

STRAVAIG #13

Inspiring Islands



Poems

Art

Essays

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.

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Front cover image: Pascale Rentsch, *Distant Sea*, watercolour.

Back cover image: Pascale Rentsch, *Where the light changes Everything*, watercolour.

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Editorial: Inspiring Islands

Islands. What is it about them? Prof Ullrich Kockel asks in his thought-provoking essay. It's hard to say, but our islands theme attracted lots of outstanding poems, interesting articles and beautiful artwork. In this issue you can journey from the Great Blasket off Kerry to Rathlin Island off the Antrim coast, follow Columba to Iona, call in at Barra and Vatersay where tragedy awaits, and travel further north to the Singing Sands of Eigg facing Rum in the company of Christian McEwen; learn how Anne Scott responds to Kenneth White's poem *A High Blue Day* on Scalpay, visit the long Udal Peninsula on North Uist, find out where the author Iain Crichton Smith grew up on Lewis; experience lockdown on Orkney's North Ronaldsay with Sue Mara, and finish up on Iceland! We are delighted that Pascale Rentsch's evocative paintings of the Luing shore are on our front and back covers. Truly, islands are inspiring places. Gilles Fabre from Dublin also shares some of his *along the way* collection of haiku from his worldwide travels. We have a new feature Field Notes by the recently formed geopoetics group in Wales who explored lead mines in Snowdonia last year and have now written poems and prose and provided photographs of their Geopoetics Day in that unique setting. We intend to continue to have Field Notes from England and Scotland in future issues.

Still on the islands theme, we have more good news from the Isle of Luing in Argyll where the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics now has an actual research and resource base in the Conservation Village of Cullipool on the island's west coast. It contains an extensive library and our archives of the growth of geopoetics in Scotland from the 1960s to the present day. Our Director Norman Bissell will be offering short courses on geopoetics and creative writing based there, starting this autumn. He will also be on hand to assist the growing number of

research students who want to know more about geopoetics. He has just been awarded a commission for a Coastal Cultures Island Residency by the Culture Heritage and Arts Network of Argyll and the Isles (CHARTS) for a geopoetics project *Expressing an Island*. As part of it, he will offer a series of workshops for writers, and young Luing artist Lottie May will provide them for artists and crafters. These will take place on Luing and, it is hoped, on the other Argyll Islands of Lismore, Kerrera and Seil/Easdale.

His creative non-fiction book *Living on an Island Expressing the Earth* will be published this year and it will chart his journey from the city of Glasgow to the slate Isle of Luing and the development of geopoetics in Scotland from the early days of the Jargon Group in 1963 to the Open World Poetics group in the 1990s, and the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics founded in 1995. Forerunners of geopoetics like Joan Eardley, Rachel Carson, Katharine Stewart and Nan Shepherd will also feature in the book. This year we are also going to reprint *Geopoetics: place, culture, world* by Kenneth White.

There are now twelve Geopoetics Videos available to watch at <https://bit.ly/GeopoeticsConversations> (with more to come) and they have helped to increase our membership to around 200, including those in nine different countries. Thanks to our many donors, the filming of our geopoetics documentary has begun and will continue throughout this year.

We would especially like to thank Caroline Watson for designing this issue of *Stravaig*. We hope you enjoy it. Please tell us what you think by emailing info@geopoetics.org.uk.

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

She is the sea

Ailsa Clark

And so with time and tide
The ebb and flow
Of life and love
And crashing, thunderous roars,

She stills, retreats and then...

Slowly rising,
mountains of fluidity,
Weighty yet weightless,
She builds, momentous,
Rising up with a force to be reckoned,
Then as if entirely harmless,
She returns to a calm...
Her depth and shallows humble.

She has carried many,
from homelands to new lands,
the sorrow of loss and the laughter of wonder.
Her vastness of distance to grieve and reinvent.

Her bravery, courageous, yet beautiful,
can hold the weight of the world,
Yet swallow it up should she so choose.
And either way respected dearly.

I am in awe,
for she is mighty,
yet can sit with the silence - unafraid of the power she holds, or the many lost souls,
unashamed of the tears that she takes to her watery depths,

Alive with the wonder of life itself.
Sparkling in the sunlight
And the dark of the night.
She is indeed the sea.

Islands: Places at Sea, on Land and in the Air Toposophical Ruminations of a Wanderer

Ullrich Kockel

Ik drööm vun een Eiland up See, Dat drifft unnern Wind, wild un free.

Helmut Debus¹

Islands. What is it about them? Anyway, aren't Continents just that – (big) islands? When is an island not an island? Islands, Franz-Josef said, it's all about islands. Can't you see? Franz-Josef Stummann, like me, is German. Around the same time I started a postdoc fellowship at Liverpool, he had taken up the directorship of ECTARC, the European Centre for Traditional and Regional Cultures, based in Llangollen, Wales. Another of the many hats Franz wore was as the Secretary for Culture with the Assembly of European Regions, in which capacity he worked with someone called Sandy whom he described as 'president of the Western Isles'. One evening at my local pub, Franz-Josef revealed his conviction. He never explained, just looked at me over his pipe, with curiously raised eyebrows – don't you see, boy, what it is all about? Islands!

Leaning on the bolted lower half of the door and gazing into the distance, I could just about make out the contours of the island in the mist, like the back of a gigantic whale, about to be beached in the sound. Behind me, Heiko, sitting on the steps to the loft, plinged on his guitar and Inge was making a pot of tea while Reiner, huddled close to the smouldering turf fire, talked of someone I had never heard of, a local man who had written a famous autobiography, in Irish, about living on that very island, the Great Blasket. And then about the deer that the *Taoiseach* (prime minister) at the time of my visit, Charles Haughey, had flown across to the smaller island behind that one, Inishvickilaun, so that he could watch the animal through his panoramic sitting room window. Or so the local myth went.

Nobody lives there now, Reiner said. On the big island. Pity. Why not, I said. What would it take? Well, said Reiner, you tell me. What do we send you to university for? I thought about it, gazing at the shadow in the mist. The following winter I was back, researching the ecology of the Great Blasket, for a BA dissertation² trying to work out a scheme for resettling it in a sustainable way.

That same year, a graduate in philosophy and Irish started an MA by research at University College Cork,³ looking at the library of that Islandman Reiner had talked about one misty evening in a small cottage on the hillside east of Dunquin. And so commenced two intellectual journeys that should converge a decade later in the great English port city of Liverpool, reputedly the real capital of Ireland.

Islands. Bloch wrote a lot about them, didn't he? But then, he would, given his focus on Utopia (does Atlantis ring any bells?). This is Ernst I am talking about, not Marc or any other Bloch. A favourite philosopher, certainly in my book, if little known in the Anglophone world. Islands as the location of the future, of our visions and desires, are a common trope in European cultures, and possibly beyond that. There is something edgy about them. Even if we recognise that we all, all of humanity, de facto live on an island of some sort. That is where the concept of offshore islands comes in. Of course, all islands are offshore. Australia is off the shore of New Zealand and Papua New

Guinea (and vice-versa), if by some distance. But there seems to be a threshold of size beyond which an island becomes mainland. That threshold is, of course, entirely relative. So, what determines when an island becomes a mainland, and when a mythical location of the future? The only instance where an island seems to have managed being both, so far, is Britain, which is both the Mainland per se off the coast of which lies the rest of the world, including that nebulous area called Europe, while Britain simultaneously bears the secret abode of the once and future king, who will return and lead his people to a glorious future...

Leaning at the bar in the Swiss restaurant on another island, Man, Mairéad Nic Craith and I discussed the local culture with the blow-in chef-owner. A few years earlier, we had joined Liverpool University's Institute of Irish Studies as lecturers, and now we were visiting the university's Centre for Manx Studies to explore with local heritage professionals how the cultural resources in the island might best be developed. It had struck us that the four towns at the cardinal ends of the island each seemed to share the character of the respective country they were facing across the Irish Sea, with their backs to the central upland of Man: Douglas felt like an English seaside resort, Castletown like one of those towns with a castle in North Wales, Peel like an Irish harbour town, and Ramsey like a Scottish seaside resort. Such diversity in such a small island – would that be reflected in cultural tensions, or would it highlight the island's pivotal position in the cultural geography of the Irish Sea? They're a peculiar lot, said the chef-owner, the Manx. But they do like Rösti.

Islands. What does that designation tell us about them? A leisurely trawl of the

Online Etymological Dictionary⁴ reveals the following terms:

isolated (adj.)

'standing detached from others of its kind,' ... rendering into English of French *isolé* ..., from Latin *insulatus* 'made into an island,'...

insula (n.)

Latin, literally 'an island' (also, in ancient Rome, 'a block of buildings') ... In anatomical use, ... 'detached or standing out by itself.'

insulate (v.)

... 1530s, 'make into an island,' from Late Latin *insulatus* 'made like an island,' ... Sense of 'place in an isolated situation, cause (someone or something) to be detached from surroundings' Electrical/chemical sense of 'block from electricity or heat' (by interposition of a non-conductor)

Islands are places apart, on the edge. Interesting nuances are worth noting here, however. An island – *isola* in Italian – is not simply detached, but 'from others of its kind', which suggests that its position might well be otherwise, and has been made what it is by what must have been, by implication, a deliberate act. By whom? And why? Moreover, islands are not all necessarily surrounded by water – blocks of flats in ancient Rome, for example. And one might wonder whether the arrival of the verb 'insulate' into English could reflect a growing 'island consciousness' under the Tudors, following England's loss of its territories on the European mainland, a wound that the best efforts of the Houses of Stuart, Oranje, Hannover and Sachsen-Coburg have not been able to heal (nor have those efforts succeeded in bringing the Sceptred Isle any closer to the mainland, either physically or even just ideologically).

