Scottish Centre for Geopoetics

STRAVAIG #10

From Alba to England

Poems Art Essays

Scottish Centre for Geopoetics

Geopoetics

- places the Earth at the centre of our experience
- develops heightened awareness of it using all our senses and knowledge
- seeks to overcome the separation of mind and body and of human beings from the rest of the natural world.
- learns from others who have attempted to find a new approach to thinking and living, e.g. 'outgoers' like Henry Thoreau, Nan Shepherd, Patrick Geddes, Joan Eardley, Kenneth White and many others.
- expresses the Earth through oral expression, writing, the visual arts, music, geology, geography, other sciences, philosophy, combinations of art forms and of the arts, sciences and thinking.
- develops a network of Geopoetics Centres with a common concern about the planet and a shared project to understand geopoetics and apply it in different fields of research and creative work.
- opens up the possibility of radical cultural renewal for individuals and for society as a whole.

More information:
www.geopoetics.org.uk
https://www.facebook.com/ScottishGeopoetics/
https://twitter.com/SCGeopoetics

Front cover image: Johann Booyens, *Re-imagined Landscape*
Back cover image: Johann Booyens, *Some Time Ago*
Design and layout by Caroline Watson

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From Alba to England

Our call a year ago for work on the theme of a sense of place, of belonging to a place and memories of place - duthchas in Gaelic - brought a rich harvest of poems, prose, essays and artwork. So much so that for the first time we were able to create two issues of *Stravaig* in one year. Issue 10 is therefore a landmark for the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics in both ways.

The places depicted here range from the granite city of Aberdeen and the former 'Jutepolis' Dundee to Shingle Street in Suffolk and the causeway that links Lindisfarne to the mainland of England. From glorious Scottish mountains like Suilven to the past glories of the Union Canal that links Edinburgh to Glasgow and the Thames at Battersea Bridge you will find much here to awaken what Colin Will calls our seventh sense, a sense of place.

George Wyllie was a man who knew a thing or two about places, especially the River Clyde that linked his native Glasgow to his adopted Gourock. 'The Why?s Man' taught us to question everything and, this year when the eyes of the world were on COP26 in Glasgow, never was that more needed.

The agreed outcomes of the official conference fell well short of what was needed to tackle the climate and ecological emergency but the sight of thousands of marchers from all over the world will remain long in the mind to inspire all who have the best interests of the Earth at heart.

March for Climate and Social Justice in Glasgow

We provided poems and music throughout the RSK Live at COP26 Fringe Conference *Greening the Blue Chips a*nd had great feedback from RSK and delegates that we provided a different and memorable dimension to the event. Over 150 business leaders attended and we were encouraged that they were all committed to Net Zero carbon emissions and many other practical measures to tackle the climate crisis. The livestream recording is at https://rskgroup.com/cop26-virtual/.

Rory McLeod Live from COP26

The 5 virtual Geopoetics Conversations we offered this year led to greater participation and more members joining than ever before. We now have 100 paid up members, 30% up on a year ago! We have launched a crowdfunding appeal to help us to make a feature documentary film *Expressing the Earth* about geopoetics. Please support us: https://bit.ly/ExpressEarthfilm.

Editors: Norman Bissell, Ullrich Kockel, Callum Sutherland, Caroline Watson and James Murray-White.

ALBA a callant awaukins

Joe Murray

I – Geologica: a studdie o stanes

Shapit frae daurk gabbro, peasie whin, and gneiss—
some mair elderin than Tethys; than Lapetus
eildit afore the seas e'en haed names—
yer auld men abide.

Frae the Laurentian Plateau ye chairtit coorse—
makkit sail for a hundart million year carrant
endlang elderin oceans tae kiss Albion—
tae luve; yet, laithe her.

Binna for juist ninety myles o Cheviots ye are ane island—
thegither, feeskit wi a yer sisters, ye dowp doun
afleet oan a Caledonian archipelago—
the perfit multiform.

A the appen mynds o yer gallus-fowk gied a yird
philosophies tae cuitle Thales, Pliny, Voltaire—
an wirds an airt an jig an sang
tae fu yer verra saul.

Oosta tae Rhins o Gallawa; Rockall tae Boond Skerry
ivery curn o saund, stane, drumlin, ben—
ivery pyle, leaf, beuch, dreggle
fesht up a yer weans.

I – Geologica: a study of stones

Fashioned from dark gabbro, granite, and gneisses—
some more ancient than Tethys; than Lapetus
old before the seas even had names—
your old men remain.

From the Laurentian Plateau you charted course—
made sail for a hundred million year journey
across ancient oceans to kiss Albion—
to love; yet, abhor her.

Except for only ninety miles of Cheviots you are an island—
together, tangled with all your sisters, you sit
afloat on this Caledonian archipelago—
the perfect multiform.

All the free minds of your wild-folk gifted a world
philosophies to please Thales, Pliny, Voltaire—
and words and art and dance and song
to fill your very soul.

Oosta to Rhins of Galloway; Rockall to Bound Skerry
every grain of silica, stone, drumlin, mountain—
every blade, leaf, branch, droplet
nurtured all your children.

(English translation: Alba a callant awaukins)

II Biologica

Joe Murray

i Skylark

In the hollow of my boyhood days
troubles would just melt away
in those summer mornings
in my lazy field
Bound for mass I would be late
for I'd lie there and contemplate
the lark that sang as a
lonely church bell peeled
That summer there and more to pass
in my favourite place in the long soft grass
forgetful of the world
and all its pain
I'd watch him soar till I could not see
as his music fell and covered me
with notes that were so soft
a silver rain
I wished that I could fly like him
so high above this earthly rim
connected still to everything
yet knowing I was free
A bond between us one might say
to me at least it seemed that way
for as he flittered rose and sang
I flew into reverie

I imagined once that I could know
just how he saw the world below
(to a bird a shrinking habitat?)
to a lad a green and rolling sea.
Now as this man thinks of that boy
in nature's shawl those moments' joy
I remember too that little bird
who shared his song with me.

ii Flowers

One morning walking aimlessly
when I was just a boy
a dance of flowers in a field
filled my heart with joy
their colours and their fragrances
arose to make their mark
upon this meadow, springtime new
‘til recent winter stark
and I an unaffecting figure there
as this newborn beauty to the dawn did rise
a gift from mother nature
to spring
as barren winter dies.

iii A short walk to port carrick

iv outside my cottage

The Seventh Sense

Colin Will

To the accepted five senses of sight, touch, taste, smell and hearing we often add a sixth sense: intuition, knowing without knowing why. There is a seventh sense known to the salmon, to the wild geese, and other migrating and homing creatures. Our lives too are shaped by the places in which we are born and pass our formative years. More than that, these places affect the way we view the world, the surroundings we enjoy, and the things we take comfort in. This seventh sense - a sense of place - carries with it an unstated and unconscious network of associations and feelings. We all sense our landscapes in different ways, navigating by unrecognised beacons. Walking by the sea, or on the Cuillin ridge, will be different experiences for those from East Anglia or Easter Ross.

I recall flashes from a family holiday in the early 1950s, a camping trip to the North-West Highlands. The adventure properly began in the Trossachs. After driving steadily through a summer evening downpour, and unable to find a campsite, my father stopped the car beside a wartime Nissen hut. It had probably been used to shelter farm stock; the front and rear brick walls knocked down, and just the curved corrugated iron roof remaining. He pitched the tent under that roof, and my brother and I slept in it that night, our parents preferring to sleep in the car. On the Sunday morning our father drove to Brig O' Turk to buy rolls for our breakfast, before we packed the tent and continued North.

On the single-track road beside Loch Maree, the road so seldom used at that time that there was grass growing in the middle of it, a pine marten emerged from the trees and stopped to turn and look at my father's little post-war car. Father, mother, and the two young boys in the back seat, gawped at it until it loped away in search of who knows what.

Later that same holiday, rounding a bend, I saw Suilven for the first time. That sight made a huge impression on me. It often did, every time I saw it in the intervening years, and now, in my 79th year, it still does, in my memories, although I have, as the climbers say, "knocked it off".

Being among mountains exhilarates me, energises me, yet brings me comfort. A caravan we had outside Comrie, at Twenty Shilling Wood, when our own sons were young, was an ideal jumping-off point for the Breadalbane Hills, the Lawers Group, even the 'Arrochar Alps'. I did a lot of hillwalking in those days, usually on my own, but we had lots of family walks too, in Glen Lednock, Glen Turret, Glen Artney. Our sons, with families of their own, love the hills too. The legacy has been passed on.

Mountains, particularly the higher ones, display the bare bones of landscape: the rocks, strata, cliffs, gullies and peaks. Getting to know them sparked an interest in geology, which culminated in study, and then fifteen years working for the British Geological Survey.

Another nexus of personal associations is the coast, the 'seaside' of childhood, and an abiding focus. We've lived in Dunbar for twenty years now, and the coastal landscapes of East Lothian and Berwickshire never fail to impress, from Hutton's Unconformity at Siccar Point to the current geoengineering work to restore sand to Dunbar's East Beach.

I've written so much about life and landscape over the years that it feels entirely natural to incorporate tectonics in a poem, or fossil-hunting in a short story. As a past Chair of the StAnza Poetry Festival, I had the pleasure of introducing readings at the Byre Theatre and other venues. After Kenneth White's In Conversation event he and I had a long conversation of our own. It was gratifying to discover how many favourite landscapes and views we had in common. Although we both walked different paths in our lives and careers, there were many points at which these paths might have crossed, were it not for time differences, and the random way life goes.

The Dunbar coast where John Muir grew up. Credit: www.grough.co.uk.

A Wild Boyhood

Cindy Stevens

“When I was a boy in Scotland I was fond of everything that was wild”
- John Muir

Along the seashore,
when the tide was low, I found
shells, crabs in rock pools.
I watched waves in awful storms
thunder against the castle.

I wandered in fields,
listened to the skylark's song,
went birds'-nesting;
once found a mother field mouse
feeding her pink, naked young.

I tried to plant beans
but dug them up every day
to see how they grew.
I climbed trees and private walls,
stole garden flowers.

The castle ruins
were my climber's training ground;
so was the house roof.
Reached from my window, I climbed
on the slates in my nightgown.

I loved to run wild,
would face any punishment
just to get away
into the blessed wildness,
the start of my life's travels.

Written for the opening of the John Muir Way

Allt Easdal

Cindy Stevens

4000 BC
We lived close to the shore,
built a stone terrace, hearths,
a wall to shelter us from the wind,
a timber-framed house.

There were trees on Barra then.

2500 BC
We lived uphill, across the burn,
where the southward view was clear,
the ground less boggy.

We had stone houses against the weather,
storage huts, too, and stone kists;
swept our rubbish down the brae -
old flints and pottery too broken to mend.

I had a beautiful pot, a beaker
with incised patterns of lines and whorls.

I lost it one day.

Iron Age
Our house was big, strong,
thick-walled in stone,
with seven different rooms
around a central hearth.
It was good to gather round the fire
on a long cold winter night.

You can still sit within our walls,
look across the turquoise sea

and remember us.

19th Century
We had a good life here,
with house and byre,
ovens for grain and kelp,
enough land to grow barley
and graze livestock,
peats for the fire.

Then a ship was wrecked in the bay
and they came
swimming ashore :

the rats.

We could do nothing.
As fast as one was killed,
another appeared,
devoured our grain and fodder,
brought disease.

In the end we had to leave.

Question Everything

Norman Bissell

I first encountered George Wyllie at the *Burns, Beuys and Beyond* event in November 1990. I say 'encountered' because we didn't meet one to one, but he was a major presence throughout that weekend which was organised by the Scottish Society of Artists with George at the helm. He had just completed an amazing run of public art projects such as the Straw Locomotive which was hung from the Finnieston Crane in 1987, The Paper Boat which sailed on the Clyde, the Thames and the Hudson in New York in 1988-1989, and numerous other artworks and performances. The Straw Locomotive when burnt, and The Paper Boat when opened, revealed a huge Question Mark made of metal. With his self-styled title as a scul?tor, clearly George was a man who wanted us to question everything.

At Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum he created a cottage in honour of Robert Burns which he covered in felt as a tribute to Joseph Beuys. George was a larger than life figure with more than a touch of the showman's humour and mischief about him. A musician, writer and artist who was widely read and travelled, he was a human dynamo who had the energy of a man a fraction of his age. The conference on the Saturday was held at the Goethe Institute in Park Circus, Glasgow and the Burns talk was given by Kenneth Simpson, a Burns specialist at the University of Strathclyde. It was clear that he knew his stuff and that Burns was a great starting point for the weekend. He was followed by a German professor who gave an illustrated lecture about the significance of the hare in German art. It went back to medieval times and took in the hare's fascination for Joseph Beuys. I didn't know much about Beuys back then but that was soon to change once Ricky Demarco got going that weekend.

