enough good world to go around.

Whole swathes of Siberia and Yorkshire,  
prime bits of Australia, most of Belfast,  
have been snaffled by wide-awake poets,  
sealing their bids with a sonnet sequence.

All that's left is narrow spurs of land,  
a few tidal mudflats no-one has grasped  
the potential of yet – geographic rejects  
insufficient to base a lasting reputation on.

Most of us, late to the market, make do  
with these scraps of real estate, envious  
of the men of Assynt, the Shropshire lads  
who saw a bargain and moved in quick.

I sing a weedy verge twenty minutes  
outside of Glenrothes on the M29,  
on the lefthand side as you travel east;  
that's my patch, so hands off, you losers.

### Performative Utterance

#### *How to Do Things with Words*

Language may lick where the tongue  
is disallowed – a lingual ambassador  
permitted into the locked Russia  
of another's life, words doing the work  
of the hands and the insinuating voice;  
phrases practice their surrogacy, load  
themselves with as much colour, pollen  
and suggestion as they can carry, and rub  
these into the perusing mind; criminal  
acts of vocalisation smuggle a delicious  
contraband of silk, vodka and poetry hidden  
in the grunted underwiring of glottals;  
they give us the scratch of her suspenders,  
the very crackle of her nylons, so to speak.

### On the Death of Classical Music

In that scarlet frock, knees astride her cello,  
she was fizzing – a strawberry Cossack.  
Bartok erupted from an instrument

tautened by wooden pegs to resonate  
at the slightest brush of her rosined bow;  
voices in its barrel chest snarled with

the animal noises of late Western music.  
What aesthetic cries she drew from it,  
what bellowing beasts of philosophy.

She gripped it hard, she had it in her spell –  
a rose conquistador. She hacked and sawed  
as if to sever the arteries of its long neck.

## Taming the Flood

hawkmoth and bracket fungus thrive  
where gluttoned musk beetles encounter  
gall-midges in old birds' nests.  
western skunk cabbages and marsh  
periwinkle snails inhabit hydric soils.

must educate a lost landscape,  
return sloughs and depauperate vegetation,  
eel glaive and bitterns' eggs  
to small shallow palustrine wetlands,  
gather mother-liquor to ponded water.

scrapers and shredders make light  
work of ling and whortleberry.  
loosestrife and buttery spearwort sprout  
on raised or blanket bogs.  
black water pools in kettle-holes.

fishing-birds catch female gerrids in  
carbon-pools; as do piscivorous fish.  
blue-winged teal, pintail and canvasback  
rise off inundated mires like  
caddisflies from a withy bed.

water impoundments attract bog asphodel,  
pink-footed geese, small passerine songbirds.  
moor-gripping stimulates black fly larvae.  
fritilleries and Oaksey lilies startle  
moths out of crowfoot meadows.



*Are you with me ? : Nell Kokocinska*

## Waning Blossoms

The white-cross flowers  
of the unstinting clematis,  
once in the ascendancy  
over the rowan's posies,  
are in retreat – browning  
to obscurity one by one.

My indifferent memory  
can't divulge the next  
stage – fruit or berry or  
some invention calling  
for botanical flare, high  
horticultural ingenuity –

improvisations in stalk  
or floral pipe, the plant's  
instinctual plumbing,  
a small marine device  
pumping itself through  
crimson coral gardens –

some expediency tried  
and tested, as the bush  
undergoes gender trans-  
formations, from pupa  
to moth, battling out  
of paper embalmings

like a crysalis – Houdini  
hanging upside down  
shrugging to free itself  
from handcuffs, canvas  
straight jackets, clocks  
taped to sticky bombs.

## Two Poems by Clive Donovan

### It Is Sufficient

It is sufficient to see the blush of promised dawn,  
the deep blue sky ridden by cotton puffs of chariots

and not to see like fish or flies – faceted,  
orbital, telescopic, magnified;

not coveting the thoughtless worm's felicity  
nor placid trees, rooting slow, swelling their time-rings.

It is enough to stroll in grass, stripping seeds, chucked up high,  
be charmed by skylarks and curlews, not envying their song,

nor the naked, rich and natural lives of hare and fox  
who stop to stare, simple as stone, till I move on,

emergent into this bliss-trance of beauty manifest  
for its own perfect sake – not mine – yet it is sweet enough

to watch the sun, far off, cut, as with a razor bleeding,  
pink-fading, at day's death, staining, the sea's edge in the west.