But how detached are islands really? Ultimately, all islands are situated on, connected with, a larger land mass. That is true not only of the *insulae* in ancient Rome, obviously built on (mostly) dry land, but also of islands that are surrounded tightly by water – whether in a stream, a lake, or the ocean – and are (with few atypical exceptions) outcrops of the land underneath the water.⁵ Only mythical and artificial islands, like the one Helmut Debus sings about, tend to float freely.

Leaning against the churchyard wall on a minor elevation in a small Bohemian town, I surveyed the town - and landscape below. So, I think, that is how a former *Sprachinsel* (language island) looks today, traces of the culture that came with the language still evident in the landscape, architecture and other material heritage, in plain sight or sedimented with multiple layers of history. This part of Europe, stretching all the way between the Danube and the Volga, was once full of these islands with their fuzzy edges. German ‘salvage ethnology’, especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, was obsessed with them – islands of ‘German’ language and culture.

Strikingly, the designation was not applied to other areas of Medieval and Early Modern German settlement in Central and Eastern Europe, such as the Baltic. Is that something to do with power relationships or broader class relations? The Teutonic Knights and Sword Brethren colonising the Baltic after the Crusades, supported by the Hanseatic merchants, were in a different category from the peasants and craftsmen that floated down the Danube in their wooden boxes or followed the call of ‘Mother dear-Tsarina’ Katherina to cultivate the expanding Russian frontier. Different also from the Jewish traders Kazimierz, last of the Piast kings, invited to Poland – their *shtetl* did not merit the romantic accolade *Sprachinsel* either, nor

was Yiddish fully acknowledged as a Germanic language until later. Power relations define where and what is or is not an island, when, and for how long.

Mairéad’s research on intercultural writers⁶ has drawn extensively on interviews with authors from such *Sprachinseln*, as my own subsequent work on expellees from Central and Eastern Europe⁷ inevitably has done. These projects marked for both of us the expansion of our research horizon beyond the island of Ireland. Yet the ultimate archipelago comprising islands both off and on shore has continued to loom in the background – the Irish *Gaeltacht*, to which we have kept returning over the years, especially to *Corca Dhuibhne* (the Dingle Peninsula) with *An Blascaod Mór*, the Great Blasket.

Other islands located on land, intriguingly named, come to mind: Scotland’s Black Isle, or Ireland’s Inishowen (island of Owen). Our friend Liam Campbell grew up close to the latter and tells us that the elders at that time had stories about the land - and waterscapes of the area being very different when they were young. Land is solid, while water is not. Yet water erodes land, floods it, turns it into a soggy swamp. Land may temporarily redirect the flow of water, but ultimately, water wins – if ecological need be, with rising sea levels.

Islands. They have been steady companions on our journeys together, especially the Hebrides and Scotland’s Northern Isles – holiday destinations the former, mainly work-related the latter. Scotland’s *Gàidhealtachd*, like its Irish counterpart, is an archipelago partly on land, but as I surmised earlier, all islands tend to be on land, so thinking about them in terms of waterscape may be misleading. Or maybe not. Since Liam Campbell’s doctoral research on the Foyle catchment,⁸ ‘waterscapes’ have pervaded my

own thinking and influenced Mairéad's. It has not escaped us that during that period there has been a synchronous cascading of approaches using 'waterscape', *shoormal*,⁹ and other similarly liminal, watery concepts; it feels like one of those instances of an idea whose time has come.

Leaning against a rock while catching my breath after climbing the 'Hill of the Back to Ireland' on Iona, I can confirm St Columba's conclusion: that larger island is not visible from here. Neither are Atlantis, Hy Brazil, or any of the other mythical islands of hope that Bloch would have been interested in. A special island for many people, Iona is often described as 'a thin place', a portal to an elsewhere that is actually right here. On a personal pilgrimage there, my mind wandered back to another place where I had a similar sense of spiritual liminality: Kloster Andechs, a monastery overlooking the Ammersee lake in Bavaria – an onshore island, yet close to water. The thought drifts

off in a rising sea mist as a soaring eagle cries in the sky above.

Islands. That's where it all began. With one rugged island off the coast of Kerry, which we finally visited together in 2018, the year of our Silver Wedding: the Great Blasket. As young lecturers in Liverpool, we had often discussed my idea that Mairéad should translate her book on the Islandman into English and update it. May be, she had always said, some day. And that book was finally written – not just an up-dated, English-language version of the original, but a new work, building on its predecessor.¹⁰ Taking the old story to a new level of both description and analysis. That journey has rekindled our shared interest in liminal places, worlds on the edge, towards fresh departures into creative ethnology, geopoetics, and beyond. As Franz-Josef told me all those years ago: Islands! That's what it's all about.

¹ Transl.: 'I dream of an island on (the high) sea, drifting in the wind, wild and free.' From Debus, H. (1981), 'Ik drööm vun een eiland', on: *As een Strom*. Worpswede: Atelier im Bauernhaus.

² Kockel, U. (1984), *A Blasket That Might Be?* Schriftenreihe der Deutsch- Irischen Gesellschaft Bremen 3.

³ Nic Craith, M. (1988), *An tOileánch Léannta*. Baile Átha Cliath: Clóchomhar.

⁴ Available at <https://www.etymonline.com/word/> (accessed 19 August 2020).

⁵ One might ponder why, for example, river islands are 'in' the water in both High and Low German and English while lake and high sea islands are (immersed?) 'in' the water in High German and English, but (floating?) 'on' it in Low German. But that is a question for another day.

⁶ Nic Craith, M. (2012), *Narratives of place, belonging and language*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

⁷ Kockel, U. (2019), 'Commemorating vanished "homelands"' In: Ullrich Kockel, Cristina Clopot, Baiba Tjarve, and Máiréad Nic Craith (eds): *Heritage Festivals in Europe*. London: Routledge, pp. 188-204.

⁸ Campbell, L. (2021), *Room for the River: The Foyle River Catchment Landscape*. Buncrana: Merdog.

⁹ Shetlandic term for 'water's edge', also the high water mark on a beach.

¹⁰ Nic Craith, M. (2020), *The Vanishing World of the ISLANDMAN*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.



Cyanotypes of the Mind

Dina Fachin

These recent paintings come from my ongoing project titled *Cyanotypes of the Mind*. I have been working on this series for over two years, experimenting with the potential of almost monochromatic painting. The inspiration for this collection comes from old platinum palladium prints, cyanotypes, as well as black and white landscape photography. As an immigrant in the United States, over the past twenty years I have been re-examining my relationship with my native place and my memories of the landscapes of my youth. By adopting the language of these photographic styles, I have been giving a “face” to my memorial recollections. In this series I have been experimenting with ink washes, ink pens, soft graphite and soft pastels both on watercolor and on mixed media paper, the latter always yielding different atmospheric effects and textures. This project is in constant evolution: it oscillates between drawing and actual painting, between abstraction and representational, thus echoing the wavy movement of memorial recollection.

Image opposite top: *Casa/Home*, Ink , ink marker, graphite, and soft pastel on mixed media paper, 9in x 6in, 2022

Image opposite bottom: *Dolomites*, Ink, ink marker, graphite, and soft pastel on mixed media paper, 8in x 6in, 2022

COLUMBA LANDS ON IONA 563 A D

Anne Scott

Was there an argument
First thing
After the thankfulness of landing?

A pause in everything?

Sail half-mast, the steersman waits.
He will go or stay –
Whatever they say

Burying the coracle
Images flight and a seaway back

Burning it . . .

You can see the Burners
Separate suddenly
Heads up, out of hearing now

And always.

The Buriers stand
Explaining to each other
About fallbacks and never-knows
And wiser courses -
Their thin hands searing from the oars.

Chastened experience
And purpose win.
The coracle is taken from the sea
And lowered in the land
Sand of Iona.
The first rites.

As surely as they chose the star-way here
They are attracted to
The testing ground,
The pitiless way, the self-assay -

To make return possible
But stay.

Rathlin Island

Laurence Mitchell

I am no geologist but it must be said that I was drawn to the Antrim coast by its rocks. Some of these are, of course, well known, with reputations that go before them. I am referring to the polygons of oil-black basalt that make up the extraordinary geological spectacle that is the Giant's Causeway. Causeway seems a wholly appropriate description. The previous year I had made a journey to Staffa, west of the isle of Mull, where I had seen the same unique rock formations in the sheer cliffs that surround Fingal's Cave. It was easy to imagine the two locations connected by a long-distance underwater jetty that linked Northern Ireland with the islands of Scotland's Southern Hebrides. What was true of geology might also work for myth-making and any self-respecting giant would surely be capable of strolling between Scotland and Ireland with nothing worse than wet knees for their trouble.