The third lecture was *A Shaman Dancing on a Glacier* by Kenneth White in which he spoke about his childhood growing up in Fairlie on the Ayrshire coast and the rituals he carried

out ‘up the back’ of the village which he later discovered were like those practised by shamans. It was a wide-ranging talk which traced shamanism from the Celts to Beuys and to ‘the dawn of geopoetics”, a concept he had originated and advanced by founding the International Institute of Geopoetics in France the previous year. When he sat down after more than an hour, a torrent of questions and comments followed. The electrifying response it sparked in the audience, which mostly consisted of visual artists, was tangible. It was a tour de force in which White set out his claim to representing the ‘Beyond’ element of the event. However, once Ricky Demarco got on his feet and rambled on for about half an hour, the excitement White had engendered was dampened somewhat. But there was no mistaking the impact his talk made on George Wyllie and many other artists present. So much so, that the lecture was later published as an A3 broadsheet by Bill Williams who edited the free paper *Artwork* and in White’s first essay collection in English, *On Scottish Ground* which came out from Polygon in 1998. George described it in The List magazine as his highlight of 1990.

That evening we all repaired to the Kelvingrove Art Gallery for a dinner and poetry reading. I remember reading a few of my poems after the meal, but, before Kenneth White could read any of his, we were rushed out by the Gallery staff because of the Council’s ten o’clock curfew for the rent of the room. Undeterred, we huddled together on the steps of the south entrance to the Gallery in the dark and listened intently as White read one of his signature poems Scotia Deserta. In adversity, he enhanced his credentials with those who stayed on.

Next day a large group of us set off early from the back of the Gallery on a bus run to Rannoch Moor. As we headed north, the snow grew thicker on the road and hills, so it took us several hours to reach the bleak moor which Beuys had visited back in 1970. We got off the bus and gathered round a prominent spot beside the road to witness George raising one of his kinetic spires in honour of the German artist. It was bitterly cold and George was finding it difficult to position it on the frozen ground, so after a while I suggested to Ken that we explore some of the moor away from the road. As we walked, I spotted a mound about half a mile away and picked up a silvery piece of wood lying in a peat bog with which to make our own spire on the mound. We each wrote a haiku and buried it in a hole under a rock and I placed the stick on top to mark the spot. The German professor and a friend passed by below and gave us a wave. On the way back, we looked round and were astonished to see that our spire on the mound looked for all the world exactly like a hare! Back by the roadside George’s spire was standing proud and swaying slightly in the wind as we got back on the bus and headed for the King’s House Hotel and a late lunch. The rest of the event was something of an anti-climax since it mainly involved Ricky Demarco regaling us for hours on end with tales of his adventures with Beuys. That’s when I realised what a scunner a huge ego can be in the art world.

After that first encounter George would turn up at various Kenneth White lectures and he always made his presence felt. I remember one in particular which was held in a backroom of the Botanic Gardens in Glasgow’s West End, thanks to Gerry Loose, its artist in residence at the time. It was a bit

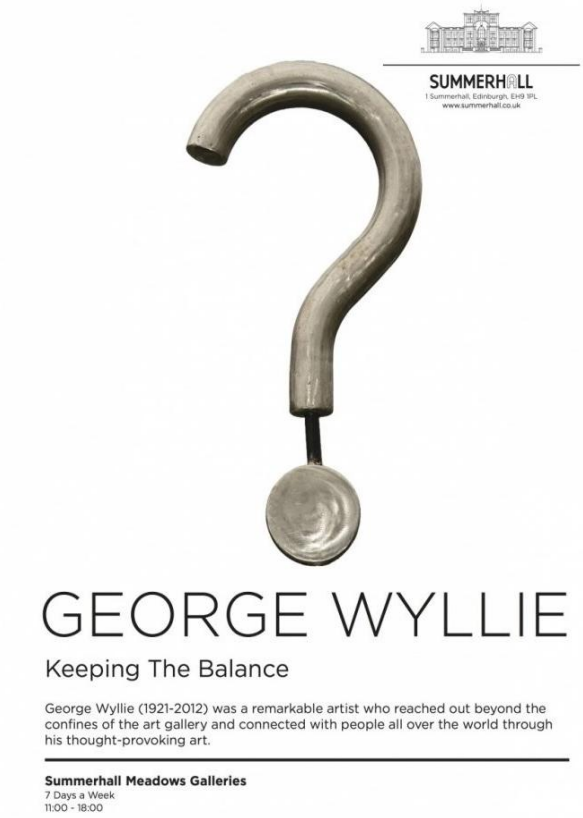
of a mystery tour just finding your way to the room but that didn't stop George. White's lecture theme was the idea of North and he spoke about his long-standing interest in Hyperborean culture which took in Inuits in the Arctic and much more. As soon as he finished George got up on his feet and asked, "But what about the South?" And once he got his answer, he was quite prepared to argue the toss with Ken.

George joined the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics after I became its Director in 2002 and I would regularly send him Newsletters about our events and activities. When we published the booklet *Geopoetics, place, culture, world* by Kenneth White in 2003, George liked it so much he ordered six copies to give to friends and other artists. When they ran out, he would phone me up and ask me to send him another six to his home in McPherson Drive in Gourock, which he subsequently paid for by cheque. This went on for several years and clearly demonstrated his commitment to geopoetics as a world outlook and creative practice. In an interview quoted in the book *In Pursuit of the Question Mark* he said:

I look out the window and see the sky, the mist, which is the river up in the air. You see the land behind it which the river is nurturing through the rain and the mist. You see the trees and the animals which are nurturing us, you see the houses. You see ourselves. It's all out there, it's completely geo. And if you look at it that way instead of in an analytical, scientific way, it's poetic.

And in another interview:
Ten years on from that (White lecture) *I feel that I'm pushing along the geopoetical idea quite strongly myself*.

The book *Arrivals and Sailings: The Making of George Wyllie* by Louise Wyllie and Jan Patience says:



He had espoused the philosophy of geopoetics, a movement established by Scottish poet Kenneth White.

I don't know why I never asked him to give a talk about his take on geopoetics. It would have been fascinating. Perhaps I was worried he would be too much of a wild card on the subject, but I regret it now.

I met him again at a performance of his play *A Day Down a Goldmine* at Theatre Workshop, Stockbridge in Edinburgh in which he had a walk on part. It featured a group of disabled actors and, although I much admired its critique of the money and banking system and the humour of its talk of 'bum steers' and 'an incorrect assumption leads to a false conclusion', George told me afterwards that there had been better productions of it involving professional actors like Russell Hunter, Bill Paterson and John Bett. The last time I met George was, appropriately enough, on a trip 'doon the watter' on The Waverley paddle steamer. A

large crowd of us left from the Yorkhill Docks where years before my uncle and other relations on my mother's side had worked as dockers and where I used to sell socialist papers when I was a student. I remember witnessing the indignities suffered by the men when they held up their Dock Labour cards and were either picked or rejected by the gaffer who stood above them on a metal gangway. My grandfather told me it was those who bought the gaffer a drink in the pub or who were Masons who got picked. It was a lovely sail downriver, out into the Firth and round the Kyles of Bute and back in fair summer weather. The Waverley had been rented in aid of a project to imagine the River Clyde as it could be in the future. On a lower passenger deck, George held court with lots of admirers who were much taken by him and his work. He spoke passionately about his latest project The Crystal Ship which would traverse the junction of the Kelvin and Clyde rivers and be Glasgow's answer to the Eiffel Tower. On the way back he did a roaring trade in selling and signing posters he'd drawn of The Waverley to raise funds for the river project. I still have mine.

I went twice in 2012 to his last solo exhibition in the same Collins Gallery in the University of Strathclyde where his first one was held in 1976, and was blown away by the range and humour of his highly inventive work. After he died in May 2012 at the age of ninety, I went three times to see the retrospective exhibition of his work *In Pursuit of the Question Mark* in the Mitchell Library. It was even more extensive than the Collins one and contained such early classics as a Mortgage Climbing the Walls, a swaying pipe band in metal, and The Whysman film about George on a loop made by his friend Murray Grigor.

Looking back, I can see now that George was a force of nature who combined an enquiring mind with a bold imagination to create unique art out of whatever he came across. His work was exhibited all over the world but the places which meant most to him were his birthplace Glasgow and the Tail of the Bank where he spent the last part of his working life as a Customs and Excise man (like Burns) before becoming a full-time artist at the age of fifty-nine. It's fitting, therefore, that his work will find a permanent home in The Wyllie Art Gallery at Greenock Ocean Terminal which is to open in 2022. The River Clyde meant a great deal to George Wyllie. As his daughter Louise has said, "It inspired my father constantly during the course of a long and creative life."

The website https://georgewyllie.com is a great source for all things George Wyllie.
Images: George Wyllie Estate, Summerhall and Inverclyde Council.

Glasgow Wolf

Alison Cohen

It could have been
any dusky afternoon last winter,
the city's loudness muffled by the snow.
I was louping home along Great Western
Road
hauling bags of awkwardness
past asymmetric strangers
folded onto squares.

A shiver of an ambulance wowed blue
and pounded on,
left behind
an emptying
into which

a husky,
sitting just beyond the co-op,
howled
open-mouthed
throat tracked back
communing
pointing to the street light moon

unfurled an echo
from the frozen stones,
wound a way
to time before the pavement age
when Glasgow was a forest or the tundra.

His sound resounded
round the godless streets
shook needles from the pines
padded through my mind
and found that chord
where myth began:

the grapple at the edge of now
where busker, homeless man and me
are bowed, made tongue-tied,
awed and bound together.

GRANITE

Elaine Morrison

Everyone has a collection of pebbles they've picked up on beaches, from rivers, or walks in the hills. There is something about stone that compels us to reach out and touch it; to hold a gleaming fragment of quartzite in the palm of our hand and turn it over and over. To slip it into our pocket, take it home.

*

"Are ye nae spikin? Far ye fae?" A tall, lanky girl leaned in over me, fringe dangling like a brown velvet curtain above my face. So close I could feel her breath on my forehead. She smelled of bubble-gum and a lack of soap. There was another girl on either side of me, smaller but huddled in tight so I couldn't move. She spoke again, "Fit a gype – are ye deef? *Where*-are-you-*fae*?"
"Tain." I said.
"Far's at?"
"Ross-shire."
"Russia? *Russia*? Hey aabody – the quine's fae Russia!"

I was the quine fae Russia. As the new girl in school the bullying was relentless; but I had my father's quick temper and knew how to use my fists. Pulled to the stony ground by the hair "fight, fight!" chanted the large circle of spectators. Two or three of them in the middle surrounding me. Fortunately, the din usually reached the ear of a teacher or the jannie.

The ring leaders picked up their jackets and bags, and dispersed before they could be caught. "We'll get ye next time ye Russian cow."

I rearranged my granite-grey pinafore, retrieved my school bag from the bush it had been chucked into, and wondered why we had to move here.

We arrived in Aberdeen on the sixth of November 1980. It was late afternoon; dark, cold, and raining. The party of three that stepped off the train from Tain in the Highlands, found our way from the dreary station; up the steep flight of slippery stone steps from The Green to Union Street, and were dazzled by the lights of the high street stores. My mother, my four-year old brother and eight-year old me. Laden with bags and a hefty dose of bewilderment, we took refuge in the grand surroundings of the Littlewoods restaurant in the old Trinity Hall. I recall that day vividly. It was awful. We asked for directions, once again faced the elements and the crowds, and found our bus stop.

The number 22 bus took us through unfamiliar streets and seemed to go on for ever. "This is yer stop quine." called the driver. We stumbled off with our overnight bags onto the damp pavement, gleaming in the orange street light. Not knowing exactly where the house was – my father had viewed it but he was on an oil rig off the coast of Brazil – Mum took out the folded piece of paper with directions from her coat pocket. I held on to my wee brother's hand as mum gathered our things together, and we crossed over Provost Rust Drive to find our new home. The houses looked like the ones we had left in Tain; the same landlord – Scottish Special. At least there was the comfort of familiarity. The enduring memory of going into the house was that when the light switches were flicked, no lights came on. The previous tenant had taken the lightbulbs when they flitted, and the door handles. Welcome to Aberdeen.