### Looking Back

Looking back, then, you really shouldn't,  
for you may turn to a pillar of salt  
and shrink when it rains  
as snow-women do,  
or, take Eurydice,  
who, when her trust-challenged husband  
looked behind him  
to check on her,  
got requisitioned straight back to Hell.  
Why is it always the wives, I am thinking.  
But then there was that H.C. Anderson's Little Fir Tree,  
tortured by nostalgia for its nursery forest,  
with a bird for a friend,  
instead of revelling in this blissful radiance  
of the Christmas sitting room,  
crowned by an angel,  
adored by children,  
with twelve sure days to go  
and the after future a bleak unknown.  
For you shouldn't ever look back,  
even when the flames  
are consuming the heart  
of your present.

### Three Poems and Photographs by Anne Dunford

#### Elephant Hawk-moth

*Deilephila elpenor* –

Today, there's one safely hidden  
among strawberry leaves  
another, caught in a web  
struggles.

Greenhouse spiders weave  
lairs in corners, capturing victims  
daily but one was destined to live.  
Largest of moths - caught by a tiny spider,  
trapped.

You free it from sticky tether,  
it remains on your hand  
motionless -  
rests.

Rhubarb pink and green markings,  
soft majestic moth,  
now on your shoulder, reluctant to move.  
It clings.

Trust from a moth,  
a gift you savour.





### **On VE Day, Don't Ask Me**

Don't ask me how it was  
how many friends, brothers,  
cousins and countless others  
I'll never see again.

Don't ask me to celebrate  
the war is over. For me  
it always stays in my head  
*will* stay, till I too am dead.

Don't ask me if I know  
how I survived, how it  
feels to be one of the lucky ones  
isn't my silence enough?

### **Beyond Five Miles**

Liberated from lockdown, we follow winding  
lanes to the Wood of Cree. On familiar paths,  
we're drawn uphill by storm-filled  
waterfalls' magnetic pull.

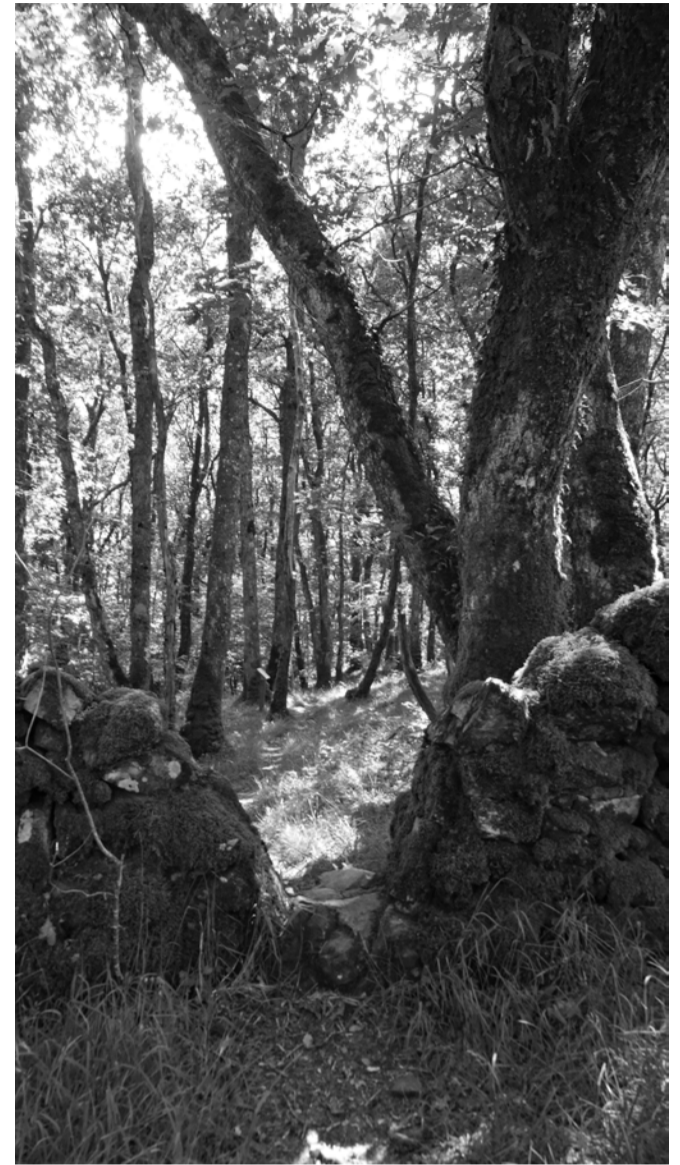
Among waves of grasses, see flecks of yellow  
cow wheat flowers, much prettier than their name;  
dykes moss-cushioned; a crèche of saplings  
with feet snug in mossy socks.