There was another type of rock that interested me too: a stone that is all too common where I live in the East of England but which becomes increasingly scarce the further north and west you venture in these islands. It is a rock that, while still having its place in the modern age, was of paramount importance to our distant ancestors back in the Mesolithic and Neolithic; indeed, even further back in time. For untold millennia flint was a vitally important material for making tools and for summoning fire. In the British Isles its prime sources were in the chalk country of southern and eastern England but there were also a few scattered deposits elsewhere. The Antrim coast was one such place, one of the few locations where flint could be found in abundance on the island of Ireland.

Driving up to the Antrim coast from Belfast I was keen to stop at the fishing village of Glenarm, where exposed flint in the chalk cliffs had provided an ample supply of raw material for Mesolithic tool makers. It was not hard to spot the cliffs, as just before we arrived in the village I could see large fallen chalk boulders lining both sides of the road. We parked in a lay-by to investigate. Fulmars had made their nests in the cliffs and were flying around above. Calcareous grassland plants like cranesbills had colonised the places where long-fallen boulders of chalk had had sufficient time to develop the thinnest of soil layers. The flint nodules trapped in the chalk were mostly a pale grey colour and the beach itself was covered with flint and chalk pebbles along with those of much darker basalt. Without much effort I managed to find a belemnite buried in a lump of chalk and then a piece of flint where the same species of Cretaceous squid ran through the stone in cross-section like a grey eyeball in the white cortex.

The cottage we had rented stood high on a hill a couple of miles outside the resort of Ballycastle and the view to the north was an uninterrupted panorama of sea, sky and the long, low profile of Rathlin, Northern Ireland's only inhabited island. The island was always visible, although in less clement weather it was little more than a hazy grey outline, a vague smudge that sat on the water. Sun or shine, two of the island's three lighthouses could usually be seen, winking at regular intervals to alert shipping – the waters around Rathlin Island have a long history of shipwrecks and the remains of many unsuspecting vessels lie gathering barnacles at the bottom of the Atlantic close to its shore.



In sunnier weather more detail became evident and the island's magpie cliffs of basalt and chalk could be clearly discerned, as could the houses and church of the village by the harbour. It was on these brighter days that other landforms also took shape on the horizon. Most days we could make out the southern tip of Scotland's Kintyre peninsula but now and then, far beyond the island, more distant places came into view – the hills of Islay and the unmistakable double rise of the Paps of Jura.

From our perspective the island appeared to be at the edge of things. The most northerly point in Northern Ireland, it was the place where the island of Ireland gave way to the Atlantic. A small island that lay off the coast of another much larger island, it seemed to be more an outlier than a stepping stone to anywhere else. But it was a place that had not always been so peripheral: long before today's national divisions had come into play Rathlin had been central to the ancient Gaelic kingdom of Dal Riada, a political entity that included the coast of Argyll in western

Scotland as well as part of what is now County Antrim in Northern Ireland.

Some days we could make out the ferry, *Spirit of Rathlin*, plying its way between Ballycastle and the island. On a day that promised to be calmer and sunnier than most we made the journey ourselves. At Rathlin harbour, a bus – the 'Puffin Express' – was waiting to take passengers to the seabird cliffs at the island's western point next to a lighthouse. After an hour or so at the cliffs, fully replete with the sight of auks and gannets and the ammoniac stench of guano, we took the next available bus back. Driving back to the village, past fields of sheep and grazing cattle, our driver stopped the bus briefly to point out a cave to our left. It was the entrance, he said, to the stone axe mine that had existed on the island in Neolithic times.

In Belfast, a few days earlier, I had gone to see the so-called Malone Hoard at the Ulster Museum. The hoard was a collection of 19 beautifully polished stone axes that had been

discovered on Malone Road close to the museum. The axes were around 6,000 years old and clearly ceremonial objects of some kind: not only were they too large to be of practical use for chopping trees but when they were discovered some of the axes had been found aligned vertically in the ground like miniature standing stones. Even behind glass, they were undeniably beautiful objects and had a curvy heft about them that seemed to invite handling. Given the understandable restrictions imposed by museums, this, of course, was not possible.

The axes have been identified as being made from a rock called porcellanite, a hard, dense impure variety of chert so-named because of its physical similarity to unglazed porcelain. Unlike flint, porcellanite does not flake easily and has a texture that accepts a fine polish and keen edge. There were only two possible sources of this scarce rock in Northern Ireland. Both were in Antrim. One was at Tievebulliagh, a 402-metre mountain in the Glens of Antrim; the other was on Rathlin Island. Both sources yielded stone of exactly the same physical and chemical makeup so it

was impossible to tell which had been used for the Malone Road axes. For reasons of romance rather than anything more scientific, I preferred to think that these precious objects had originated here on the island.

Back at Church Bay we spent a little time listening out for corncrakes, whose presence had recently been reported in one of the nearby fields. The birds were elusive, as is their wont, and so we went down to the shoreline at Mill Bay to watch the waves as we ate our sandwiches. The stony beach, like across the water on the Antrim coast, was covered with a peppercorn scattering of chalk, basalt and flint pebbles. Beyond this, floating upon the gently lapping waters of the bay were sinuous strands of green-brown seaweed, through which the glistening dark heads of grey seals occasionally bobbed up like inquisitive sea-going dogs. Seaweed, specifically kelp, was once an important industry on the island, as was the capture of cliff-dwelling seabirds like the guillemots and razorbills we had been watching earlier.





The roofless chalk-block barn that stood at the end of the beach was evidence of the island's erstwhile kelp industry, a place where seaweed had been stored in bulk in preparation for loading onto boats bound for the mainland. These days it tended to be the holiday trade that supplemented most islanders' incomes – there are a couple of bars and cafés as well as gift shops in the rows of cottages that cluster close to the quay at Church Bay. Walking back to the village in search of a cup of tea, I picked up a couple of small flints from the beach. Like most of what I had found in Antrim, it was light grey in tone, the colour of a herring gull's back – a contrast to the more familiar dark flint I knew from Norfolk. Even so, it was a connection of sorts.

Sailing back to Ballycastle, the sea was calm with broad swathes of its surface turning momentarily silver as the sun made fleeting appearances between the clouds. The Mull of

Kintyre was so clear that, seen through binoculars, a few of its houses could easily be made out on the cliffs. Far to the north, the voluptuous peaks of the Paps of Jura faded in and out of vision like distant phantasmagorical mountains. Then, very briefly, captured in brilliant sunshine, the unmistakable form of Ailsa Craig glowed like a lightship on the eastern horizon before vanishing from sight. Here was another Scottish outlier; another island, another rock formation – granite formed of igneous intrusion from the earth's crust. Connected by geology and salt water, related by people and culture, Rathlin Island with its seabirds and precious stone was starting to give the impression that it lay more at the centre of things rather than at the edge. For a moment it seemed almost as if the scattered territory that once constituted Dal Riada was coming back into focus through the mists of time.

Allt Chrystal

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.

18TH-19TH CENTURIES

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.

The Wreck of the Annie Jane

Cindy Stevens

I lie on wet sand unable to move,
sea-soaked, exhausted, ice-cold.
Wind howls about me, waves drag at my feet.
There is no light, no moon, no stars,
and now no wife.

We sailed from Liverpool en route for Quebec,
with high hopes for a prosperous future.

I lie on wet sand unable to move,
head throbbing, mind confused.
I try to think clearly what happened,
remember only rough seas, then panic,
and my wife gone.

We sailed from Liverpool en route for Quebec,
with such hopes for our future together.

I feel a soft touch as I lie on the sand,
hear strange foreign words as hands lift me up,
I'm carried to shelter and a warm fire
with room to rest. At last I sleep
without my wife.

We sailed from Liverpool en route for Quebec
but our hopes for the future were drowned.

Come dawn, we gather up bodies,
adults, children, emigrants, crew,
three hundred and fifty dead.
And in a mass grave in the sand dunes
I lay my wife.

We sailed from Liverpool en route for Quebec,
but our hopes were crushed on Vatersay.

The Leaving

Cindy Stevens

It was evening when you left us.
The tide ebbed gently over the sand,
the dull red afterglow
of sunset
lingered on the western horizon
while dark lay on the eastward hill.

We watched you slowly fade away
into the fast-deepening shadowland
as the tide flowed nearer
to its ebb.
Our spirits fell with the coming night
as we huddled around the peat fire.

So the darkness came upon us.
The cattle slept, night creatures were still
as we sat on, thinking
of the past,
of your gentle kindness and the songs
that made our long day's labour short.

Life will never be the same now
for those left on this lonely croft
in cold windy seasons
or June sun;
the island has lost its heart with you.
It was evening when you left us.

Island Listening

Christian McEwen

*“And all the place
there was grew out of listening.*

- Li-Young Lee

There is a knoll on the Isle of Eigg called *Cnoc na Piobaraichd*, or the Piper’s Cairn. Those in need of inspiration have only to go there on a bright moonlit night, lay an ear to the ground, and listen.

Inevitably, a new tune will be given to them.

Eigg is a ragged heart-shaped island, set twelve miles off the west coast of Scotland, accessible only by ferry. I came there first in the early 2000s, and returned several times thereafter, hungry for the “new tunes” it had to offer. There was the rush and slap of the sea on the ride over from the mainland, the skirl of bagpipes down by the quay. There was the laughter and banter in the village tearoom, the steady tramp of one’s own hard-working boots, the long drawn-out *baa-aa* of the sheep as they browsed their way across the sloping fields.