*

The Silver City. The Granite City. Oil Capital of Europe. This large town on the North Sea coast of Scotland has different identities. The most enduring is of a rich, mean, and cold place; far away from anywhere. The colour

associated with Aberdeen is grey – the city-scape is dominated by granite. Street upon street of granite tenements, bungalows, villas, churches and schools – from Torry in the south to Cults in the west and Bucksburn in the north. All buildings lining the mile-long Union Street are granite. This giant of igneous rocks is the core of Aberdeen.

In the nineteen-thirties Lewis Grassic Gibbon's third novel in his Scots Quair trilogy[1] is *Grey Granite*. Set in the fictional city of Duncairn, its depiction and themes of depression and oppression made it quite clear that it was Aberdeen. Fifty years later, Paul Theroux, in his typically acerbic style, was straight to the point in his view of the city. In *The Kingdom by the Sea*[2] he described Aberdeen as a 'a cold, stony-faced city'[3]. Iain Crichton Smith, however in his poem reflecting upon his student days at Aberdeen University in the forties, says of his Aberdeen that, 'Everything's glittering and transient.'[4] The oil boom that brought the city its contemporary wealth, and which repulsed Paul Theroux so much, compounded the transient nature of the city – its population, industry and civic identity. But Crichton-Smith's poem shows an affection for the city that paints an alternative portrait; albeit one pre-oil and of a life absorbed in academia:

I loved your granite
your salt mica.

Your light
taught
me immortality. [5]

Perhaps he saw light because of the contrast with the varying shades of grey – charcoal-navy in the rain, silvery-steel in the sun. Twenty years away from Aberdeen has given me the space to appreciate the light of this part of Scotland – especially its illusive relationship with granite.

*

These subtle aspects of light, stone and perspective were not things I noticed as a child. It was the herbaceous green of Dancing Cairns Quarry against the concrete and man-made quartz harling of our housing estate, on the edge of the grey city that grabbed at my nature – drew me in deep.

Our estate was Heatheryfold West. The 'West' part was important – it signified superiority to the older, neighbouring estate, Heatheryfold. Our houses had been built in the seventies to accommodate incoming workers for the young oil and gas industry that still dominates the city.

Elaine, Heatheryfold West c 1985.

Built on former farmland; we had little more than a patch of grass with a "No Ball Games' sign, and a few young rowan trees for greenery. Immediately to the north was Auchmill Golf Course and the disused quarry. For years I didn't know the name of the quarry – *Dancing Cairns* was a dodgy pub down the road that we were warned to avoid. These two green spaces – one manicured, the other returned to nature – separated the Heatheryfolds from Bucksburn towards the northern limits of the city.

Dancing Cairns quarry operated from the late-eighteenth century until the nineteen-fifties. It produced a North Sea-grey granite flecked bright with quartzite. It was one of many quarries in Aberdeen and the surrounding area – granite was a major local industry within living memory. Stone from Dancing Cairns was used locally in the construction of buildings, but the main use was for paving stones. The quarry was owned by the Adamant Stone and Paving Company. 'Adamant' in this context has the meaning of 'very hard stone' or 'invincible' depending on your source etymology. The name is a bit of a mystery – all other quarries in Aberdeen and the surrounding area are named after their location – Kemnay, Rubislaw, Nigg Bay, Peterhead. Why Dancing Cairns? I haven't been able to find out for sure. There is local lore about a young couple called Cairns, who committed suicide at the quarry, and their ghosts could be seen dancing there.

When the quarry closed, it left a two-hundred feet deep hole in the ground. As people and machinery moved out, nature began the process of reclamation. By the time I had discovered the quarry in the eighties it was a lush playground. A dangerous one too. There were calls on Parliament to have the quarry infilled due to the death of three boys and two men between 1955 and 1958. I don't know how many were subsequently killed (presumably through falling from the rock faces or by drowning in the pools). With hindsight, my friends and I were lucky to have come away with nothing more than scrapes and bruises.
The quarry access was behind a row of garages on Howes Drive. A path was foot-worn through scrubby grass, gorse, and broom that formed the boundary between the nine-hole golf course and the quarry. It probably wasn't that remarkable. To a council estate bairn like me though, the sheer cliff faces could well have been in the Cairngorms – pools and ponds the deep bottle-green corrie lochan of Lochnagar.

The sharpest shards of memory are deeply personal – of the sensory, tactile experience of hands, knees, and feet on stone. Reaching out to grab a tuft of grass or a branch of broom to pull myself up a particularly tricky section of cliff; feeling the loose aggregate slide away under my plimsoled-feet, hearing it tumble over rocks below as it fell – trying to make sure I didn't follow. The thud of relief as I land chest first at the top, face in the sweet-green of wild grasses, grabbing onto a friend's hand or the trunk of a woody shrub to heave the rest of me to safety. Sometime our family dog Trixie was with me – her daily walk my excuse to go to the quarry. The poor, wee thing, a dumpy cocker spaniel. It's a wonder she survived sliding down near-perpendicular faces of smooth granite onto sharp boulders below. I feel guilty just thinking about it.

The bottom of the gouged-out quarry was pockmarked by pools of varying sizes. One particularly large in the 'wet quarry' would ice over in winter, but we had heard too many tales of people falling through the ice and freezing to death to try to skate on it. In spring the small ponds were gelatinous with frogspawn, the tapioca of school dinners; we would dare each other to scoop some up in our hands. Next would come froglets – prodded with twigs and never caught. The newts in summer were less lucky. I don't know how many were caught in jam jars and taken home to disgusted parents. They probably ended up flushed down the toilet to join the dead goldfish from the Carnies at the beach. I loved the newts – just watching them. If I took one home my mother would know where I had been and I'd be grounded.

"Don't hang about on street corners," she would call every time I set off out – "and keep away from the quarry." What were the alternatives? There were only so many times I could roller-skate up and down the back lane. So I hung out on street corners and went to the quarry.

It is likely that the species we pestered in Dancing Cairns quarry was the Palmate Newt. They have a preference for shallow pools and acidic soils with a granite bedrock. They also have webbed feet, which I was fascinated by as I cupped one in my hand, unlike the open-toed Smooth Newt. It seemed as though I stared into the smaller pools for hours on end, the heat of summer school holiday sun on my back, lying stretched out on my front – a bit like one of the sunbathing newts – speckled with freckles.

As a child in the eighties, you went home when it was dark – almost eleven o'clock at these latitudes. No mobile phones, and parents oblivious (or so we thought) to where their children were. With the exception of avoiding gangs and the occasional encounter with a glue-sniffer – who wouldn't notice me anyway with his head lost inside a brown paper bag, inhaling toxic, misery-escaping fumes – I felt safe. The real risk was often within a supervised environment, not a natural one.
On Saturday mornings I went to gymnastic classes in neighbouring Northfield – in the community centre next to the public library. The coach was weel kent for his predatory behaviour towards the bairns in his charge. I escaped his attention. Our regular babysitter though – the elder brother of a classmate – had a tendency to be inappropriate with where he put his hands on me during 'play fights'. He became an accountant.

*

Middlefield School was built in the nineteen-thirties. It had art-deco curved wings at each end with large areas of geometric glazing – the main structure was built (unsurprisingly) from blocks of granite. After my small Victorian school in Tain, this was an imposing structure. The building had been badly damaged during air raids on the 21 April 1943, during what became known as Aberdeen's Blitz. In the space of just forty-four minutes, one hundred and twenty-seven bombs fell, damaging or destroying more than twelve-thousand homes, and killing one hundred and fifteen people.

Whilst my early days at Middlefield primary school were difficult, like most kids of my age I was pretty resilient. I made friends – there was safety in numbers. A group of us went to and from school together – on the bus for three stops if the weather was particularly wet, on foot if it was just a bit dreich or snowing. In knee-deep snow it was quicker and easier to walk.

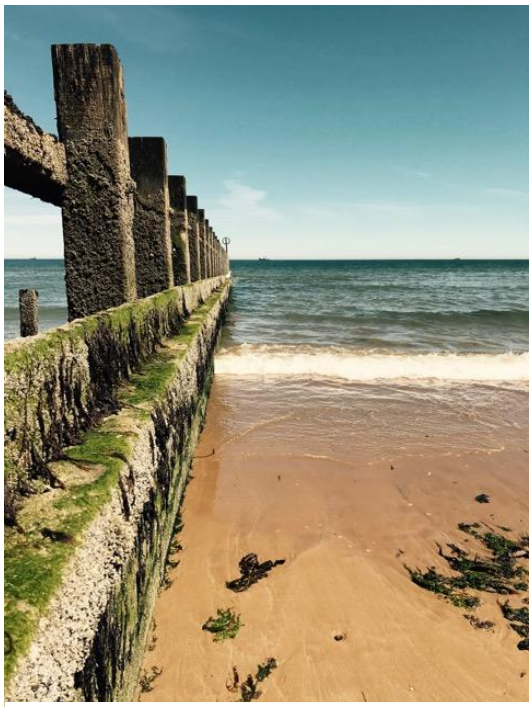
Mrs Shaw, my first class teacher at Middlefield, took me under her wing. She was one of those people who looked much older than they actually are. Dull brown hair with a streak of grey pulled back tight into a bun with thick-rimmed black glasses too big for her wren-like face. She ran the school chess club and soon I was signed up alongside Kerry, the only other girl on the team. I wasn't very good but we got time off to go to other schools for league matches. During the Easter holidays we spent a week at the Beach Ballroom for the regional championships. Kerry and I had a ploy to get knocked out as early as we could and hang out on the beach until the next session was due to start.

Aberdeen beach is a three-mile long, slender stretch of buff sand. It extends from the mouth of the Dee at the fishing village of Fittie, northwards to the sand dunes at the mouth of the Don. The sand is punctuated at regular intervals by a series of thirty groynes – fence like structures made from marine-grade timber, that extend from the shore into the sea with the aim of preventing longshore drift. At certain locations, granite blocks have been placed to further protect the shore.

*

After about the age of twelve I stopped playing at the quarry. To cope with teenage angst, I walked the dog up to the golf course after supper, and sat on the brow of the hill

looking north towards the airport; the lights of an oil rig or supply boat visible in the North Sea. In 1988 the Council infilled the quarry with household waste and it became an extension to Auchmill Golf Course. Funny how I didn't notice all this going on in my back yard. Innocence was waning, as was my interest in hunks of abandoned granite – no matter that the light seemed to dance on the waste-heap cairns in the mid-summer sun, changing it from dour grey to quartzite bright silver.



Groyne at Aberdeen Beach.

*

Granite comes in different colours depending upon the the variety of feldspar and minerals it contains. The Aberdeen quarries including Dancing Cairns produced grey granite. Peterhead on the Buchan coast produced (and still does) red and blue granites. The North East of Scotland is at one end of a geological zone that extends beyond Argyll in the south west – through Islay to Northern Ireland. It is known as the Dalriadian Supergroup. What is now the landmass of Scotland, was once separated from England by the Iapetus Ocean, which reached its maximum extent around 480 million years ago. Continents doing what continents do – shifted and collided. The Iapetus Ocean began to close. The continental collision resulted in the formation of a massive mountain chain from Norway to the Appalachians in North America. As the ocean closed and continents crashed and ducked and dived, the mud and sand that formed the ocean floor was plunged deep into the Earth's crust, causing the surface rocks to fall with it and melt – metamorphosed – forming granite in an extreme atmosphere of charged energy and fiery emotion. The sea closed and things slowed down (in geological terms), continental drift was more sedate, and eventually the land masses that form modern day Britain met up and stuck. Carved by the weight of ice and the flow of meltwater, granites and their sister rock gabbro, came to the surface as we see them today. Whilst granites can be found all over Scotland, they are particularly concentrated in the Grampian-Argyll region.