It's a tonic to be back again. We wallow  
in a sea of green, breathe woodland scents.  
Life here continued oblivious of any virus.  
Was that a roe deer or the ghost of a memory?

So much to see, we feast eyes on orchids  
nearly missed as we look up to see a treecreeper  
spiralling the trunk of an oak. At our feet,  
an inch of russet - a young toad, braves our boots.

We stop, hear the strident call of a jay guarding  
his patch of ancient woodland. Then ...  
stillness - we linger, absorb the peace, fresh scents  
of trees, mosses, grasses until

a distant roar of motorbikes in the valley below  
reminds us of life elsewhere.



*Mossy Dyke*

## Six Poems by Peter Donnelly

### Van Gogh on the Table

It grows each day  
like the sunflowers  
it will portray  
before they were cut.  
The vase develops  
as fast as a photograph,  
or the real thing  
in a potter's studio.

I pick out the yellow pieces,  
arrange them on paper  
like a painter's palette,  
searching for the right shade.  
It's half the puzzle  
that so many look the same,  
that the whole image  
isn't on the box.

Lockdown keeps me indoors  
as the weather did Van Gogh.  
I'll never have it on my wall  
but I think when it's finished  
it may stay on the table.

### Jervaulx Abbey

The route becomes familiar,  
three times I've travelled it this year.  
We don't turn right at West Tanfield  
as the 159 does, past Nosterfield.  
Nor do we get the view  
from Masham Bank which you do  
from the high up seats of the bus.  
There is the sound of wild geese  
as we get out of the car, the rain  
has stopped, the sheep appear tame,  
at home amongst oak and sycamore trees.  
There never seems to be a breeze,  
the air as still as the water in the fish pond  
or the ferns with their fronds  
that grow against the ancient walls  
in the grounds of the more recent hall.

### The Bones of a Guitar

Tonight I watched a programme  
about a guitar with a broken back.

When it finished I opened a book of poems  
and read one about a guitar with a broken  
neck.

I never knew till tonight that guitars  
had a back or a neck to break,

or a bridge, mentioned in both  
programme and poem. Or that

there was such a thing as string pressure  
holding the headstock in place.

### Reading P. D. James in Lockdown

*A Certain Justice*. I haven't read it  
for twenty years. I should have been  
ploughing through *Ulysses* or *Women in Love*  
or drinking in the union bar  
not sitting in my room in the Old Building.  
I couldn't remember the plot,  
the motive or even the culprit,  
only the image of Roy Marsden as Dalgliesh.  
I'd never have bought the book  
had I not stayed with Shirley and Noel  
two summers before.

Now I'm reading them all  
as they told me they had.  
Many seem to start in autumn,  
feature religious communities,  
remote coastlines, islands.  
Phrases and words recur -  
'devices and desires'. Death.  
It wasn't planned  
that I should read her, or write this  
on what I learn today  
is her centenary.

## **In the Country**

Everything tastes better,  
the wine not like vinegar,  
the tea stronger,  
coffee smells and tastes like coffee.  
I cook proper meals -  
cottage pie with beef from the butcher's,  
seasoned with parsley  
picked from the garden.  
But the mirrors don't lie  
like they do in the city -  
there I have fewer grey hairs,  
the lines under my eyes  
are less pronounced  
like hidden stains and cracks  
on my plates and glasses.  
I have a cat to talk to  
instead of just myself,  
which I can't do here  
because I'm more exposed.  
I step outside for fresh air  
at midnight in mid August,  
look up at the sky and there is the plough.  
In town I can't see the stars at all.

## **One Week Before the Summer Solstice**

*For Jasmine Persephone, born 19 March 2020*

I've seen so many photos and videos,  
feel I know your face

after three months.  
Now I'm really here

but still I can't hold you,  
touch you, to make sure.

I push you in your pram,  
perhaps the only person

besides your mum or dad  
to do so, round this estate

you've seldom been outside.  
You barely cry at all

but return my gaze almost as if  
you recognise me.

I hope that next time you will,  
that you'll remember my once heard voice

when I speak your name  
which reminds me of the flowers in your garden.