Best of all was the broad swath of sand at *Traigh na Bigil* -- “the strand of the whispering,” as the Singing Sands of Eigg are known in Gaelic. I saw it first one bright July morning. I’d been staying with friends on the south side of the island, and we walked north-west along the one road, with brambles tousling the hedges, down through the little village of Cleadale, and over the fields to the Singing Sands. There was no one else about. For what seemed hours we shuffled and scooted and kicked along the upper reaches of the beach, while the sand chirped cheerfully underfoot.

Sand is mostly made of quartz, with smaller particles called fines. When the wind sifts it so that it is evenly milled, each grain rounded and washed clean by the salt sea, it makes a very particular kind of music, variously described as “singing,” “burping,” “barking,” “whistling,” “whispering” or “chirping.” The sand “sings” at a right angle to the wind, as one layer is blown or shifted over the layer beneath. It has a distinct frequency, about 88 hertz, equivalent to the low note on a cello.

Standing on the beach, just above the tide-line, you hear what the sound artist Bernie Krause has christened “geophany” -- the showing forth or revelation of the earth’s own natural voice, its wind and rain and tides, its changing ground, its shimmering rock and sand. These were the first sounds ever to be heard on our small round planet, preceding human habitation by some four and a half billion years, and on Eigg have remained unchanged for millennia.

Eigg’s neighbor to the north, the island of Rum, is said to be the first place in Scotland to be inhabited. An archeological site there dates back 8,500 years, and Eigg too has had its share of finds, most now safely ensconced in the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh. Between Bronze Age hunters and fishers, prosoletizing Christians, Viking marauders, and warring clans, the rocky little island has had its own complicated history, not least its

recent series of capricious landlords, from the charismatic playboy Keith Schellenberg to the self-styled German artist known as Maruma, who bought the place in 1995, and sold it again, under duress, two years later. Finally, after a massive fund-raising campaign, the island was bought back by its own people in April 1997, and has since been run, with great aplomb, by the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust.

The journalist Patrick Barkham praises “the genuine fusion of Hebridean culture and mainland counterculture” that now exists on the island, with its emphasis on affordable housing, renewable energy, and land reform. In his view, a contemporary small island manifesto might start with “the realization that we need to treat other people more

carefully... Spend more time outside... Consider animals and plants as well as people. Live more intimately with our place, for it is a complex living organism, too.”

Meanwhile, the waves continue to pulse in and out as they have always done, soothing the hearts and minds of all who listen. On a recent visit, my friend Doug and I walked over to the Singing Sands just as the sun was setting, a flare of light behind the jagged hills of Rum. The sands whispered and squeaked as before, and he showed me a dimple on the water which was an otter eating a fish, and another, larger dimple, which was a seal. Later, on the way back, he felt in the half dark for a little nugget of something which turned out to be a toad. I held it, quietly palpitating, in my hand.

Footnotes: Island Listening

Eigg: Camille Dressler, *Eigg: The Story of an Island* (Birlinn, 2007).

“Sand is made...” Trevor Cox, *The Sound Book: The Science of the Sonic Wonders of the World* (W.W. Norton, 2014), p. 206.

geophany: Bernie Krause, *The Great Animal Orchestra: Finding the Origins of Music in the World's Wild Places* (Back Bay Books, 2012), p. 39.

“the gentle fusion...” Patrick Barkham, “This island is not for sale: how Eigg fought back,” *The Guardian*, September 26th, 2017.

Knap of Hower

K J Cannon

Take shelter in the oldest homestead —
foundations dug into cliff-edge
Squeeze through narrow passageways, stand
way back on flagstone
Appraise

as a potential buyer —
consider size of each room, the orientation
Would this suit? —
so close to the sea and sky, a constant
view across the foam to seals
sun-wallowing on rock

Someone has placed a row of pretty seashells
along a stone aumbry, ornament
to make stout walls
a home. At my feet, a mortar smoothed hollow
an awl for punching holes

Eat sandwiches crouched low
out of the ruffling wind — what else is a dwelling for
except to provide shelter against salty squalls
far longer than Skara Brae

Flick a switch across the Sound of Papay —
a quick flash of sun spins the heavens blue
captures jade light beneath surface glass

The wind is a whistling song —

*Build me a house and I will live in it
for five thousand years, small
rooms we will make our history in, bent low
under stone entrance lintels
We will see the future grow dark-haired
above our heads, curlews bubble summer songs
our music, along inside walls pink sea thrift
flowers every year
will keep doing so*

Skara Brae

Ellen Galford

I know I would have liked her if we'd met
and shared some language and a slice of time.

Her house became a pawn
in sand's wars with the ocean
but maybe just for now
her kitchen door's still open.

On the edge: an Orkney island lockdown

Sue Mara

I remember the exact day of that first sense of creeping confinement: 16 March 2020. I'd not long moved to live on North Ronaldsay, Orkney's northernmost isle, and that day I'd taken the 10-minute flight to Orkney Mainland and an overnight stay for an eagerly anticipated book launch event. But suddenly Boris announced lockdown, and the author had no choice but to cancel. With deep disappointment and a few faint stirrings of unease, I hunkered down to hostel tea and cake and hurriedly scribbling a long shopping list of supplies, whilst the planes were still flying.

Next morning the Stromness rook chorus roused me early. Theirs is a penetrating, harsh dawn cacophony, and I curse and bless them each time I stay. This was likely my last Mainland trip for some while, and I savoured the raw sound, a memory store for future comfort. Then it was off to the airport and home to bad news: my daughter down south had just lost her job, a casualty of Covid. Things were closing in...

North Ronaldsay's dawn chorus is softer; it's an island of birds, and they're a backdrop to everything. In this tiny place - four miles by one mile, home to around 50 people - peace reigns, with or without lockdown. Apart from the occasional tractor or plane, the only sounds are wind and birdsong, and when the wind drops, a never-ending rise and fall of chirrups and trills and whoops permeates the landscape. It's a reason I moved there.

Another was to embrace solitude, in a tiny croft cottage overlooking the ocean, and in this aspect my life on the isle during lockdown didn't really change very much. Yet social distancing wasn't easy. All our usual community groups - film, book, fitness, singing - on the island, like everywhere else,

stopped running. Solitude is fine until one's freedom how and when to break it is taken away.

And slowly other restrictions began to bite. Essential journeys for us could not include Mainland food trips. Planes went from thrice-daily to a skeletal twice-weekly to bring food, fuel and other essentials, plus mail. Early in lockdown, happiness for me was the weekly ferry making it over with my precious coal order. I depended mainly on an open fire for warmth, and had run nail-bitingly low.

Our one lovely small island shop stocked the basics, but other food had to be ordered from Orkney Mainland, and some of my favourite shops didn't deliver. Flour shortages became problematic, until a few of us joined forces for a wholesale order.

Ongoing isolation takes an emotional toll on us all. For me, Mother's Day proved particularly painful and the trip switch to a couple of days of inconsolable howling. It was the right place for it though - only the cows and birds to disturb. That night I lit a candle in the window. Another day, an exhausting long panicky dream of entrapment and despair miraculously shifted into the most profound feeling of wellbeing, as if a huge weight had lifted. I was grateful: that nightmare crystallised and expressed the anxiety and despair I'd been trying not to feel, and brought me peace.

My island walks were another sanity-saver. My cottage was on the east coast; a quick nip through the gate, across the grass and I'd be on a long sand-pebble beach, with the sheep, seals and birds. I got lost in blissful hours of pottering, photographing, beachcombing for oddities, daydreaming, and one time I swear I heard the tide turning: the water suddenly sounded faster, eager, a little ferocious, and

as it darkened, birds began to race and swarm. One morning, a pair of mute swans surprised me, drifting dreamily on the waves.

The isle's west side is wilder, all rocks. One sunny, squally day I headed out, lashed by an icy wind and greeted by a ferocious raging sea, hurling at the rocks to whip up sheets of white foam and spray. What I'd thought were little white feathers weirdly scattering off the water were flecks of this foam. Ocean and wind screamed and roared, birds looped and wheeled, an absorbing shoreline drama.

Up north are the lighthouse, the old jetty - built to transport lighthouse building supplies, now a picturesque relic - and often a view of Fair Isle, some 27 miles north. At the ruined Old Light tower, ravens cawed and circled, probably from a nest in the scaffolding.

The previous summer a whale had beached itself on the northern shore, and one April day I sought its remains. Most had now washed out to sea, but a salt-scourged jaw-bone made for some rather beautiful photographs. I spotted one other person at the far end of the beach, but soon it was just me and a large gaggle of sheep, hovering warily.

If down south, I'd follow the long sandy curve of Nouster Bay. I never tired of this beautiful walk; different weathers, seas and tides bestowed fresh colours, light, sounds, presences. This soothing sensuality was the closest I got to a human hug, the warmth of a hand. Mostly I kept near the sea's edge, to avoid disturbing the fulmars nesting along the dyke. This also often brought seal encounters, as they swam in tandem, eyeing

*"Ged tha mo ghrian-sa a'triall fo sgleo
Is mise 'm bliadhna mar ian 'sa cheo
Togaidh 'n sgaile 's ni ise dearrsadh"*

(An Ribhinn Donn/The Brown Haired Maiden)

me curiously. I'd paddle, enjoying the ice-cold.