*

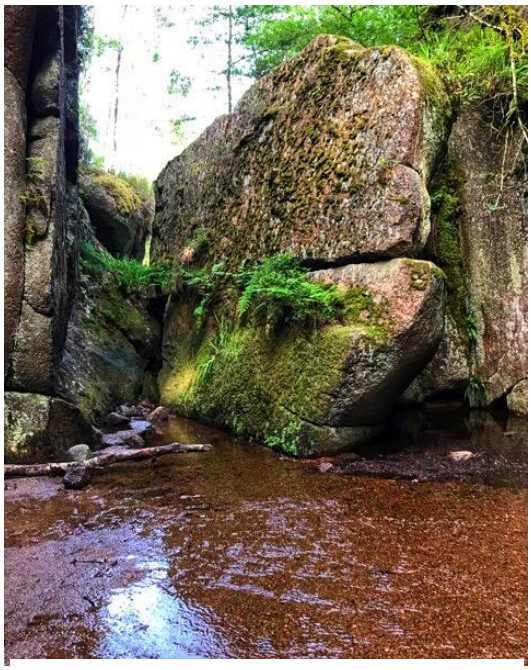
It wasn't until a geography fieldtrip to Ballater in Deeside at secondary school that granite consciously came into my life again. We were studying the Muir of Dinnet nature reserve. Approaching from the east, the first impression was the haze of expansive silver birch. It is particularly striking during winter when its leafless branches inject a pink-purple-violet floating mass into the cold greys and deep evergreens of the surrounding hillsides. On first sight I likened the effect of this birch to candyfloss, filling the shallow depression of Muir of Dinnet with a dense yet airy cloud. They have an effervescence that illuminates the dark months here in the Cairngorms. The birch devoid of their summer foliage also affords the best views of Loch Kinord. Loch Kinord together with her neighbour Loch Davan, are considered to be among the best examples of kettle hole lochs in Scotland. At the end of the last ice age parts of the ice sheet became stranded in this area. They stagnated and were washed over by sand and gravel as the

main glacier retreated and melted. As temperatures rose and the blocks of ice began to melt, debris below the surface acted like a scouring pad on the bedrock, and the weight of the ice and surface deposits added to the effectiveness of the erosion. Two depressions were gouged out in circular and downward motion which, when the big melt finally occurred, left two lochs in the shape of kettle pots behind.

There is evidence of early settlement on the isthmus of land between Kinord and Davan, including an early Christian, pink-granite cross slab, field systems, hut circles and in the north east corner of Loch Kinord itself, an Iron Age crannog. The crannog here goes by the name of Prison Island, thought to have been used in a later period as a place to detain the enemies of a long since ruined castle nearby.

A walk around the circumference of the lochs is a fine thing to do, but wasn't the main reason for coming here. Turning off the A93 at the edge of Loch Kinord took our minibus along a gently winding road that cuts through the birches. The monochrome bark was shot with flashes of acid yellow and grey-green lichen. Bracket fungi stuck out at right angles like shoulder pads. After a mile or so we reached the car park for the nature reserve. The main attraction of Muir of Dinnet is not the lochs with their abundance of overwintering wildfowl and resident otters, the rich aquatic plant life, rare mosses, vibrant damselflies and dragonflies, adders, lizards, raised bogs, or the fascinating archaeology. The star of the show is the Burn O' Vat – a glacial meltwater-formed cauldron.

The Vat Burn was tracked by a waymarked path through the woods. Its peaty water had a remarkable clarity as it washed over a bed of fine gravel and sands. We followed the burn further upstream until we reached a jumble of rock and an apparent halt; the path ended but muddy footprints in gaps between boulders suggested that forward motion was possible.



Burn O'Vat, Deeside.

In order to enter the womb-like structure of the cauldron we had to line up in single file and follow Mr Rae – his well-felted brown and white Fair Isle jumper a guiding beacon. We clambered over angled slabs of pink and grey granite, then used flat stones to step through the trickle of the burn as it exited the Vat. I had to use my hands to make sure I didn't slip, feeling them damp and cold against the crystallised texture of the passage slabs of granite. Having squeezed through, we were all obviously amazed at what we stepped into – it was like being inside a fish bowl made of deep-red-pink rock, the sides closing in a concave arc above our heads to reveal daylight. The walls of the Vat were evenly worn – from a distance smooth – but up close the quartzite crystals protrude from the feldspar. The air smelled damp and earthy – lush with moss. Opposite the passageway of collapsed rock, a waterfall spilled from where the burn originally flowed over the top of where we stood. The prehistoric weight of erosion caused collapse, and a torrent of meltwater, boulders, and glacial till scoured out the deep cauldron below. A shallow pool of water barely the

height of the heel of my walking boots below us, the soaked gravel quietly moved with the weight of each step, reformed gently but definitely – like well-risen bread dough prodded with a practiced forefinger.

Granite. Pink, red – almost terracotta in the wet – not grey like the buildings and pavements of Aberdeen. Glaciation showed me that this apparently tough stone may be adamant but not invincible.

Red Jasper in granite at Easter Aquhorthies Recumbent Stone Circle.

Aberdeen tricked me into thinking that it had a cold heart of stone. Coming from a family rooted in the gregariousness of Glasgow and our recent years amongst Highland hospitality, the apparent meanness and cold-personality of Aberdeen was the thing I struggled with most growing up. I see now that it is not that people were unfriendly or miserable (on the whole), but that they were reserved and introverted. Like granite, the people of Aberdeen can sparkle if you look at them the right light. Our prehistoric ancestors here in the North East of Scotland used fragments of quartzite to scatter on and around the massive granite recumbent slab of their stone circles to reflect moonlight; give an illusion of light in the dark. There is nothing new in what I have seen.

Portsoy – the North Eastern edge of the Dalriadian Supergroup.

*

Thigh-deep in the cold salt-brine of the North Sea at Portsoy, my eyes are lured below the surface to stones that are washed over pale and opaque, baby-blue, with chalky white. I can't quite reach. I wonder if one of those blue plastic carrier bags has lodged into the sand, wrapped around some pebbles. Or it could be pottery – a Cornish jug broken into chunks, carried, and reshaped by the motion of the tides; by the friction of collision with tiny particles of sand – the remaining glaze catching in the August sun and drawing my attention. I manage to poke at it with my foot, it's not plastic. I try to gouge it out of the sand with my toes and thrust it towards the surface so I can catch it. My efforts are futile. I give in.

"Can you do me a favour?"
Ewan ducks down – taller, longer arms and wearing a wetsuit – he hands me a chunk of cloudy quartzite.

Of course it's quartzite. It is ubiquitous. It is the element in granite that determines how light or dark the mineralised feldspar appears – it gives it its mood, sets the tone. The illusion is stone reflecting sea reflecting sky. It's beautiful. I turn it over in my hand, hold it up to the azure sky, wash it through the North Sea. Put it in my pocket. Take it home.

She Town

Leela Soma

Jam, jute and journalism the modern Dundee

Mansions built by jute barons, the wealth of

The city, created by exploiting the women and children

Young as nine, worked as pickers cleaning dust under machines

Choked by ‘stour’ clogging eyes and mouths, killing

Them with bronchitis as the genteel life in the mansions

Continued. Men left to look after the bairns, women were

Cheaper to employ, the ear splitting din making some women deaf

Or dying of ‘Mill fever’ as Dundee grew with sales of jute sacks, aprons

Boot linings, roofing felts, tapestries, sail cloths, horse covers, tents

Versatile, strong, durable low cost, shipped in bales as raw fibre

from the shores of Bengal, exploitation in two continents, Jutepolis

remains now a museum, a painful and proud fragment of the past.

Village

Leela Soma

Lush green paddy fields edged with palm trees

villagers bent over soggy sun-baked fields

lunch was under the shade of a tree, *Kanji* with a chilli

dusk saw them, cooking over an open fire stove

pots of clay bubbling with simple fare that they could afford

a hut with no electricity, they sat in the light of the stars

the breath of their ancestors in the swaying palms

memories and history faded like rice paper

dissolved in the sheets of monsoon rains.

RANDOM ACCESS

Peter Barker

A slender thread has always led me back to two scenes from times and places now impossible to know but no less real for that.

First. There are three men waiting as I leave a little café with swing doors. I glance sideways and down at them over a low wall. They gesture to the one empty chair. A washed sky is reflected off the cobbles as far as the corner. The men call to me and stamp their feet. A cat wandering by their table skips up the steps and into the café through a window curtain. The air is chill though a pinkish sun is rising and the day will be warm. The men speak to me. I see their mouths moving but ……. already the sound is fading.

Second. A vignette – darkened at the corners but clearer in the centre, like all memory – of sleeping bodies dressed in military grey and green, sprawled across the slatted wooden benches of a train somewhere in Europe long ago. Silence apart from the soft clank of kit and stirred limbs. Outside, darkness and the slow grind of wheel on rail. Picking my way down the centre of the carriage I approach a closed door. Varnished wood with a light stain. My fingers close round the metal of the handle…… End of reel. What was beyond the door, I do not know.

These two scenes, which have been with me ever since memory formed, seem themselves to be connected; not necessarily in time and place but more like a double exposure. Sometimes they may be one scene and other times they are clearly two superimposed one on the other.

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A few years ago, in Suffolk, I noticed on an OS map a strip of coastline named Shingle Street. Curious, I took a day to cycle out and have a look. There was something special from the first turn of my wheels; a lowering sky followed by torrential rain, then bright

sunlight and the temperature rising. The hum of tyre on road and the swish as I steered through the steaming puddles. You get a rhythm going: hum swish, hum swish.

Shingle Street was deserted – a curving pebble strand joining the horizon in a crescent stretching left and right. Behind me, a small terrace of houses and a voice floating out of one of them; a telephone call in which the words were indistinguishable, carried on a light breeze to the sea's edge where they dissolved into the suck and blow of the foam. A figure appeared, in a heavy overcoat despite the heat. He trudged along the beach by the horizon, back and forth, back and forth, head down as though looking for something on the pebbles.

Other than that, just this blissful mix of sky, sun, horizon, sea, and shingle – each its own form and emptiness. It was, in that very curious phrase, a moment to die for.

Some months later, I was reading, re-reading in fact, WG Sebald's *The Rings of Saturn.* It is an account of a walking holiday round Suffolk and I had completely forgotten, or so I tell myself, that the narrator visits this same coastal strip, Shingle Street. He recounts rumours of wartime biological weapon experiments there and describes it as "just one wretched row of humble houses and cottages where I have never encountered a single human being…."

****

I was walking in Northumberland last year when I sat down at a pleasant though fairly random spot for a moment's rest. I leant against a gate, crunching on an apple and thinking about nothing in particular. Slowly, a hawthorn tree ahead of me on a slope up to my left, impressed itself on my retina.

The hawthorn is a remarkable little tree: scrawny, resilient, self-sufficient, it seems to thrive on even the thinnest of soils. This one, perched alone on its rocky slope, all sap and sinew, seemed to be growing out of sheer force of will. My passing presence in its space was clearly of no consequence to it yet I felt a companionable silence.

As I gazed at it, some sort of trembling meniscus in my vision seemed to give way and recognition brimmed over briefly. For many years I've tried to train myself to focus on such moments and to let them grow. I've found that the simple act of setting a camera's controls, of framing the shot and then releasing the shutter seems somehow to help fix the impression in my consciousness just as later, in the darkroom, the image will be fixed on the negative ready for printing.

I finished my apple and moved on though the glow of enchantment stayed with me for several miles.

****

These four memories – the café, the troop train, the beach and the Northumberland hillside all seem to confirm an invisible connection between time and place. Just as a moment is fleeting so is a place. All we know is that occasionally consciousness may expand slightly, the flow of impressions slows and we look round in wonder. Then the shutter flashes down, events reassert themselves and direct contact is gone.

Peter Barker, *The Hawthorn Tree*

Loriana Pauli, *7 Beeches*

The Seven Beeches

Loriana Pauli

They stand together
along the river bank,
high and strong;
smooth pale grey bark,
green moss,
gnarled wide spreading branches,
reaching towards passing clouds.

They hold stories.
How many hundreds of years
of rain, hail, snow,
mild and maybe scorching summer days,
of thunder storms,
autumn colours,
and the song of a blackcap,
a willow warbler in Spring.

The raven, the blackbird,
the robin. the buzzard, the owl
know them well,
how many clutches raised.
At their feet a squirrel, pine martin, mouse,
sometimes an otter.

I used to visit
that still, soul nourishing group of old cailleachs
while the river chatted gently or roared by,
imagining people,
maybe a young couple holding hands
or a rider on his horse touched by the lower branches,
children playing in the meadow,
dogs chasing rabbits, a hare.

Now they live in my memory
as I am not meant to travel.
I am grateful for their presence
in whatever is the part of me
loving them.

Causeway

Mark Bicton

I'll cross the water on foot — my aim towards the holy island, not to reach it. For this moment, though, I wait. At my back, the bus door hisses shut, the engine shakes to life again, wheels lurch. The bus moves past me, then ahead and — in less time than it takes the crows it's disturbed from the roadside to circle the trees at my left and settle noisily again — it reaches the causeway. My breath is still, holding back the world, an interval empty of memories of you. Or so I try to trick myself, knowing full well how each parting lays bare the loss, the ebb simply powering the flood that's your return.

***

It was other buses we shared, of course. Other times.

Glimpsing the stone circle through gaps in high hedges that summer day, while you read to me from your phone about the haunted pub we'd stay the night, making half of it up. I reached across the seat to grab the screen, knocking the open sketchbook from your lap, and reeled, gut-punched, at the thought of the floor's dirt on your creations. Perfect lines.