*Heads above the rest ? : Nell Kokocinska*

## Poem by Paul Goodwin

### No Apologies

People like me, from a council estate  
With jumble sale clothes  
And nothing was new  
And no car to our name

People like me, with our mongrel dogs  
A shilling in the meter  
And hiding from the tally man  
And this was our life

People like me, at comprehensive school  
Got a uniform grant  
And free school meals  
And no career advice

People like me, left school at fifteen  
No college or uni  
And no gap year abroad  
And no choices

People like me, paid tax and NI  
For fifty odd years  
And earned our state pension  
And now we are blamed

People like me, have stolen their future  
Them with seven years more schooling  
And less taxes paid  
And now it's our fault

People like me, with no free nurseries  
No child benefit for first kid  
And no maternity allowance  
And we've spent their inheritance?

People like me, boomers they call us  
No posh holidays  
And no free TV



*Annan in Lockdown IV : Tom Langlands*

## Four Poems by Chad Norman

### Notes on Knowing Where the Nest is

What I am up against, if anything,  
when change slows my search,  
for better or worse doesn't matter  
when a tree had no leaves  
and now it is heavy with them,  
keeping me from spotting it  
as I liked to do during the snow,  
keeping me from seeing the boy  
with a loud voice walking the poodle  
going by it, going under it, knowing  
nothing about what the Spring does  
when it is time to rebuild somewhere else.

Now that hardwoods can hide the sources  
of so many different irresistible sounds  
the play on the mind, to fool it, begins,  
an occasional event during my visits  
all of them Winter or Spring to see  
or hope to see what I thought was  
a bobbing black feathered head  
above what appeared to be the mother  
but turned out to be a black branch,  
the type a fir tree gives to shadows.

No matter what kind man stands  
and watches, thinking there will be no  
young again this year, a kind man  
far below on the sidewalk where he  
has grown comfortable with little  
the nest wants him part of, even  
though it won't be the one  
where any young break through,  
the rarity of eggs being any guarantee  
a new member will join the family,  
will join his hope of seeing or knowing  
where the new nest is, the one hidden  
he hasn't found yet, the one noisy  
they don't want even him to know about,  
to have any expectations it will be  
where mortality ends in a hungry young beak.

### Another Morning the Heat Has Us

Watching  
the intelligence  
of a bird,

the branch  
where  
a decision  
is made.

In the beak  
a peanut  
soon to be hid,

a routine belief  
stored for  
the humid future.

### A Fawn's Stare

Shortly after feeding the family  
and speaking with adults I know  
the blessing of healthy ears  
led my wonder to the forest  
growing in an industrial park  
when the intermittent brave caws  
confirmed the annual hope I carry  
to say out loud to myself, "Yes, babies!"

Two new members now make seven  
as parents watch what I do  
happily seated on a stack of pallets  
behind some business the virus reduces,  
a time only I, the human, feels threatened  
as well as what a few isolated moments  
fill all five senses with when I lower  
my head having heard some other sound  
to witness a fawn's stare, another new one,  
peeking up out of grass wet with gifts of rain,  
ears like mine gathering, tiny spotted body  
soon to turn and bolt back to mother.

How time can slow down, even stop us,  
all these lives finding life somehow,  
those with years running out, those  
able to bear births with a trust almost,  
but still hide to protect and teach.  
As I stand to begin the trek to my home  
new little spots, new open beaks  
become all that is necessary to believe  
tomorrow is there, perhaps, anxious to arrive.

### Three Poems by Fiona Sinclair

#### Rush

Mid-winter morning I lug bloated bags through the door,  
still frowning from encounters with mums and their toddlers,  
unruly as puppies, to be greeted by 'Shouldn't have left me alone',  
your laptop displaying a motorcycle for sale whose retro looks  
stirs memories of past bike loves, and 'is a steal'.  
Suddenly, all previous tutting at middle aged men  
on bikes 'They can't handle', mutterings of  
'Trying to recapture their youth' are forgotten.  
Replaced now by 'It will help my back', 'Get me exercising'.  
But I have known by the way you ogle bikes in car parks,  
this is an itch you must scratch.