On bad weather days I'd be baking, sorting photographs, working on a bookmaking project, watching films and music streamings with a glass of wine..... like people anywhere on lockdown. Socialising now meant brief snatches of conversation whilst social-distance-queuing at the shop, or collecting parcels at the airfield or pier, or waving at other drivers. The postlady's visit was a definite highlight. For me, being so far from family and close friends was very hard, so I was grateful for the internet. There was finally great news - daughter was offered a furlough, after it seemed she'd qualify for nothing. Huge relief all round, and another candle in the window.

Through all this, the rhythms of farming life continued. Punding - rounding the animals up into punds (stone enclosures) - of North Ronaldsay's seaweed-eating, shore-dwelling sheep takes place on set dates through the year to coincide with spring tides and high water. The April punding brings the ewes onto the fields to lamb safely, before later being returned through the dyke. Everyone who can turns out to herd the sheep around the shore into the punds, in vehicles and on foot, before separating each farmer's animals.

Community spirit flourished. People organised online quizzes and competitions, painted stone hunts, and an art call-out. One day my fellow islander Louise dropped round a loaf of bread and a pastry, warm from the oven, and she'd made them for every island household. That was a teary, happy moment.

"Though my sun has gone under a cloud
And I this year, like a bird, enshrouded in mist
The shadow will lift and she will shine again."

The Search (Grandad O' Saviskail)

Ellen Grieve



Photo credit: Max Fletcher

A raven came to sit
On a dyke that Grandad built.
"Kind sir, I thank you for my perch,
I am so tired and hungry as onwards I search".
Old Hugh he bent down slowly, and gently turned a stone.
Scuttling gablos, the raven ate, until they were all gone.
His black, bead like eyes shone as he looked,
His watching, tilted head, then he shook.



The gentle old man sat down alongside.
Of all God's creatures he was always blide.
"Eat your fill my friend, all I have is yours.
I am only the short-lived guardian of these windswept moors.
Seeds I sow, one for me, one for you,
I know that my feathered friends are aye hungry too.
You help me out as you look and dig.
Eating the grubs, helping my crops grow big".

"I built this dyke to keep my animals safe.
A shelter from storms that they have to brave.
Moss and lichen grow on the stones,
This, tiny creatures eat and make their homes.
There are gaps in the stone that make it strong,
Wind and rain pass through, a solid wall would not stand long.
Small birds nest in these holes and raise their young.
Warming my heart with their thankful song".



The raven sat and looked long and still
at the tall, weathered giant up on that hill.
His coat tattered, tied round with string,
He had riches more than any king.
Cracked leather boots that had walked many a mile,
A pilgrim of life, with a heart-warming smile.
A cap, his crown, sat regally upon his head,
Wisdom shone forth from every word he said

And, as they sat, a feeble cow came by a look,
It was many years since she had had a calf to sook.
“Ah, Powie my dear auld lass, whit like today”?
She nuzzled the great hand, that yielded a nut, then, ambled along her way.
“My first coo, I had her when I was a younger man,
My trusted friend, I owe her more than any soul can.
She will have a home here with me, for the rest of our days,
Loved, well-fed and respected, come what may.”

“Kind Sir”, said the raven, “I surely do feel,
That my long search has ended, with this glorious meal.
I was sent forth, many years ago, on a hopeless quest,
To find a humble man, to honour as the best.
Knights and Kings, Judges and Scholars,
None are richer and none are taller,
than you, my friend, who lives out here,
with no ill thoughts, greed, or fear”.

“True Contentment is to live a life of sharing.
Thinking of others, loving and caring.
Harming no one, whether friend nor foe.
Reaping the harvest of compassion that you sow.
I, can return now, to my far-off home,
and leave you, in peace, on this earth to roam.
Until the day, when I will come back once more,
Then, my dear friend, with you.... to the heavens I will soar”.



(Grandad by marriage was the most gentle soul who literally lived at one with nature his whole life. He started farming with horses and always put the welfare of animals and the environment first. Never in a hurry, he always got his work finished, with time to fill his pipe and pass on some treasured words of wisdom.)

The Moor, the Sea, the Sky

Ian Grosz



I take the turning for Achmore – a small township ten miles to the southwest of Lewis’s capital Stornoway – and follow an empty, single-track road that crosses the open moor. I pass cold grey lochans alive with waves; peatbanks signalled by rows of tattered plastic bags and upturned wheelbarrows scattered along their length; lonely looking shielings sitting high on the moor. I pull over and look out across its undulating expanse: monochrome and windswept, feeling its emptiness in the pit of my stomach.

The landscape around me brings to mind the famous Lewis poet Iain Crichton Smith’s description of the setting for his childhood home. ‘My house lay between the sea and the moor,’ he tells us: ‘the moor scarred with peatbanks, spongy underfoot: blown across by the wind (for there is no land barer than Lewis).’¹ No land barer; and yet the moor was filled with untapped memory and story, locked away like the carbon stored within the peat. I put the van back into gear and continue on, following the long and empty road through Lewis’s treeless expanse.

Achmore is a typical Lewis settlement, or ‘township’, with its irregularly spaced houses – many of them old croft houses or new self-builds – lining the main road from Stornoway for a mile or two before it continues westward. I am staying in a compact but perfectly equipped bothy that has been left open for me. It’s small but cosy, with a kitchenette lining one wall, a shower room and toilet, a comfy bench seat and a raised double bed in the corner with a Harris tweed curtain for privacy and storage units beneath. The hosts’ home is next door: an open plan, Scandinavian style house on one level. Sea kayaks are stacked in a purpose-built rack by a large bike shed. There are chickens in an enclosure at the side of the house and the croft runs down a slope toward a loch overlooking the distant hills of Harris. In the long, golden glow of summer it must be a beautiful view, but today it is dank and grey, the sky heavy with threatening rain, and I am pleased to get inside.

*

The first morning I wake to find it wet and windy: the kind of wind that makes the rafters moan and snatches a car door from

your hand. But after breakfast I take the van down the single-track road to Stornoway, chasing the ghost of Iain Crichton Smith. I arrive at the town by the land-fill site, gulls crowding greedily overhead, before the road gives way to the streets and houses of Stornoway's suburbs. I drive through the centre around the harbour, the sky still heavy and overcast and the streets grey, past the ferry terminal where a boat is docked – the sailing cancelled due to the persistent high winds – and then head east.

I am making my way to see where Crichton Smith had been raised under the regime of his strict Presbyterian mother, ever terrified of her sons falling ill after losing her husband to tuberculosis when the future poet was still only an infant. The church figured heavily in Crichton Smith's early life – the Sabbath strictly observed – and even the village's name has a darkly biblical resonance.

Bayble, or *Pabail*, like most of the island's place names has a Norse rather than Gaelic origin, and is derived from *Papa- býli* meaning 'dwelling of the priests', possibly named so when the Norsemen who first settled here found the Culdee already inhabiting the fertile peninsula where the township is situated. The nearby ancient church *Eaglais na h-Aoidhe*, or St. Columba Church, dates from the fourteenth-century and is thought to be the successor of a much earlier chapel established in the sixth-century by Saint Catan or his followers: one of the early Irish saints who became bishop of Bute. The extant church overlooks Broad Bay from the eastern end of 'The Braigh' (pronounced *Bry*): a narrow sea-battered spit of land connecting the eastern arm of Lewis – known locally as 'Point' but officially as The Eye Peninsula, or *An Rubha* – with the main island.

Bayble lies just three miles further east of the church along this peninsula, but before crossing the Braigh, I head to Holm Point to see a sculpture memorialising the well-

documented *Iolaire* disaster and brought vividly to life in Donald S. Murray's book *As the Women Lay Dreaming*.² I knew the story well. In the first hours of New Year's Day 1919 the HM *Iolaire* – a steam powered yacht converted for troop transport returning to Lewis – grounded on the rocks in the frigid seas off Holm Point with the loss of two-hundred and five souls and one-hundred and eighty-four of the island's men only a few hundred metres from the safety of Stornoway's harbour.

What made the disaster so terrible in its cruelty, was that many of the men had survived the horrors of World War One only to die within touching distance of their homeland, their wives, mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers standing on the quayside to welcome them home. As daylight broke on New Year's Day, children's gifts brought back for Christmas were still washing up on the shore amongst the bodies. Suggestions by a survivor that the crew had been under the influence of alcohol were dismissed, and there followed a series of banal recommendations without further action.

I park up at the point and walk the few hundred meters along the track to the monument: a low, curving wall of grey slate and Lewisian Gneiss facing the waves. There is an already weathered bronze wreath at its centre and bench seats either side that look out to sea across the curving line of inscribed names mounted in bronze on the raised platform of the memorial. The rocks that sank the *Iolaire* – in conditions not far worse than today and known as *The Beasts of Holm* – are clearly visible a hundred meters or so offshore. The wind is fierce, the waves swamping the rocks, but I can see their jagged grey edges lying treacherously just below the surface.