Laughing on the top deck as we escaped an autumn-rainstormed village. I blessed the drenched congregation of sheep penned on the green below us, my fingers raised to each in solemn but rapid ceremony before we sped away.

The night ride back from the airport, swapping photos of each other beside a foreign city waterside — only now spotting the grey cat we'd both missed on the wall behind your shoulder.

Laughter like that returns, an unexpected visitor, but thin now and pale.

***

The bus reaches the far side, skirts the low dunes along the island's shore, turns inland and disappears.

I was alone my first time here too. But then the sense of all this opening up — the sea beckoning left and right, the island lying low and wide ahead, and the slow, tidal channel before me — it was fresh. A promise. And later, in our early days together, I could insist my solo discoveries had always been meant for you too; waiting, ready in my pack for when you'd show up. When you did, I took them out and we shared this view.

The twin markers on sandbanks to the south, guard and guide to the seaway.

The line of tall pilgrim poles marching away, from mainland to island.

The causeway stretching between tides, between lands.

And out there, at the causeway's centre, the tiny wooden refuge hut moored on high legs, midpoint of this sometimes road through sometimes sea. Sanctuary for those ignorant of this world's tides. An ark on stilts, I announced (that way I loved you to mock), and this whole land its twice-daily Ararat. How, if the animals went in two by two here it would have to be just one pair at a time, then 'Back out, make way for the next couple. Dragons, stand in line back there!'

'Listen to Noah, cap'n of the timeshare lifeboat!' you laughed. 'But such an intimate rescue from the world could make up for it being so brief, no?'

The window light in your eyes as you turned towards me on the bed was the reflection of these future shores we imagined together, your irises my secret navigation.

***

The crows call again from the trees at my back. Released, I descend the road to the fading sea, approaching each margin: shrub, scree, sun-bleached plastic ejecta. When the overwhelming sea comes up at last — in another generation's day — it will drown all lines, the raw world seeping back in: its otherness pulling further into us the more we try to push away.

The sky is wide and free of clouds, except those fresh from the latest cargoes of wingless migrants traversing atmospheres, contrails stretching back in space and time from ends we cannot know.

***

That time under the oak. A whole season in one day and night we lay beneath its canopy, treasuring the bloom through dew, heat and rain, the slow easing of light into dark, to wake cold and moonlit under a powdering of pollen. You told me then you wanted to paint the world a new ceiling. To make it home again and redraw the meanings we'd all forgotten.

'A big Sistine Chapel affair!' you said. 'But no walls to hold it up. No frantic need to put our own face up there, looking down at ourselves.' I tried to put your vision into words, making do until you had your chance with paint and light. I laughed as I failed, and you smiled as I took failure for my win.

***

Waiting here at the edge, tidal perspectives shift back and further back, fracturing on long rills of polished sand. Wind washes the causeway, and your long breath rises again in my ear, weaving into the withdrawing surf. Somewhere, far out, the faint motor of a boat tumbles in bursts as waves surge and fall. The raw seal-bark of it draws my sight across the water, seeking. Salt fluxes in my nostrils.

'Look,' you'd say here now — never, now — your hand turning my face to follow yours. 'The moon's breaking from the sea! When the sun's down, she'll be high over the refuge.' But in your absence, this horizon moon just points out how the wind buffeting the distant island’s margins has lifted a veil to dance across her face: earthly grit, made of the same stuff as a moon but born to wear itself to nothing and blow away.

Suddenly apprehensive at the world grinding down — nothing to hold on to — I cross the boundary at last to tread road where water was an hour before and, hours ahead, will be again. Gulls tumble and pick at seaweed littering the wet ribbon of causeway. Repeating skies assault my eyes: first, the high unbroken plate of polished blue balancing above me; then as mid-distance silver-black beats on the parted sea; and last in the skidding, burnt bronze glare off slick sands at my feet. Ahead, gathering all its skies about it, joined to me by its causeway: the island.

I walk.

The pilgrim poles stretch away at my right, islandwards. Vanishingly thin, they pierce the glistening sands at haphazard angles, marking out space-time for wayfarers seeking horizons: theirs, the world's, this life's. The island ahead is no holier than the land at my back but the temporary, uncertain path between teaches a humility of sorts. Many have passed this way before, many will follow; only *this* me is *this* here for *this* now; always, the moment is the moving point on endless germ-lines across whatever lands we

walk. Beings bordered by nothingness, we pass a flame back from hand to hand. How often I shouted at the dark — the shadows of the xray, the points scattered on the graphs, the unforgiving void beyond.

'Our biology filters the world,' you reminded me, somewhere between trains. 'It has to, to make us even possible. We're living somewhere we cannot truly see, so we can't know everything you want it to tell us. Chasing what we can't seize but can't let go of, we're caught. Like a dog chasing its tail.'

***

And so, walking on wet tarmac across the sand-sea, even in motion I'm suspended. Moving from one thought towards the next; one slow sediment of land towards the next; one beat of the world's watery rhythm towards the next. Inbetweened. Half-something, half-nothing, forever weightless in my orbit of a memory of a truth of a fiction of you: always ahead, the turning horizon I fall towards.

And there, on this line that will be searoadsearoadsea, the wooden refuge approaches at my own slow pace. I climbed its steps before knowing this I-with-you without you, and will climb again now, to look out and lie down.

'There's a point to this,' you said. 'Our patterns make stories; our stories make us tell them. So make new patterns, before the old ones take you under.' Like yours? Your eyes no longer had that soft light of tomorrow when you spoke.

Where *are* you, now?

***

It's here. It stands above me, white, wind-wet, on searoad, stilts and steps — the hut.

Suspended, I look up.

climb to this refuge between times
look out through windows scarred by air, sand and sea

feel the faded petals of a flower that's been offered to the sill in a plastic bottle,

a flower drinking just the shrunken skin of water sprung half a thousand miles away,

water sunk how many thousand years ago.

Something large but quick breaks the surface of the sea to the north, then another, and they disappear again. South, gulls walk sandbanks under the sun or skirl and tumble above, calling to the sky.

I lay down along the hut's confines, west to east, end to end, point to point and, stretched between worlds, close my eyes. The refuge compasses the turning world upon this point — its pulsing seas, fixing earth and spinning skies. Calling on them to find me here, I wait, and —

Where *are* you, now?

***

Hours.

The final bus rattles back across the causeway, the last cars rush to beat the waters edging in beneath their wheels. Windows open wide to a faint twilight advancing at their backs, children in back seats shriek, pulling briny air deep into their lungs in exhilaration at the race for land, for home. The sun passes over, warming distant hills as it slips along but the hut is cool above my closed eyes. Gulls squabble, scraping at the thin roof. Perhaps they hear my heart keeping time, a fathom beneath the dry itching of their beaks.

Breathe. Wait. Breathe the fading light. Cold breaches all walls.

The lapping that was the wash of waves on rock, then on road, then wood, is now an endless push of waves on themselves. Is it more than water welling and pulling beneath the floor? Sea creatures between the wooden stilts, pushing under the steps?

Hours.

The sea breathes between the wooden boards that press, hard, under my heels, backside, shoulders. Sea-breaths, in-out, in-out, at hairs on neck and scalp. A scent of washed salt threads and seals wet films at nostrils and lips.

My tongue's as heavy as the darkness on my eyelids. I can hear those pilgrim poles I last saw reaching down to earth the sky, now pull and guide the sea upwards.

I open my eyes and the moon has fallen further up the stars and, balanced above the hut, pours slanted light down through the warped glass, rainbowing like spectral oil on slowly drifting water. And, moving on, the moon wants to pull inside me, subtle fingers feeling their way to untie flesh.

Did, will, all the pilgrims past and future, pause at their crossing's midpoint? Sense the turning of the world and waters about them and wait a while for the trickling up, the rushing in. Ready at last for re-creation? Is that them I hear, prayers pulsing across the waves as, chest-deep then deeper, they mark my high-water with their return from times behind, times ahead? Prayers, or stories? An intimate rescue, or the final, overturning wave?

'Pulling apart, letting go – it's not something you *can* make sense of!' Your face showed lengthening lines of pain; again your exasperation at my exasperation again, my refusal of an end. 'It takes sense with it too.'

You were moving us further than two could go. Untethered, I could say nothing.

'You might see that, later,' you insisted. 'After. If you give yourself the chance and let *this* flow out.'

***

On the pilgrim's path home, while the moon rolls on down the slope of the sky, pulling oceans as she goes, the watersound here has a deeper wash now than I've heard before. I am far from the walls of land.

My hands rest, palms down. Ridge-and-furrow fingertips slip deeper into the wood's grain and groove, molecule to molecule. It was a long way to come, to look, to find — this? The touch of matter only to itself, loosening its bonds with something other?

And, at last — as you said — salt wells and flows, washes and falls.

Hours.

***

Where *are* you, now?

Me, now?

I'm here, I … feel dust falling on my face; taste saltwater from my eyes, the coming age of crystals at the corners of my mouth; hear a subtle weight settle in my ears; smell ancient clues — of moon, earth, life.

I'm here. My eyelids flick open, stirring the air, to suck in a quick, massive blackness, and let it back out as a slow, final, failing moonlight slants back through the very edge of world and window to fall on the door of the refuge beyond my feet. The walls at my

sides are no walls at all now, but deep-grey fields of shadow framing further fields of black, of stars. The earth-dark wooden ceiling is just a — what — a glow? There, on the rough surface, traces of dots and lines, burning. Almost memories of light. Are my eyes making this, or —

Someone's worked the ceiling with webs of pale paint, luminous and flickering in the starlight-silver of the waves outside: here, inside, are more stars, adrift on wood and the upcast waterlight. Do they point? To what? To where?

My mind fails, then grasps and tracks the patterns I make these stars make. Paths emerge, distant as the ends of space. I remember at once the dancing, drifting green specks of a childhood fever-vision I told you of: a five-year old's fear and fascination at the shape-shifting drift of glowing points back and forth across the midnight ceiling above my parent's bed, where I lay half-awake and breathless, buttressed between their deep, dreaming tides. Another realm peeking through.

The otherness of home returns, refreshed; the filtered universe now made again into map-meanings as, above me, painted stars and meteors trail a yellow-green constellation — paired, winged serpents. Curving in on each other, they chase tails across the new roof of the world, circling a summer oak in its skirts of pollen. Two by two, sharing time for this time, lifting the place and thought of refuge from the cell of its narrow bounds.

Did you — ?

***

So now, the flood tide complete and held at its turn, you

break across the waves that lie all about this ark,

advance up the steps from the deep,

make the wooden threshold,

push further in.

And, as darkness begins to leach again from my windows on the world, the sound of something far off — perhaps a seal somewhere near the island — reminds me of a boat, its motor working hard against the falling tide to reach a shore.

Johann Booyens, *Shape of Things*, monotype

Iapetus Dream

Val Fellows

Drop
slide
drip
into darkness
almost an age of myth
soaking
sinking
seeping through layers
into the damp of peat
filtered like dream images
before the hard of stone
spirals of energy fossilize
fish eyes ever open
scales of mica flash unseen
the luminescence of pearls
entombed in perfect stonewaves

jellyfish
starfish
glide invisibly, ghostly
into realms of future imaginings
as water dissolves itself out of existence
silently
slowly
imperceptibly, earth shifts
moons fade
ice flows
bubbles of air trapped
suspended
somewhere in geological time
disappeared from view; an ocean lost -
and therefore sought.

The Iapetus ocean used to separate England from Scotland – in an earlier age.