By Friday it is parked outside.  
First fine day you armour up in a leather jacket  
reinforced like a knight's brigandine,  
select a private road at the rear of the house  
to get to grips with: 'wing mirrors all wrong',  
'brakes on the wrong side'.  
I tip toe up the path, peep through a crack in the fence  
as you go through the protocol of 'lid' on, then Raybans,  
under which disguise, you time travel back to your 20s.  
You mount, and after decades out of the saddle,  
roar off down the road with Steve McQueen cool,

leaving me behind. And jealousy abrades  
at this old passion rekindled,  
as if I have reluctantly agreed to an infidelity,  
because I have nothing comparable in my past  
to give me this *Woo Hoo!* high.  
Dancing once, perhaps, but not now with my disobedient body.  
Suddenly, I understand why those Whitstable women  
don wet suits and take to wild swimming with *whoops*,  
rather than seek their thrills amongst the WI.  
I retrace down the path, noting the garden chores  
that are pending, to coffee and online solitaire.

## New Tricks

The hat and dress I fussed to find for 60th birthday bash remains box bound. Instead, I am kitted out with biker armour, donning the dead weight jacket with a grunt, all fingers and thumbs with the helmet. *But, I won't take you out until:* you get the measure of the machine, become road savvy for local ruts and drain covers that might unseat; feels like a reprieve, suspecting that your fantasy of me as pillion will fizzle.

Not for you refresher lessons, but a *once a biker* faith that it will all come back to you, as if riding was an autonomic function, and for several weeks its, *I'm off on the bike* with reports back in tones giddy as rekindling an old love affair, then suddenly, *I can take you out now*. First ride, I hide beneath my helmet, the *Let's get it over with* expression, usually reserved for facing, without flinching, monster credit card bills, mammograms ...

My 60 year old legs struggle to develop over the seat that I must perch upon, no bigger than a bar stool. For now, I have permission to place my arms around you but generally you dislike it, since it feels more boa constrictor than sexy biker chick embrace. As the bike moves off, the winter pitted roads wind me so that my body screams for a seat belt, first encounters with buses, HGVs, I mentally crouch, missing a car's metal carapace.

Once on the by-pass you accelerate, the velocity hurricane buffets me, but simultaneously, my own driver's instincts kick in as I peer over your shoulder, scanning for on-coming jeopardy. The first corners present like the fairground rides I have always avoided, my instinct is to pull against the tilt in self-preservation, fortunately you are experienced enough to compensate for my wrestle with gravity.

But there is a moment, up Courtney road, where the road's camber is air strip smooth, and the woods seem to keep pace like running children. I notice donkeys in a field, a coy cottage hidden behind hedges, details overlooked in my car as, music blaring, I bowl through the present, eyes fixed on the road ahead. Back home I am fizzing, and receiving your blue riband praise *I didn't even know you were there*, swagger up the garden path.

## Trust

*You must trust him, he knows what he is doing.* So I wrench my eyes from on-coming cars, avert my gaze as buses scrape past us, look at the sky whilst you negotiate dodderly cycle riders, allowing you to lead me in this riotous quick step. Until, an argy bargy with white vans on roundabouts, I simply smile and shrug *He'll sort it*, giggle as at traffic lights we weave past stationary four-wheel drives, as if waved through like VIPs. *Follow his shoulder line on corners* and, at first, I talk myself through each curve as if to a nervous child, but over time given the *snakey or dual carriage way* option, I chose the Herne Bay twists that over the weeks we take lower and faster like our personal TT. And sometimes we blast up the M2 doing a ton, wind rattling my lid, battering my jacket, in the wing mirrors, grinning at each other in cahoots

## Four Poems by Niklas Salmi

### Lessons on Religion

Lessons learnt the hard way stick better,  
sometimes even as well as the mines  
of under-desk, tickle-me-pink gum  
run over by fidgety fingers.

The day's topic was the fall of man.  
The teacher, a Catholic nun, passed out  
photocopies of a painting  
of Adam and Eve clad in fig leaves,

suddenly aware of their nakedness  
in front of a classful of tittering pupils.  
The nun laughed along – she was tuned  
to the Friday-afternoon frequency –

until one of the boys became too daring  
and asked the question. Not the one about genitals –  
no, that was still subject-relevant –  
but the other one, involving belly buttons,

implying that God himself had tasted  
an apple or two in his early days, or else  
that he was a she, an umbilical cord-bearing  
oojamaflip – Gaia? Or was it Eileithyia?

At this the nun's cheeks blushed, and spit-shouting,  
spurting like a ripe fruit when bitten,  
she made everyone write a thousand lines of  
'Curiosity is a sin', due Monday.