Watching the waves rolling in relentlessly and smashing into the black metamorphic rocks immediately below the monument, I find it almost impossible to believe anyone

might have survived, and at the same time, difficult to accept the idea of so many casualties so close to the shore. How do we make sense of such loss? Iain Crichton Smith asks the same question in his poem 'Iolaire.' In it, he imagines an elder of the church confronted with the tragedy:

in the fat of water, they came floating home
bruising against their island. It is true,
a minor error can inflict this death.
That star is not responsible. It shone
over the puffy blouse, the flapping blue
trousers, the black boots. The seagull swam
bonded to the water. Why not man? ³

After crossing the Braigh, I head east a mile or two and then turn right down a long, minor road following the sign for Upper Bayble. The village is divided into two parts: upper and lower, its houses, some empty and dilapidated, scattered like pebbles either side of the single-track road that cuts a line between the moor on one side and steep cliffs that meet the sea on the other just as Crichton Smith had described.

I try to imagine growing up here under the watchful religious gaze of the widow, the loss of life from the *Iolaire* still within living memory; the town of Stornoway with its little harbour and its few shops the highlight of my week; school and literature my escapism and my chance of escape; a wider world invisible beyond the island's limited horizon, seeping in only through the radio and the stories of returning servicemen and whalers. 'It was as if I was searching for a wider world of ideas,' Crichton Smith says: 'a freedom which I could get only through books, a freedom I imagined as existing elsewhere.'⁴ I would have wanted to leave too, and yet Crichton Smith never really escaped. He looked for it ever after, finding it always just beyond his grasp:

It's the island that goes away, not we who
leave it.
Like an unbearable thought it sinks beyond

assiduous reasoning light and wringing
hands, or, as a flower roots deep into the
ground, it works its darkness into the gay
winds that blow about us in a later spirit.⁵

This haunting Crichton Smith conveys – the ghost memory of the island of his imagination – is expressed in much of his poetry: a lament for an island not only diminishing in personal memory but its people 'condemned to departure': its language and culture slowly being lost; slowly sinking beyond the horizon of the collective past, 'leaving the island bare, bleak and windy/itself alone in its barren corner/composed of real rocks and real flowers/indifferent to the rumours and the stories/stony, persistent.'⁶ In these lines, the island reveals a timeless indifference to the cares of its inhabitants, and for the poet, is left absent of any real meaning.

I drive down to the pier where I sit and watch the waves jostling each other into the small bay, wondering how many times Crichton Smith may have come here to do the same: dreaming of the wider horizons that lay beyond the Minch; the view of the headland and the moor beyond the row of small houses lining the cliff-tops so familiar to him as a boy, but knowing deep-down that to thrive meant to leave.

*

The next morning, I again take the single-track road to the town across the moor. Once I feel that I am far enough out of sight of both Achmore but not yet within sight of the town, I pull over into a layby and switch off the ignition. I clamber down and stand in the road, turning slowly to take in the moor's expanse, its lonely shielings and a few, newly added wind-turbines as much part of the landscape as its rocks and heather. From the centre of the moor, the island reaches out in all directions as far as I can see, amorphous and yet fractally detailed and full of countless plants and insects, birds and animals, living, dying and decaying within it. The closer I look

at the moor, the more colour I see in it: not just the greens and the browns, but also the ochres, purples, and the burnt orange of fading grasses. It is a haunted and haunting landscape: a landscape that haunts, but there is a reassuring presence of almost invisible life here that eases its empty longing.

Staying still, I close my eyes and listen, and I am filled by the moor's presence: the sound of the burn at the side of the road; the faint calls of birds, unseen in the heather; the icy cold breath of the wind on my neck. A deep sense of peace comes to me. I feel held within the moor's ever-changing, ever-present elements, its blossoming and its constant renewal: just one of countless life-processes.

In the book *The Life of Lines*, anthropologist Tim Ingold re-examines how we think of the earth's surface. It is not something *on* which we live, but live *with* and *through*. There is an interaction between the ground, the soil and

the weather whose boundaries become difficult to define once you begin to examine them more thoughtfully. He describes how 'in this regard the ground surface is neither superficial nor infrastructural, nor is it inert. It is, rather, interstitial. Literally "standing between" earth and sky.' He goes on to cite Martin Heidegger, from whom so much of Ingold's work is drawn, and who described how the earth is 'the serving bearer, blossoming and fruiting, spreading out in rock and water, rising up into plant and animal'⁷ Only now had I seen it: the *Umwelten* contained within the moor's unfolding story. Lewis is an island of elements, of contrasts and opposites: an island of endless summer light and winter's darkness; an island of moorland and mountain, wind, rain, sunlight, sea-spray and shifting cloud. The moor, the sea, the sky, are all-encompassing, holding the island within their expansiveness. I take a last look across this landscape, and then I drive on, ready to go home.

¹ Iain Crichton Smith quotes taken from 'Between Sea and Moor' in, *Towards the Human: Selected Essays*, (Edinburgh, Macdonald Publishers, 1986), pp. 73-83, p.74

² See Donald, S. Murray, *As the Women Lay Dreaming*, (Glasgow, Saraband, 2018)

³ Iain Crichton-Smith, 'lolaire,' from *The Exiles*, 1984, in Mathew McGuire (Ed.), *Iain Crichton Smith, New Collected Poems*, (1992, repr. Manchester, Carcanet Press, 2011), V. 11-17, p. 274

⁴ From *Ibid*, (1986), p. 79.

⁵ Iain Crichton Smith, 'The Departing Island' from *Three Regional Voices*, 1968, in *Ibid*, (2011), V 13-18, p.65

⁶ Iain Crichton Smith, 'No Return' from *The Exiles*, 1984, in *Ibid*, (2011), V 46-50, p. 270

⁷ See Tim Ingold, Chapter 9 'Surface', in *The Life of Lines*, (Abington, Oxen. Routledge, 2015), pp. 41-45.

Udal Peninsula

Bruach Mhor

A diet of whelks.
And more whelks.
Place me in this cist,
with care,
cover me with pebbles.
Let the weather change,
let the storms throw sand.
Drop bones of butchered animals,
quartz tools,
smashed pots.
Let sand become grass,
let grass become crops;
until the crops blow away,
bringing back the sand,
exposing smashed pots,
quartz tools,
bones of butchered animals;
until the time of the diggers,
the fine sievers,
who lift me out, with care,
check my teeth,
see I starved as a child
see I starved as an adult,
see I lived on a diet of whelks
and more whelks.

.

A High Blue Day on Scalpay

Anne Scott

This is the summit of contemplation and
no art can touch it
blue, so blue, the far-out archipelago
and the sea shimmering, shimmering
no art can touch it, the mind can only
try to become attuned to it
to become quiet, and space itself out, to
become open and still, unworlded
knowing itself in the diamond country, in
the ultimate unlettered light.

Kenneth White

There is no history here. No Past. Only Now, Always Now. We are not Icarus, to be lost before the sun, and drown. We are within a contemplation – a mysterious word with a temple at its root, a space of unreadable auguries. Already the distances, the ‘far-out archipelago, the untouchable ‘blue’: or ancient ‘blao’ which carries ‘shimmering’ within it, separate us but do not isolate us. What we see, ‘blue, so blue’, is within sight of our world.

Before this scena, the poem is unbraided through perfect crossings of mind and miracle until the savage truth appears. Mind and Art are powerless to understand or render. The mind can ‘only’, tragically ‘try’: and face immolation. There is truth in how the words stand upon the page. ‘Only’ ends a line, falls to blankness, limps to the feeble ‘try’ on the further side of blankness.

There has been no sound, but now there is a single chime, at the heart of the poem, in ‘attuned’, into the moment and the silence. It rings into the music which may speak without words, without letters: offer and preserve where other art fails.

A shift to an alternative Mind in the Universe, a space of a single order, impervious to change except its own: where truth and change announce in magnificence, the Diamond Country.

To which the mind assimilates in silence, unworlded, with its sovereign world reduced. But the ultimate unlettered light lumines the human world entranced. If it’s impossible for words to have a direct engagement with the glory of the Blue, they are essential to the Day, and to occasions of accession on Earth.

In the ‘unlettered light’ we rise to glories: it was a ‘High’ blue day on Scalpay.

Iceland

Mary Thomson

Geological maps show all is in flux,
that plates of the earth's crust
still drift;
that there is a land
where you can stand
where continents still move apart.

That rift
is a hundred mile trench
with a gully like widening crack
where the first Icelanders gathered
in that new home where molten rock
might,
at any moment,
incinerate their children.

Tectonic shifts and gross eruptions destroy
and create new lands and mountains;
on fresh charts men give them names,
as if naming can make a thing permanent.

The Shipwright says Goodbye

John Lanyon

Where the flames meet the waves
let her go, let her go
tide take her, trembling
tide take her

Where the river runs deep
as night falls
let her go, let her go
Chains, shackles, pulleys
Commend her to The Fates
let her go, let her go
She sails to The West
the past claims its coin -
her amber, her silver, her gold
Tide take her
She's got a new man now.

along the way

Gilles Fabre

at the end of a day
observing seabirds
I know a little more

Cape Town, South Africa

getting into the cold sea –
a scar on my instep
I had forgotten

Gosford Sands, Scotland

mankind
can't you learn from this old pine
leaning towards the sea?