The Sound of Water That's All

Mark Saunders

1
The bus slides through the mountains
holding them at bay.
I look at them through the windows

2
A litany of small memories
to make a mountainous pile

3
Now you've climbed them all,
she asked, what's left?

4
Many narratives
not a single story

5
Should I write these stories
on stones

6
Map -- check
Compass -- check
Whistle -- check
Headtorch -- check
Midge hat -- check

7
Pylons marching
pylons fizzing
in the mist

8
The landowner of Letterewe
tried to prevent me going on
to the two Munros. 'You'll scare the deer.
But I can't stop you, can I?' he shrugged
and nodded to his two gillies
to continue down the path

A bloodied stag
was tied to the front horse

9
The photo on top of A'Mhaighdean
stayed for years on my parents' wall,
maybe because I looked utterly content

10
Kept awake all night in the bothy
by a large rat sniffing around the food
bag I had tied to the ceiling.
Met a German couple the day before
who might be heading there,
so I wrote on a piece of paper
'Welcome to the Rathaus'

11
On hands and knees
ducking under the gale
crawling to Cairngorm cairn

12
Tongue hanging out.
These mountains are dry
not the slightest trickle.
Back in the glen
I drink a river

13
Sitting by a loch
picking up three stones
throwing them in the air
dropping them
throwing them in the air
dropping them
throwing them in the air
learning to juggle

14
Ping! went the muscle
in my left calf as I crossed
an innocuous wooden bridge
in the Fannaichs

15
Ping! went the tendon
in my left leg as I attempted
the Glenshee moguls

16
Wrapped in solitude
like a second skin
protecting me
from loneliness

17
Don’t you get lonely?
I once asked a shepherd.
No, he said, there are always
people in my head

18
A whole skeleton
of a deer, under the cusp
of a ridge, picked clean
by birds and weather

19
Pulled off the skull and antlers
and fastened it to my backpack.
A stag roared across the glen
at this half man half deer
parading in his territory

20
The sound of water
that’s all

just water
that’s enough

21
You think your way up a mountain,
a route of thoughts,
one leading to another

until opening out
to a conclusion

Deirdre (The Homecoming)

James Fenton

And you were heading for home at last, a homecoming you had put off for so many years, years in which you had been fighting other people's battles, helping them save a forest here, a coral atoll there, an ancient prairie over there… the list was endless, for there were always people wanting to tear up the planet, to impoverish its life, oft times for but small commercial gain; you had been focused on this work, it had been your whole life, consuming you with unbridled passion, a passion you had passed on to others, creating an NGO to channel all your energies into effective campaigning; your timing had been right too for, although in the early years you had seemed like a lone voice crying in the wilderness (for the wilderness!), now everyone was listening, or at least paying lip service, and there would soon come a time, you hoped, when your successes might outweigh your failures, the tide was turning and politicians were saying the right things, if not yet actually changing their ways.

But you were beginning to feel tired, your energy depleted by endless repetition over the years of the same arguments again and again to those unwilling to listen, or incapable of listening, and frustrated by people's selfish attendance to their own needs, unable to raise their heads to see the glories of the planet they were intent on destroying, destroying in ignorance (you hoped) rather than with malign intent, or perhaps just through carelessness or apathy; you were feared that your passion was waning, that, just when success was visible on the horizon, your appetite for battle was fading, that each new case was no longer a challenge to relish but a weary duty; and you had no-one with whom to share yourself, intimately that is; you never had, embracing a commitment to 'the cause' at the expense of embracing a real human being.

Always at the back of your mind rested the words of your father, a father who was always going on about 'the hame country', who had reminisced about its hills, its lochs, its glens, 'God's Own Country' he had called it; he was forever recounting its beauty, the glories of a sunset over an island-studded sea, the long, snake-like lochs that had no end, the mountains not too big and over-bearing like the Rockies, but smaller and more homely, albeit wild in the depths of a snow-blasted blizzard, the wide-open, windswept moors where there was room to breathe and space to live, an golden eagle soaring above, an antlered stag outlined against a clear horizon, the coming home to a heart-warming peat fire after a day's work during the short winter's day; and the music, there was always music to bring folk together; not the harsh music of modern times, he would say, but music in keeping with the people and the place; and you would ask your father why he ever took his family away from such an earthly paradise (you were barely five years old when you all left), "times were hard, aye, times were hard" were all you got in reply, "and I'll go back one day" – but he never did.

And you had always meant to visit, but the years had passed and you were too engrossed in Saving the Planet to give time to yourself; but now, when you needed to break loose, the words of your father were increasingly coming back to you, perhaps the time was right to see for yourself 'the hame country'…

As you took your seat on the plane you could not help but notice the occupant of the seat next to yours, she smiled at you as you squeezed past to gain your own, and at first you were too shy to talk to her or even to turn your head round to look at her; but it

was she who said the first words “Have I not seen you recently, on television, the campaign to stop drilling in the Arctic Wildlife Refuge?”, and you had to reply in the affirmative, although this campaign had been one of your (or rather ‘our’) failures – at least so far, because there were still avenues to be tried, avenues you had given to others to travel down leaving you to make your escape; and once conversation had been opened, you found that it flowed freely, you found her easy to talk to, she listened well, and you found yourself telling her about your work and then about yourself, and you surprised yourself by telling her your hopes and fears and why you were escaping to ‘the hame country’; and she in turn opened-up about herself, she was a singer, a folk-singer, ‘well-kent’ at home and abroad she said (although her name was not familiar to you), returning after a long and tiring series of concerts in the States and Canada, and looking forward to relaxing back at home, on the Isle of Skye she said, where she could be herself and not be parading herself to her fans; and she was surprised you had never before returned to your country of origin, considering its great beauty, the glories of a sunset over an island-studded sea, the long, snake-like lochs that had no end, the mountains not too big and over-bearing, albeit wild in the depths of a snow-blasted blizzard, the wide-open, windswept moors where there was room to breathe and space to live, an golden eagle soaring above, an antlered stag outlined against a clear horizon; surprised in particular as you gave her the impression that the environment was important to you.

The Black Cuillin

And there appeared to be an inevitability about it all, as if the fates, in the original placement of her seat next to yours, had decreed that you and Deirdre should be brought together, that the plane flight was but the start of a much longer journey for you both, and you had accepted her invitation to Skye, her desire to show off her country to you; and you had cancelled your hotel and travelled north with her instead, having first been taken aback by the crowds greeting her on her arrival at the airport, and not failing to notice the puzzled glances of many at yourself; the next day you would see pictures in the papers (Read all about it!), pictures of you both under the caption “Is this the new man in Deirdre’s MacKinnon’s life?”, a question you thought unfair as you had known her less than a day (but how were they to know?).

And you still could not believe it, here you were sitting beside a beautiful woman, her long red hair glowing in the sunlight, her occasional glances to you enhanced by her smile as she concentrated on both the driving and the extolling of the scenery; at first you found it hard to listen, finding the beauties of the driver overwhelmed the beauties of the countryside, but as the journey north wore on you eventually managed to drag your eyes round to the windows and began to notice the land you were passing through; at first you saw it through the eyes of your father, the romantic view of an unspoilt land unsullied by modern intrusions, but when seen through your own eyes you began to notice a mismatch between what you were expecting and what was there; the land was smaller and more cramped than you were expecting, and you noticed little regard for its beauty, with lines of pylons traversing the landscape, a plethora of bulldozed tracks disappearing up into the hills, lakes converted to reservoirs with dams and ugly draw-down zones, miles and miles of fences

and plantations, and even, in some places great scour-lines of forestry ploughing, ripping through everything.

And you were surprised at Deirdre's surprise when you started to tell her that this was no longer the undefiled countryside of your dreams, that the landscape she was extolling was no longer untramelled but beset with the infrastructure of the modern world, the naturalness and wildness becoming cornered to a last retreat; and at first she argued with you, defending her own land against outsiders, but you were persistent in pointing out what was hidden in plain sight: the scar of new track ascending the hill slope, a ploughed area of hill surrounded by a high fence, older plantations of Sitka spruce far away from their native land, a new phone mast placed for all to see… "Could she," you asked, "could she point out any place we can see that in America would be called 'wilderness' – wild land left to itself?"; and she looked, and she looked, but it was only when we reached her native island and neared the mountains you heard were called 'The Cuillin', that she said "There you are!"; and she was right, these hills were in keeping with your father's imagination – but it was too little too late, your image had already been shattered.

And you asked why the people were so unconcerned about what was happening to their own land, how could she be so blind to the reality?; and she had no immediate answer, saying things just happened and you accepted them, and that there was a history I needed to understand: it was a poor country and people needed jobs, and people had been badly treated in the past and now resented outsiders coming in and telling them how to look after the land; but you pointed out that the same was happening

Loch Cluanie and dam

everywhere across the world, nature was in full retreat; and when you asked her if she approved of oil drilling in a wildlife reserve, she emphatically said no! "Then why," you asked, "do you accept similar development amongst Scotland's lochs, hills and glens?", to which she had no answer…

As is of course well-known, you never left Skye and over time you realised that there were the same environmental battles to be fought in the 'hame country' as in the rest of the world, and because no-one else was doing it, you put your campaigning skills to use in order to protect what was left of the 'old Scotland of the imagination', even though it was too late to save many places; and your energy was rekindled by having Deirdre at your side, and you could not have achieved what you have achieved without her now well-known collection 'Songs of the Highlands' achieving worldwide acclaim, with its strong environmental message; and she introduced you to a whole new world of music, music with roots embedded in the Scottish soil; and you felt that the one song which encapsulated your new life was Runrig's 'Going Home': "Across the moorlands, past the mountains, O'er the rivers, beside the new streams, Something tells me that I'm going home"; and you have come home.

Canal Days

Mark Sheridan

1.
Whirring farthing flits among brambles
ivy filled tree boles and roots
hedging the undergrowth
foraging crevice and bobbing bark.

Then arrow fast across the canal
to a rare higher branch and song
rippling cascading arpeggiating
a flute player's cadenza.

Every day is a wren day.

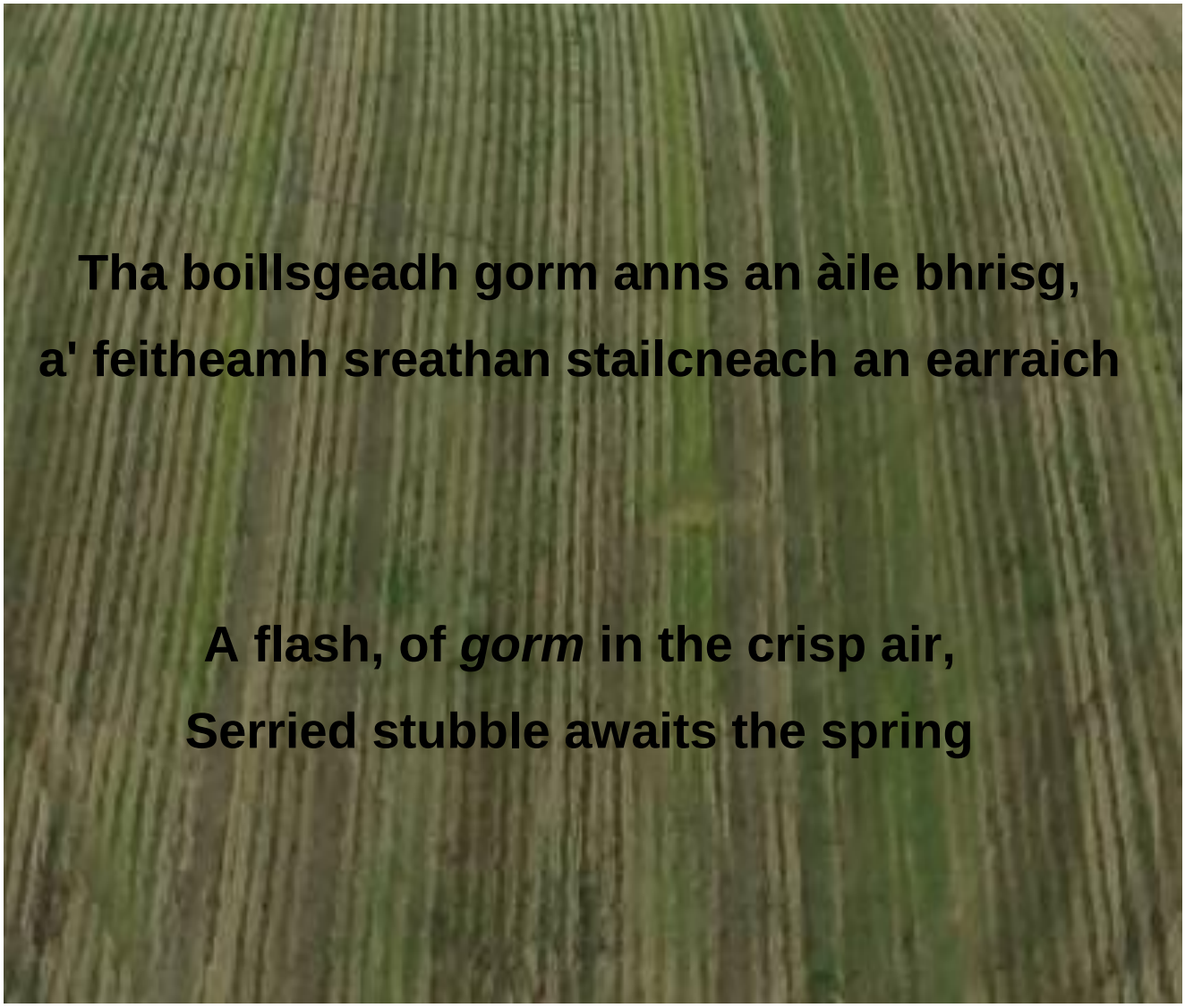
2.
The deep rope-grooved weals
on weathered sandstone blocks
reveal long-gone barge ponies' strain
between Ratho quarries
and auld reekie new town
some days in that tree-lined corridor
of hanging branches and leaves
of timelessness and endless space
I can hear the clash of hooves
and the snort of the beasts
as they drag laden barges
out and back with provisions
and crates of beer for the village.