After the weekend had passed, there was  
not one sore-handed soul who didn't recall  
what it was to fall. Not one who couldn't feel  
the phantom pain of being cut off from paradise.



*Journey into the Elements ; Nell Kokocinska*

### Balthazar Baku

Alluring alliteration, balmy breath of ah's,  
purring foreign consonants: it had it all,  
the pen name my father used as a young man,  
trying to earn a few coppers by writing  
horoscopes for local rags.

It never became a rags-to-riches story, filled with  
fur-lined velvet cloaks or the cloud-nine clink of coin  
upon coin; that wasn't even what propelled him.  
A clear night sky and some tealights in jars were enough  
to make his fountain pen fly.

And there was never a fly in his ointment – because  
that's what each of his columns was: a cosmetic  
or cure to lift tired eyes and heavy hearts,  
a balsam of blurry yet bright readings that whisked  
the crowd wherever they wished:

from rags to riches – yes, why not; or from Dullsville to  
Disneyland, plain vanilla to miraculous myrrh,  
mind-numbing baby music to the mind-blowing  
quiet of Cosmos, where all questions, whether asked  
or not, are answered.



## Holy Wednesday

*on first seeing you, our unborn baby*

The sonographer passes a probe  
over your mum's shallowing navel pit  
in a small room that is so dimly lit  
it could be anywhere on the globe –

maybe a church, where on this very day  
and hour, silence takes over from Handel  
and the last burning Tenebrae candle  
is taken down to be hidden away.

In the utter dark, I hear a loud *lub*  
as if a bulky book had been slammed shut  
for the strepitus. But then a clear-cut  
second sound follows: *dub – lub-dub – lub-dub*,

the sound not of the angel-made earthquake  
that rolled back the stone sealing Jesus' tomb,  
but of a life-giving, life-holding womb  
and your upbeat heart. Like a new daybreak,

the unveiled candle returns to its hearse,  
the ultrasound probe picks up the echoes  
and the screen lights up happily and shows,  
in black and white, a truth truer than verse.

## The Orange

*in memory of Lilli*

A row of honed scythes hung on the barn wall  
and the only raking sound in the fields was  
the *krek krek* of a corncrake. It was the ninth  
of July, nineteen forty-five, a Sunday-like

Monday at the height of haymaking that  
just for this one strange noon had come to a halt.  
Every soul from Vicar Yrjö to the farmhands  
was sooting shards of what had been a cowshed pane

to dare look the sun in its eye, for they all knew  
that its direct gaze was enough to blind a bull.  
As the sun was hooded by the moon's heavy lid,  
the villagers raised their shards and saw through the glass,

darkly, a ring of fire. They heard the birds fall  
silent, felt the wind escape through their sun-bleached hair  
towards the sea, and caught a sideways glimpse  
of cows returning home thinking it was

milking time. When the sun began to resemble  
the handle of a porcelain cup, it came  
to the Reverend's mind to invite his flock round  
for celebratory coffee, and everyone

accepted. It was only when cups of steaming  
grain coffee chinked cheerily on the saucers  
that someone remembered Maria the maid,  
who'd fallen fatally ill with TB.

She'd missed all the awe. In a way, she'd been eclipsed  
herself: by disease, by her attic room and its steep  
eaves, by alignment with people who treated her worse  
than their horse or the mongrel begging by the church.

On hearing her story, the old vicar rushed down  
the stairs to his kitchen, and soon returned  
with a fruit few had seen before, let alone after  
the war, but which even those who were fresh to it  
could recognise by its colour as an orange.  
'Go and give this to her, my boy', said the vicar,  
placing the centre of attention in the palm  
of the stalwart farmhand who'd broached the matter.

'Make sure she eats it like the sun-swallowing moon.  
And when she's done, tell her the Light is within her.'



*Unfinished Journey : Nell Kokocinska*

**Poem by Rachel Burns**

**Pheasant**

It snows that day, thick and fast  
children grab their sledges, and make tramlines  
down the hillside. I know the snow won't last.  
I walk the dog, following fault lines

down to the river, snow melting  
turning the river molten brown.  
My footprints in the snow fading.  
I skirt around the copse; past a crown

of white snowdrops, and onto scrubland  
with its vast corridors of beech sapling.  
A pheasant appears from nowhere, bold and grand  
rich chestnut plumage, head dark green

red wattling. Colours I think I know  
until I see them afresh, against the blank canvass of snow.