Matsushima, Japan

not knowing why
after seeing the epicentre
I want to swim into the ocean

Nagasaki, Japan

boat
sputtering away
towards the blue silence

Mumbai, India

- FIELD NOTES -

A Geopoetics Day in Snowdonia

Patrick Corbett, Marcelle Newbold, Marika Gates, Hywel Griffiths and Manon Awst



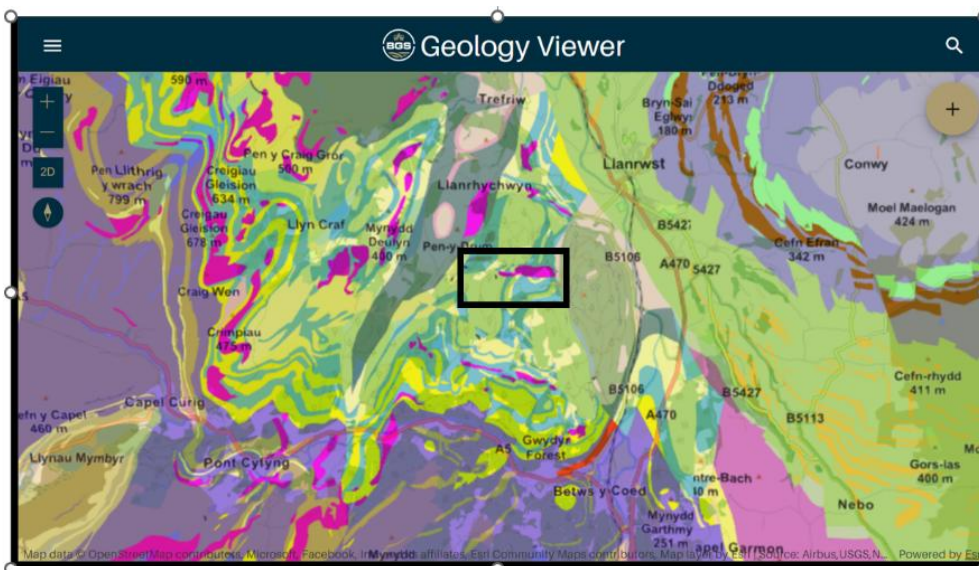
Manon Awst, *Into the unseen at Hafna*, Sept 2022

Introduction

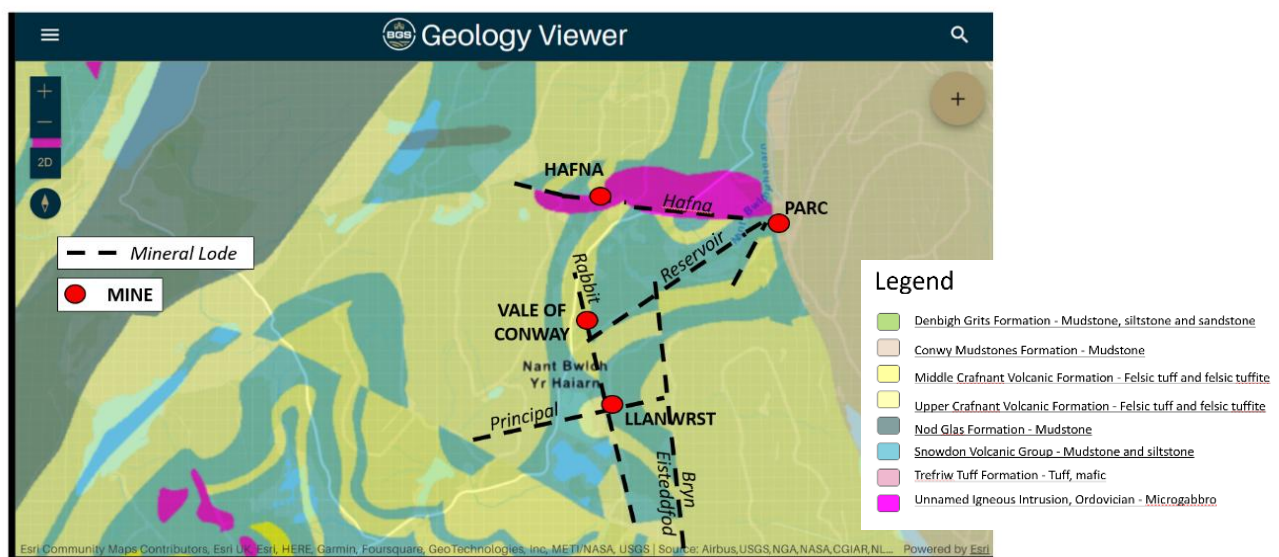
A group of poets and artists met on 10th September, 2022, for a trip round the mines of the Gwydir Forest. Invited by the Scottish Centre of Geopoetics, Marika Gates was our local geological guide. Marcelle, Manon, Hywel and Patrick were there to be inspired. The weather was as pleasant as one could have hoped for in September in Snowdonia. The trip started at the Hafna Quarry and looped down the slope of the hillside to the Parc Quarry.

Geological Background

The geology of Snowdonia is old and complicated - as the map indicates. The area of Gwydir Forest (a few miles west of the idyllic Bets-y-Cowd) contains many mines which were active from 1860-1960 employing up to five hundred miners at their peak.



Map of the area north of Betws-y-Coed with the outline of the area visited and detailed below (<https://geologyviewer.bgs.ac.uk/>).



Detailed geological map of the Gwydir Forest Area (<https://geologyviewer.bgs.ac.uk/>). The names of the mines and the main mineral lodes (faults) are also shown.

The main minerals mined in this area were lead and zinc. The minerals are emplaced in two principal fault trends running east-west (e.g., Bryn Eisteddfod and Rabbit) and NNE-SSW (Principal, Reservoir and Hafna). The faults are of Carboniferous age (360-300 Million years before present MYBP), cutting into Ordovician-aged (490-440 MYRB) melange of mudstones, siltstones and pyroclastic volcanics of the Upper Crafnant Volcanic Formation. The Ordovician rocks are identified as such the world over – named after the Celtic tribe from this area (the “Ordovices”). The faults are high angle and mining the lodes required many false floors between adits running sub-horizontal. Waste material from the veins is sometimes called gangue, the mining name for other vein minerals not historically of economic value such as quartz, calcite and baryte. The source of the hydrothermal veins in this area of Wales are the saline brines being expelled as sediments compact in the Irish Sea and Cheshire basins to the north.

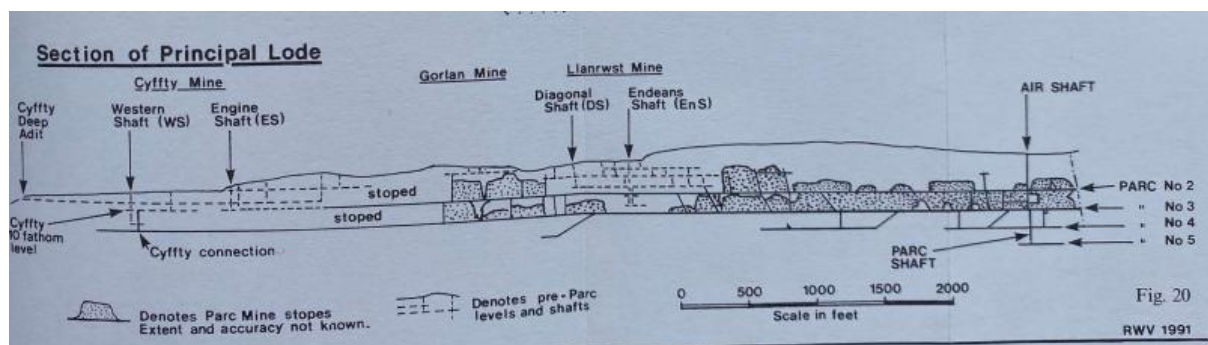
To put this into the wider historical and geographical context, lead was amongst other minerals (copper) that were mined during the Roman occupation of North Wales (Appleton, <https://u3asites.org.uk/files/r/ruthin/docs/mineralisationandminingatminera.pdf>).

Interestingly, the lead ores of Leadhills in Lanarkshire (the source of most of Scotland’s lead) were also hosted in Ordovician similar, but sandier, sediments – greywackes (<https://www.leadhillslibrary.co.uk/lead-mining/leadhills-geology/>). Those lead mines in the North Pennines, near WH Auden’s beloved Rookhope, were hosted in Devonian and Carboniferous rocks. Lead mineralization in the UK has consistent characteristics and lead miners across Wales, Scotland and Northern England will have been able to identify with similar lives in these remote places over the centuries. They will also have been able to export skills to other parts of the World (North and South America for instance) when times locally were particularly tough.

Geological Foreground

The last mines were active in the mid-20th Century. Since that time ground water has leached metal from the old workings, spoil heaps, tailings ponds and contaminated sediments. The role of the geologist today is to understand the ground-water system to help manage the pollution problem. There is no-one to hold liable for this pollution so it is left to Natural Resources Wales (NRW) with the help of the Coal Authority to tackle the problem. There are estimated to be approximately 1300 sites impacting over 700km of watercourses – and Gwydir Forest is just one such site. The site is open for public access and is a popular walking and mountain biking area – with a Mine Trail with information boards at key sites.

<https://cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk/about-us/what-we-do/water/metal-mine-water-pollution/?lang=en>



Section along the Principal Lode showing sub-horizontal adits and mined-out stopes.

Yr oerfel yn Hafna

Hywel Griffiths
(Medi 2022)

Prynhawn o Fedi yng Nghoed-y-Fuches-las,
a'r dail dialar yn dal
i obeithio am law
gan yr awel gynnes.