3.
A patch of undergrowth
crowded by trees and shrubs
wild grasses brambled
by a mass of twigs and branches
into a maze of overlapping
entwined limbs and shoots
a kaleidoscope of textures
dark hues and shadows
a secret Ariadne's thread
an entrance to a hidden place
a wilderness two metres square
two hundred years deep
drawing me in.

Mark Sheridan, *Canal Days*

Stailcneach - Beside Union Canal

Tadhg Mac DhuibhShìthe (Tim Duffy)



Note: In Scottish Gaelic gorm can infer the blue/green of a hoped for Kingfisher.

Roads

Stuart Paterson

It's the 500 to Minigaff this time,
the latest in a numbered jumble
on the fronts of buses travelling notional
roads of Galloway, the 372, 521,
213 & 75 all joining otherwise
disconnected dots of where I'll be.

I'm like a map that plots itself
along the songlines, timelines, tidelines
of a history never written, only whispered
by an engine, in a village bar snug
late at night when there are only locals
to rely on for the truths I hope are true.
Old misted eyes convince me that
their stories aren't speckled with dementia,
being skint or drinkers' mischief.

Tomorrow I will take the 42
to Babel. It lies just past Leswalt,
has beach bars with bamboo seats,
a tartan baize pool table, cocktails made
& shaken under blazing disco lights,
wild poetry nights, a small but well
looked after shrine to Calvin Harris
in behind the bogs. How do I know?
The living ghost of Bobby Dalrymple
in the Central Bar told me so.

Such majesty, such uncontested splendour
to look forward to, costing nothing more
than not being crushed by a malfunctioning
bus door & some loose change from a tenner.

372

Stuart Paterson

Another day another bus,
the trusty 372 this time,
same route, same known roads,
same passengers with different banter.

A trim man blethers with the driver
right by the notice that warns us
'No passengers forward of this point'.
I'm not sure where or what the point is,
these are not rules acknowledged by
hardened users of the rural bus.

Trim man & the driver yap of things
such as regulars & drivers yap about -
who's on the morning run tomorrow,
who's maybe dead, old work places,
how you can't get good butchers nowadays,
the price of fags. I ring the bell,
say cheerio & hoist my shopping bags
& I off out into a world less sure
but gladly more predictable as well.

Swan Wharf–Battersea Bridge–World's End

Sarah Tremlett

to George (b: 1830) lighterman at Swan Wharf, Battersea, and Martha his daughter (my great granny) World's End

Here I stand above water
between where gran was born to your youngest Martha, at Worlds End – 1892
and Europa Cottages, Swan Wharf –hard on the Battersea bank
in the lee and light of St Mary's pepper pot spire
where 'them all got christened'
yours and Elizabeth's kin [coincidence my girls are Georgie and Elizabeth]
for generations lightermen.

This she-bridge mother, the rat-a-tat-tat heart strings
wooden then iron and granite umbilical cord,
coddling a sharp bend in the river,
fetching up knocks and damage from bad navigators.

But not you. You understood the dangerous currents. Trained for seven years.
Driving the 75-foot, flat-bottomed barge with 20-foot sweeps, carrying 50 tonnes,
no locomotion,
slipping through fog by smell, sensing where ships are shaping for,
eddies and crosswinds, free surfing the rise and fall, flood and ebb
maybe seven metres twice a day, light as a fibreglass canoe.

Never did you hit a pier, stern nor bow
'… never a warnin', boomin' 'orn by the coal fire in fog or dusk
nor was you the prey of scavengin' mudlarkin' nippers
nor them Europa locals beery jeerin'.
No, you was respected.' River in your estuarine blood.

And this is the place where old Greaves' boat builders
would've laid the last elm plank on your lighter
and Walter or Harry rowed Whistler back and forth
his keen painter's eye on the realist image and then the blurry sublime, and the bargemen –
you silhouetted at dusk and the twinkling lights, cold collar up it was
yet, from another point of view a tone poem of the soul,
he saw Japanese *Nocturne: Blue and Gold*.

He saw you like Van Gogh's sower, he didn't know you knew
the complex equilibrium of slack water,
neurotransmitting a hobnail tree between the moon and the sun,
wind and tide, withstandin' the swell
never droppin' in the drink
not like John Blunder Buskins, Stan Smiler Franks, Ray Sunshine Parker.

‘An’ mind you, good to your wife – a good catch at the lightermen’s dances.
Could make money if luck were right. And ‘e could dance n’ all.
Must be that sense of rhythm
of rockin’ with the moon and tide’ (he would laugh).
‘A natty dresser. Attention to detail, to some pride.’

Right here, Martha’s late, hat blowing
pushes my gran faster and faster,
clank clank mud-spattered clogs, the clattering of horse-drawn carrriages.
The evening sweats its smog and smells. Finger up to the wind,
he can make it home. ‘Can set the time by ‘im.’

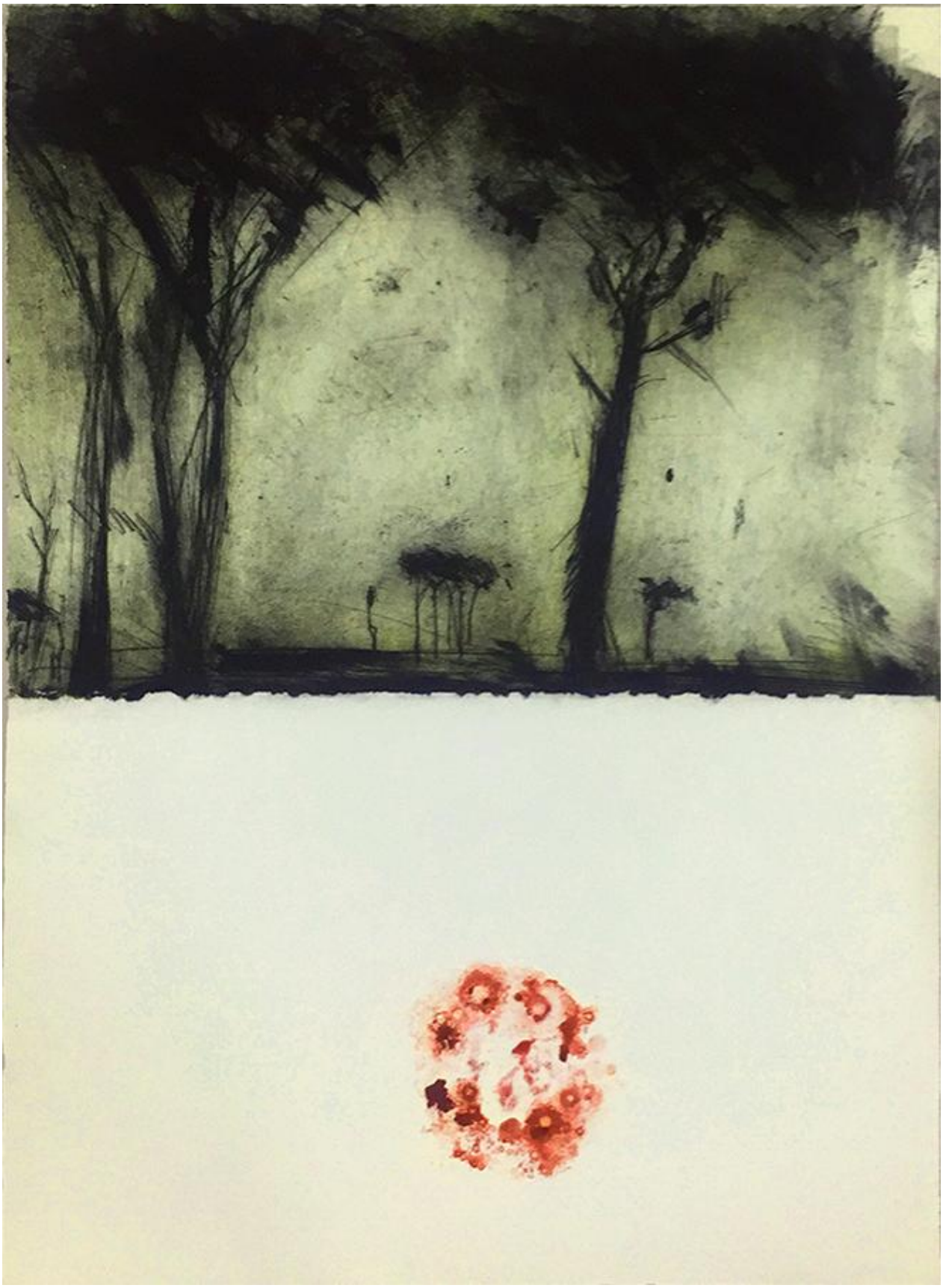
George is coming back. ‘held over down Rotherhithe
by the Force 11, waitin’ for the boat to come in.’
And it did come. Money and gifts for Alice, my gran.
Martha hears his stories. ‘Thousands of ‘em buzzin’ down London’s larder
water beetles jetty to creek,
rat-a-tat-tat gunfire shoutin’, no time to be wastin’
makin’ fast, haul it! Shift the pull and swell down a tunnel of ships,
The Old Windlass, Clarion, Java, Ceylon, strange places
a storm in the Pacific, dangerous riggin’ torn sails; steam; engines. Bodies.’

She stops for a minute. Down in the river a lighter silently slides into view. Chink of orange in the west through a turquoise veil. Somewhere fireworks. Against her breast she feels a silver locket, a bit dented, seen better days. The locket given to me on my granny’s death (with no story). And this locket here I hold now; a fine decorative front but dented, the size of a thumb nail. Prized open, inside – a moon-faced child as clear as a bell, staring back – Alice, my granny. Forever cherished, in a ‘pushin’ out the boats’ pay day gift from George.

I sit on the slipway next to St Mary’s, but the cottages have gone to chic apartments
and behind a Richard Rogers’ mountain of glass.
An old notched tide marker befriends me, where you could have practiced throwing ropes.
But I sense something else. My mum gave to the Lifeboat Men
and we sang ‘For Those in Peril on the Sea’ at her funeral
and she couldn’t wouldn’t swim, was afraid of water.
Something else lies deep, or someone I haven’t found yet
adrift like a white-boned carapace.

The tide is out, twinkling lights, dusk darkening. The wharf beach collects; a silent heron reveals the picture: the obligatory single shoe; sweet wrappers; an old thorn branch covered in dried grasses from a Gloucestershire meadow; a strangely knife-shaped stone.
My daughter texts. The church prays.

I wander towards the bridge, to where Whistler saw a bargeman that night
and people above, a woman gazing down, with a pram maybe.
I hear my mother remark when I was sixteen ‘I don’t know where you get it from’.
An alien load I carried. Flailing as I left for London.
But now I see, she did know, just didn’t tell me.



Johann Booyens, *Stain*, monotype

Lost Roads

Elizabeth Rimmer

I am haunted by wet places, the lure
of rivers, reedbeds and green lands of ash
and willow. The drift of water, pooling
between the autumn stems and wind-frayed flags
of common sedge and reed, is like the course
of blood, of thought, deep in the mulch of me.
There is talk of lost roads, boardwalks
of planks and narrow handrails
hid deep beneath the quaking ground
with its stealth of buntings, stepping heron,
its shattered tops of bulrush, spilling
cottony seed for birds like new coins
at a wedding scramble. The hidden past,
with its myths of Romans and lost queens
of the Iron Age, threads its careful way
through thickets of imagined story, and I,
not immune to this casual appropriation,
imprint my own lost ancestors, finding
or inventing the feel of home here, roots
where there may be none, whole trees
growing into the open wind and sky.

Mapping the Birds

Elizabeth Rimmer

I map this road in birdsong,
ears guiding my eyes, marking
the vantage points and boundaries.

Oystercatchers own the westward field
near the tidal mudbanks, and skylarks
the east, nesting in the wheat and barley. Here's
the line of hawthorns, the yellowhammer trees
on the field margin and here ivy-tangled ash,
with willows and sapling alder, where the river
nears the road, tenements for wrens,
for thrush and robin, long-eared owls.

Past that, the sky belongs to swallows,
and further off, the jackdaw cliff casts
its long tree-clad shadow. The houses,
footpaths, level crossing with its hips
and honeysuckle, tangle of brambles,
are placed where I can find them,
near to, or further from the birds.