## Contributors

**Jim Aitken** is a poet and dramatist. As well as tutoring in Scottish Cultural Studies in Edinburgh, he also works with the City's Outlook programme for people with mental health issues. He recently edited *A Kist of Thistles*, an anthology of radical poetry from contemporary Scotland, published by Culture Matters.

**Byron Beynon** lives in Swansea. His work has appeared in several publications including *Southlight*, *The London Magazine*, *Agenda*, *Chicago Poetry Review*, *Wasafiri*, *Cyphers* and the anthology *Moments of Vision* (Seren). Collections include *Cuffs* (Rack Press), *Human Shores* (Lapwing Publications) and *The Echoing Coastline* (Agenda Editions).

**A. C. Clarke** lives in Glasgow. Her fifth collection is *A Troubling Woman*. She was a winner in the Cinnamon 2017 pamphlet competition with *War Baby. Drochaid*, with Maggie Rabatski and Sheila Templeton, was published by Tapsalteerie last year. She is working on poems about Gala Éluard/Dalí and her circle.

**Julian Colton** has had five collections of poetry published including *Everyman Street* (Smokestack Publishing), *Cold Light of Morning* (Cultured Llama) and *Two Che Guevaras* (Scottish Borders Council). He edits *The Eildon Tree* literary magazine and contributes articles and reviews. He lives in Selkirk in the Scottish Borders.

**Peter Donnelly** lives in York. He has been published in the *Dreich* magazine, the *South Bank*, the *Writer's Egg*, the *Poetry Village* and the *Beach Hut*, as well as various anthologies. He has degrees in English and Creative Writing from the University of Wales Lampeter.

**Clive Donavan** lived in Galloway for two decades, but after a stint on Crete, now prefers the softer climate of Devon. He works on his poetry full time and his published work is scattered among various magazines including *Southlight*, *Agenda*, *Pushing Out the Boat*, *Prole*, *Stand* and *Salzburg Review*.

**Anne Dunford's** poems have been published in various magazines, anthologies and online. Her latest publication, *From the Mountains to the Sea*, in aid of Arthritis Research UK, includes poems and photographs inspired by the landscape of the Galloway hills and the Machars coastline since moving to Wigtownshire in 2002. Blog: <https://annedunford.wordpress.com>

**Paul Goodwin** His working life was one of finance systems, computers and business reports with no inkling of any artistic side. As he came to retire, he discovered a latent interest in creative writing. Who knows where this could lead?

**Brian Gourlay** His poetry has appeared in a wide variety of magazines in Britain and Ireland including *Acumen*, *The Interpreter's House*, *The Honest Ulsterman* and *Northwords Now*. Have also published essays and criticism. Longlisted in the 2019 Over the Edge Competition and the 2020 Fish Poetry Prize.

**Jenny Hockey** is a Sheffield poet ([jennyhockeypoetry.co.uk](http://jennyhockeypoetry.co.uk)). In 2013 she received a New Poets Bursary Award from New Writing North and, after magazine and anthology publications from 1985 onwards, her debut collection, *Going to Bed with the Moon*, came out in 2019 (Oversteps Books).

**Jen Hughes** has had her work published in a few online magazines including *McStorytellers*, *Idle Ink* and *Pulp Metal Magazine*. She has read her flash fictions and poetry aloud at spoken word events in Glasgow, where she is based, and have been doing this for about four years.

**Nell Kokocinska** fine art and creative portrait photographer whose work was published in *Dumfries & Galloway Life* magazine. Since her UK debut in 2017 she's had several exhibitions at Ocean Terminal Gallery, North Edinburgh Art Gallery and The Nail Factory Gallery in Dalbeattie. Her collection has been shown at Laurent de la Cabrerisse in France since 2018.

**Sue McCormack** After a lifetime as an actor and theatre director, Sue is now concentrating on her writing. She has had 6 plays professionally produced, published her first novel this year, has a short story in the forthcoming Scottish Arts Club anthology and 5 poems due for publication in *Dreich* #9.

**David McVey** lectures in Communication at New College Lanarkshire. He has published over 120 short stories and a great deal of non-fiction that focuses on history and the outdoors. He enjoys hillwalking, visiting historic sites, reading, watching telly, and supporting his home-town football team, Kirkintilloch Rob Roy FC.