Home Oak

Leonie Charlton

You call it *home oak,* I call it *the fank oak*. Of course it makes no odds, no two or three syllables can come close; the tree is what it is, old and lovely, quite beyond language beside Loch Etive. Still we stretch for words. Still we guess the weight of a heart beat.

Small birds' wintersong spills onto the backs of cold hands. The oak tree is growing inside the old sheep fank like a soothe of symmetry in a landscape of bent and windtorn. A group of hinds and calves recedes up the hill and halts behind a wave of November rain. One coughs. Their slots are all around here, at the outer perimeter of the fank, beneath the deep stone walls, alongside the burn.

The oak shoulders and shelters, shelters and shoulders. It spreads a reach of branches that drips lichens' verdigris across a landscape of ochres, golds, coppers. It's a pulse of liverwort and mossy-warmth; of thriving and holding and divining; of bearings to future, present and past. As our toes numb, sporophytes hold on to rain drops and bark drips. A holly sapling shines in dark relief - untouched, utterly protected.

A blush of long-tailed tits lands lightly, is absorbed in the utmost branches, a belief of folded wing before moving on. Feathers catch a throw of syrupy last light. We lean against the trunk, lie down on raised roots. Looking up through lichen-wished branches we go high, bewitched by affinities. Our limbs, toes, fingers, grow colder still. Hearts throw sparks.

The place and its tree, the tree and its place, is a liminal home. An opening. A dwelling where all things rest upon, and thread through, everything. Red wren flicks in and out. We listen to the slowbeat of our bodies and the nearby waterrun under bog myrtle and molinia. Tiny ticks find wrists, crawl on cheeks. Stalwart. Determinedly seeking a home, and blood. One does handstands.

Now, three months on, snow lies thickly on Ben Starav. Still cold-toed, cold-fingered, we sculpt, engrave, hold onto words *home fank oak* because we want to, need to, keep imagining the handstand, the wing-beat, the mossy saturation of belonging.

Membership

The Scottish Centre for Geopoetics is a membership organisation which relies on members' subscriptions to fund its activities which are carried out by volunteers. Its purpose is to raise awareness of geopoetics as a crucial way to approach and creatively respond to the natural world of which we are part.

It is a network of individuals including visual artists, writers, musicians, ornithologists, geologists, botanists, teachers and lecturers who share a common interest in developing an understanding of geopoetics and applying it creatively in their lives. The Centre organises talks, discussions, events and field walks which are designed to extend members' knowledge and experience of geopoetics. As the main English language geopoetics centre, it has members in USA, Sweden, Poland, Ireland, Australia, Wales and England as well as throughout Scotland.

Further information is available from normanbissell@btinternet.com and at www.geopoetics.org.uk.

If you join or renew your annual membership you will receive:

- a free copy of *Grounding a World; Essays on the Work of Kenneth* White, ed. G Bowd, C Forsdick & N Bissell rrp £9.95.
- newsletters by e-mail.
- advance news of and discounts on books relating to geopoetics.
- advance news of Kenneth White and geopoetics events.
- invitations to all our meetings and field visits.
- the satisfaction of assisting the development of our geopoetics work and publications.
- encouragement to develop your own understanding of and creative response to geopoetics.

Please send this completed form with a cheque for £10 waged/£5 unwaged, payable to the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics, to David Francis, 214 Portobello High Street Edinburgh EH15 2AU. Or you can pay by standing order or bank transfer to the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics account no. 00694888 sort code 80-02-24.

Name ……

Address ……

…… Postcode ……

E-mail address ……

Contributors

Peter Barker after a spectacularly brief career in diplomacy and a regrettably longer one in the law, is now enjoying the sunlit uplands of retirement, camera and notebook in hand.' www.peterbarker.org .

Mark Bicton is interested in human relationships with the rest of the natural world, and in our creative responses to our changing landscapes, wildlife and environment. His stories explore dis/connects of culture, nature and our sense of place, past and future. His story *After Foxes* was published recently by Fairlight Books and he has also been published by A3 Press.

Norman Bissell is the Director of the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics and a co-editor of *Stravaig*. His novel *Barnhill* about George Orwell's last years and his poetry collection *Slate, Sea and Sky*, *A Journey from Glasgow to the Isle of Luing* are published in hardback and paperback by Luath Press. His essays, poems and reviews have appeared in magazines, newspapers and books over many years. He lives on the Isle of Luing in Argyll and is writing a creative non-fiction book about Geopoetics in Scotland. www.normanbissell.com

Johann Booyens is a Glasgow based printmaker. His work is concerned with the increasingly complex relationship between humans and our natural environment. Gregory Bateson mentioned that "human beings act in ways that are destructive to ecological systems because we do not see the inter-dependencies between natural systems in our own lives". He calls for a collective acceptance and value judgment of our natural environment and to show simplistic beauty of the land to inspire us to higher reasoning of collective responsibility, discourse and education to nurture that which house us.

Leonie Charlton lives in Argyll. She writes creative non-fiction, poetry and fiction. Her work has appeared widely in publications such as *The Blue Nib*, *Northwords Now* and *Envoi*. Her travel memoir *Marram* was published by Sandstone Press in March 2020. Leonie won the Cinnamon Press Poetry Pamphlet Award in 2020 and her pamphlet *Ten Minutes of Weather Away* was published in April 2021. Much of her writing is based on a sense of place and our relationship with other species and the natural world. www.leoniecharlton.co.uk.

Alison Cohen lives in Glasgow where she keeps bees and an allotment. Having grown up in Northumberland and spent most of her adult life in Glasgow, she is interested in the processes by which city-dwellers retain deep connections to the earth. Previously a psychotherapist, she now works at writing poems. She won the Hugh Miller Poetry Competition in 2020 and her work has been published in the Federation of Writers in Scotland anthology 2018 and an Extinction Rebellion collection *Rebel Voices* (forthcoming).

Dr Tim Duffy (Scottish Gaelic and pen name Tadhg Mac DhuibhShìthe) used to win poetry plaudits at school but now as he retires and works to become fluent in writing (and singing) Gaelic, he is inspired to write again occasionally by his life-long appreciation of the work of Kenneth White and by the meetings of the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics. Tim likes Kenneth White's occasional use of Celtic and other languages within his writings and wants to see more Geopoetic style work in both English and Gaelic published. His current writing style is based on very short Haiku/Zen based 'in the moment' inspiration from photographs – usually composed and taken by himself.

Val Fellows is an environmental artist and retired art therapist living on the Isle of Skye. Relationship to place is central to her artworks; which usually start with being drawn to a particular location, discovering its history/topography/vegetation e.g: finding an abandoned stone quarry held fossils from the Jurassic era, when it was part of the seabed. She filmed the sea, projected it over the quarry floor at night, so people could jump in virtual waves. Now her garden meets the sea, she harvests materials and ideas at low tide.

James Fenton is a botanist and ecologist brought up in Wester Ross. He has worked as a researcher on peat in the Antarctic, where things really are wild and untamed!, and thereafter he tutored ecology at a field centre in the Lake District, worked as an ecological consultant in Scotland, as an Ecologist for the National Trust for Scotland, worked on landscape policy for Scottish Natural Heritage, and been CEO of Falklands Conservation in the Falkland Islands.

Dr Ullrich Kockel is Professor Emeritus in the School of Social Sciences at Heriot-Watt University, a Visiting Professor of European Ethnology at Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Emeritus Professor of Ethnology, University of Ulster and former Editor-in-Chief, Anthropological Journal of European Cultures. His overarching research interest is sustainable local/regional development, especially the appraisal, planning and management of cultural resources, approached from an interdisciplinary perspective. In 2017 he was elected as a Council member of the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics and to the editorial group of *Stravaig*.

Elaine Morrison is based in Aberdeenshire. Elaine juggles work in education with family life and too many cats. She has degrees in environmental and social sciences and worked for twenty years in community development before taking time out to study for a Masters in Scottish Literature and Creative Writing, graduating in 2020. Her writing focuses on the inter-relationship between people and environment – water and rocks are an obsession. This is Elaine's first year of 'proper' writing and she's working on a narrative non-fiction book and flirting with an idea for a novel.

Joe Murray is a retired ecologist and environmental scientist and journalist with a PhD gained from his doctoral research with NHS Scotland. He is a former editor of West Coast Magazine and Taranis Books. He has many poems published including the short collection, Ruchazie Moon. An early member of Geopoetics, Joe produced the original Open World magazines and many of Alasdair Gray's books. Away from the literary arts for many years, Joe began writing again, little though it is, a few years ago.

James Murray-White is a writer and filmmaker; has been an environmental journalist in the Middle East, and was senior producer on a local TV Channel. He is currently making films that reveal the crucial elements of the natural world we often overlook: beavers (and the case for re-introduction), rooks (a huge rookery in Norfolk) and preparing for death. His documentary on the contemporary relevance of mystic artist William Blake will be screened later in the year. www.findingblake.org.uk.

Stuart Paterson is a Scottish poet and performer who lives in Galloway and writes in both Scots and English. The author of several collections, his poetry has been published and filmed worldwide. He was BBC Scotland's Poet in Residence from 2017 to 2018 and in 2020 he was publicly voted Scots Writer of the Year.'

Loriana Pauli was born in the sweet hills of Ticino in the South of Switzerland. She moved to Scotland in her sixties and felt as if she knew the Hebridean landscape deep in her soul. *'Nature teaches me to look with appreciating eyes, seeing its perfection and accepting to be surprised again and again. I don't own the English language yet, but feel the deep need to express what I see.'*

Elizabeth Rimmer is a poet, poetry editor for Red Squirrel Press and occasional translator. She has published three collections of poetry with Red Squirrel Press, *Wherever We Live Now*, in 2011, The Territory of Rain, in September 2015, and, *Haggards* (2018) She has also published a translation of the *Anglo-Saxon Charm of Nine Herbs* and published her recent collection, *The Well of the Moon*, dealing with questions about place, language, memory and community, in May 2021. www.burnedthumb.com @haggardherbs

Mark Saunders has submitted a poem from a recently published pamphlet, *the sound of water that's all just water that's enough* which is a hundred short poems about landscape and walking. For more details, contact marksaunders2015@hotmail.com .

Mark Sheridan is an expert adviser and writer in education and the creative and cultural industries in Scotland and Europe. As a freelance consultant he supports the development of music in public and private bodies advising local authorities, Universities and Colleges and the Sottish Government. Appointed Senior Lecturer in Music at Strathclyde University in 1990, he launched the Applied Music degree there in 1993. A former Director of the National Jazz institute he is a composer and performer creating 11 major works with leading musicians internationally. His work across genres includes classical, folk, jazz and rock idioms and he is Reader in Music and Creativity at the University of the Highlands and Islands. www.musicsheridan.com

Leela Soma is a former Principal Teacher of Modern Studies and a short story writer, novelist and the author of the poetry collection *Tartan & Tumeric*,. Her novels *Bombay Baby* and *Murder at the Mela* have been highly acclaimed. She is the Scriever of the Federation of Writers in Scotland and a founder member of Bearsden Writers who serves on the East Dunbartonshire Arts & Culture Committee. Writing is her passion and Scotland and India are her inspirations.

Cindy Stevens lives on the west coast of Barra. She has lived and worked in various parts of Europe and Africa and has published poetry and non-fiction.

Callum Sutherland is a research associate in the Geography Department at the University of Glasgow. Specialising in geographies of religion, spirituality, and politics, his current work explores emerging conceptions of Acid Communism - a term coined by the late cultural theorist, Mark Fisher - at the nexus between academia and activism. He recently published a book with three colleagues entitled *Geographies of Postsecularism: Re-evisioning Politics, Subjectivity and Ethics*. In his spare time he is a songwriter, often drawing inspiration from geopoetic themes, and an attender at a local Quaker meeting.

Sarah Tremlett MPhil, FRSA, SWIP is a poet, commissioned poetry film-maker, and theorist. She is co-director of Liberated Words Poetry Film events, a judge at festivals, and author of leading publication *The Poetics of Poetry Film* (Intellect Books and University of Chicago Press, April 2021). Her long-term family history, poetry and poetry film project – Tree – crosses centuries, and centres on the geopoetics of place. *Firewash* – another poem and poetry film from the project, was published in the Geopoetry 2020 conference publication *Earth Lines* (and online) this year. www.sarahtremlett.com www.liberatedwords.com

Colin Will is a Scottish poet, editor, publisher and musician. His themes reflect a love of people and the natural world, often in language derived from his scientific background. A former librarian at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, he chaired the Board of the Scottish Poetry Library and the Board of StAnza: Scotland's International Poetry Festival. He has had twelve books published. http://www.colinwill.co.uk

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