**Marilyn Messenger** lives in Cumbria. Her short stories have been published in anthologies and magazines in print and online, such as, *Speakeasy*, *TSS Flash Fiction 400*, and *Words with Jam*, performed at literary festivals in Cumbria and Scotland, and at *The Liar's League*, New York. She also writes short plays, and a collaboration with a fellow writer led to a performance of their play, 'Telling', at Theatre by the Lake, Keswick and at the Penrith Playhouse. She is currently working on a series of short stories around the theme of secrets, specifically, secrets from strangers.

**Maxine Rose Munro** is a Shetlander adrift on the outskirts of Glasgow. She writes in both English and her native Shetlandic Scots. She is widely published in the UK and beyond, both in print and online, most recently in *Acumen*; *Causeway/Cabhsair*; and *Ink, Sweat and Tears*. Find her here: [www.maxinerosemunro.com](http://www.maxinerosemunro.com)

**Chad Norman** lives beside the high-tides of the Bay of Fundy, Truro, Nova Scotia. He has given talks and readings in Denmark, Sweden, Wales, Ireland, Scotland, America, and across Canada. His poems appear in publications around the world and have been translated into Danish, Albanian, Romanian, Turkish, Italian, Spanish, Chinese, and Polish. His collections are *Selected & New Poems* (Mosaic Press) and *Squall: Poems in the Voice of Mary Shelley* (Guernica Editions).

**Bee Parkinson-Cameron** is a writer of poetry, short stories and plays and head of Left Behind Productions. Bee's work has been published in several anthologies including *A Kist of Thistles* and collections of poetry and prose. Bee was longlisted for the Poetrygram Prize 2019.

**John Priestley** His working life has been spent teaching at various levels and locations, as well as a myriad of other wee jobs. He has been making images, paintings, photos or with words, since an early age. He runs the Kirkcudbright Poetry Group and continue with the writing practice he began when he was about 14!

**Peter Roberts** started writing poetry in 2016, in the Poetry Workshop started as part of Moniaive's Creative Place Award programme, which Peter led and co-ordinated. His work has been published in anthologies and magazines, and he has been shortlisted for the Fresh Voice Award in the 2020 Wigtown Poetry Competition.

**Colin Rutherford** has been published in *The New Shetlander*, *Creeping Expansions*, *Baseball Bard*, *The Beatnik Cowboy*, *Dovetails Scotland* and, most recently, in a book of radical Scottish poetry *A Kist of Thistles* published by Culture Matters in July 2020.

**Niklas Salmi** is a bilingual (English and Finnish) poet from Helsinki. Besides Finland, he has lived in Estonia, Poland, India and the US, and has received his education in English-medium schools. A published poet in Finland, Niklas is currently working on his first book of English poetry.

**Gordon Scapens** Retired early to pursue other interests including writing. Over a thousand poems published in a variety of magazines, journals and competitions. Still hoping to become a poet when grown up!

**Fiona Sinclair** lives in Kent. She is the editor of the online poetry magazine *Message in a Bottle*. Her next full collection will be published by Smokestack in 2018.

**John Smith** is a writer and travel photographer. Born in Birmingham, living in Kirkcudbright. Former Chairman, Stewartry Camera Club. Exhibitions include RBSA Birmingham, RBC & Gracefields Dumfries & Local Galleries 2009-2019. Member of the Stewartry Writers & the Gallery Writers with an interest in science fiction and poetry.

**Mike Smith** lives on the edge of England, where he writes poetry, plays and essays on adaptation and on the short story form (in which he writes as Brindley Hallam Dennis). Collections of his short stories and essays are available online.

**Basil du Toit** was born in Cape Town in 1951, came to Edinburgh in 1980 to study philosophy, and has continued living there ever since. His most recent publication, *Old*, is published by Smith/Doorstep, and was a 2014 winner of the Poetry Business Book & Pamphlet Competition, judged by Billy Collins.



# Southlight

welcomes submission of poetry, short stories and black and white artworks. Writers and artists are asked to submit :

- single sided, double-spaced A4 paper in 12pt font
- Poems (max 6 x 40 lines)
- prose (around 2500 words)
- Proposal for critical articles
- 50 word max biography - please include your postal address
- SAE for return of work
- Artists should send B&W work (max 6) as jpegs by e-mail or post

E-mail submissions (preferred) in MS Word or as jpegs to :

[vivien@freeola.com](mailto:vivien@freeola.com)

**Please put your name in the file title**

or by post to  
Vivien Jones : SOUTHLIGHT  
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