Ond lle holltwyd y milenia
ar hyd haen gyfleus
o graig,
lle gwthiwyd gwythiennau'n llydan
i'w gwacáu,
lle mae gratiau haearn yn toi
arswyd dwfn y tyllau sydd ynghudd yn y drain

mae ias yn treiddio at yr esgyrn.
Gwynt traed y meirw?
Na, anadl
ysbrydion mwynwyr
na welsant, ac na welant olau dydd
ym meddrodau gwaglaw
palasau plwm
eu llafur.

Wrth yr hafn,
o dan yr arwydd i beidio â gadael sbwriel
na chynnau tân,
mae caniau Stella, pecyn creision
a lapiad Durex -
pob un yn wag,
ac yn dweud mai heddiw sydd drech,
a gwres ei haul ar ddail
yng Nghoed-y-Fuches-las.

A cold wind in Hafna

Hywel Griffiths
(September 2022)

Autumn in Coed-y-Fuches-las,
leaves, ungrieving,
waiting, in hope, for water
from the warm wind.

But where the millennia
were split
along convenient layers
of rock,
where lodes were prized apart
and emptied,
where the terror of shafts
hidden in bramble
is roofed by iron grates

a cold cuts to the bone.
The east wind?
No. The ghostly breath of miners
who did not, do not see,
in tombs filled with absence,
the leaden palaces
of their labour.

Near the adit,
beneath the sign -
'No fires, no littering' –
there are cans of Stella,
packets of crisps
and condom wrappers,
all empty,
stating that today is more important,
its sun warming the leaves
of Coed-y-Fuches-las.

Galena Journey

Patrick Corbett

Where did Galena lead us?

First there was greek galene;
calm weather, tranquility and
Pliny's name for lead sulphide.
Then there was roman plumbum
that might have done for them, later
native Indians knew to mine lead ore,
traded their shot for French rawhide.
Pioneers travelled out west and settled,
bought slaves to work Fever River Mines,
trading post drew miners from afar.
City and river in Illinois became Galena,
home to a Chicago Athenaeum,
adopted one James Gates Percival,
geologist who wrote flowery poetry
before the American Civil War
and a wandering Walt Whitman
trashed the old poesy norms.
From Welsh tribal lands, lead hills
resurfaced through Pennine faults,
where pumping houses drew attention
to the love of Auden, who enthused over
mining communities, sceneries abused
for lead shot, lead pipes and
lead acid batteries

Does Galena still have its silver lining?

Cold Breath

Patrick Corbett

It's late summer, the air is breathless, warmed after the rain. In the wood, on the steep hillside, this air is suddenly cool by the mouth of an abandoned adit. If Arthur is in there, he'll be chilled to the bone. There was once a miner, called Kneebone, in these parts now remembered in the name of a stope between the Parc and Rabbit Adits. Here we are not only at a 'prayer house in the wood' but also at a memorial to past invention and are touched by this breath of fresh air. The valley is green, but its waters can break out quietly ochre. Pools hold fallen leaves and settled mud in a monochromatic glaze. The buddles, flotation tanks and wheelhouses hidden in the trees, reverberate to the tune of five hundred leadened voices, the melange of hard mudstone and pyroclastic walls now covered with scores of ochre-red fungi. A calaminarian carpet covers up the lots of spoiled ground and one can only stand and gape at the hot breath of an industry that pulsed here not so long before!



Participants familiarise themselves with the working of the old mines guided by local geologist, Marika Gates



Some of the abandoned mine buildings in the Gwydyr Forest.



Remains of a buddle pit - an old settling pond.



Time, old workings, the surrounding forest and lichen makes Gwydyr Forest a magical place.



Mineral-rich waters flow from the hillside through monitoring stations.



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, Canada, 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

Manon Awst is an artist and researcher based in Caernarfon, North Wales, who makes sculptures and site-specific artworks woven with ecological narratives. She explores the way materials stick to locations and communities, transforming them deep beneath the surface. She is a recent recipient of a Henry Moore Foundation Artist Award and has exhibited widely in the UK and Germany. Her work is part of the National Library of Wales, the UK Government and Welsh Parliament art collections, and she has long-term installations on the Wales Coastal Path at Nant Gwrtheyrn and at Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz, Berlin.

Website: www.manonawst.com Instagram: @manon_awst

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

KJ Cannon is a Creative PhD Candidate at the University of Southampton, researching poetry and place. *The Salterns*, her third poetry pamphlet, is due to be published in 2023 by *Nine Pens Press*. She was the winner of *The Hamish Canham Prize 2022*, commended for the *Hippocrates Prize for Poetry and Medicine* in 2021, shortlisted for *The Bridport Prize* in 2019, and a finalist in the *Mslexia Poetry Competition 2017*.

Ailsa Clark has lived and worked in Argyll for most of her life and is passionate about community and the environment, and is a full time founder and managing director of a social enterprise. She is a mum of two fabulous teenagers, and her Mum lives by the shores of Loch Fyne. Ailsa seeks solace in the sea to keep her mental and physical wellbeing in good shape. She is fortunate to live in such an incredible place, surrounded by the sea on all sides of Kintyre; the Atlantic West Coast, or Clyde on the East, or the South where the two converge, as well as Loch Fyne to the North. Ailsa has also been a crew member of Campbeltown Lifeboat for 23 years and so is acutely aware of how much respect the sea deserves.

Patrick Corbett is a carbonate geology specialist but seeing oolites at Helpston showed him a new perspective. Gently undulating topography, with varying soils and stones in the fields, the drystone walls and building stones all relate subtle human aspects of this soft rock that he had not appreciated before. Patrick was a professional geologist for many years before taking up poetry and is now exploring the geopoetic appreciation and expression of the earth, combining technical expertise in the widening field of science communication through poetry. Patrick hosted Alyson Hallett's residency at Heriot-Watt University and co-edited *Earth Lines: Geopoetry and Geopoetics* published by the Edinburgh Geological Society in 2021. He is the Assistant Director of the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics.

Gilles Fabre is a French national, living in Ireland. His haiku have won awards and been published in various journals and anthologies in Ireland, Great Britain, Australia, India, Japan, the USA and Canada in English, and France and Canada in French. He has also been published in Japanese and Portuguese. He was the chief editor of *STONE AFTER STONE*, an anthology of haiku by the members of Haiku Ireland. His second haiku collection *along the way, a search for the spirit of the world*, published by ALBA, was selected by The Haiku Foundation for the Touchstone Award Short List (2020). He is the founder of *seashores, an international journal to share the spirit of haiku* and of its French-speaking counterpart *l'estran*. For information go to www.haikuspirit.org For Gilles, the way and practice of haiku, bringing us closer, and sometimes taking us back, to the source, with its power to connect us to nature and reality. It has a role to play in poetry and in our life in general. Haiku can help us have a better relation to the world we need to respect and protect.

Dina Fachin was born and raised in Italy. She moved to California in 2001 where she pursued her doctoral degree in Native American Studies and, after moving to Saint Louis MO in 2008, she started teaching at Saint Louis University. She comes from a family where art and music are like homemade bread, always on the table, fresh and nurturing. She has been drawing, painting and writing since she was a child. In addition

to her fond memories of home and family, her academic background and work in literature, languages, Indigenous and Latin American studies are a true inspiration for her work. Several of her paintings and drawings have been displayed in collective and solo shows in the Saint Louis region and in Italy; some also appeared in literary and cultural magazines.

Ellen Galford was born in New Jersey, USA, but came to live in Scotland half a century ago and has never looked back. She has published long and short fiction on both sides of the Atlantic; her fourth novel *The Dyke and the Dybbuk* was given a Lambda Award for humour by the American Publishers Association. In recent years she has reconnected with a very old flame—in the form of poetry-- mostly exploring Jewish, Scottish and/or LGBT+ themes.

Ellen Grieve was born in the 'Iron Burgh' of Coatbridge in 1961. Captivated by stories of Monks, Blackstone Iron Ore and local, celebrated poet, Janet Hamilton, she held mussels that were millions of years old! A passionate aged local historian patiently listened to the thousands of questions of an 8-year-old. At 20, she moved to Rousay, an island in Orkney where she could see perpetual horizons and breathe pure air in abundance. She is fascinated by environments, whilst working, learning, sharing creativity and still asking thousands of questions. Sometimes she write poems!

Hywel Griffiths is a poet and Reader in Physical Geography in the Department of Geography and Earth Sciences, Aberystwyth University. He has published four collections of poetry, the latest is *Y Traeth o Dan y Stryd* (Barddas, 2023). His third collection, *Llif Coch Awst* (Barddas, 2017) won the poetry prize of Wales Book of the Year. He mainly writes in the Welsh strict meter, *cynghanedd*, but has also published work in English in *Poetry Wales*, *Consilience*, and cultural geographies. A geomorphologist by training, he is particularly interested in collaboration between the sciences and the arts.
<https://hywelgriffiths.cymru/en/hafan/home/>

Ian Grosz is in the third year of a PhD in Creative Writing funded through a New King's Studentship with the University of Aberdeen. His work explores the intersection between landscape and memory, place and identity, and has been published across a range of magazines and journals both in print and online. Ian has a website at www.groundings.co.uk

Dr Ullrich Kockel is Professor of Creative Ethnology at the Institute of Northern Studies, University of the Highlands and Islands, 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*.

John Lanyon lives in the Cotswolds. He works as an organic gardener, linguist, musician, and writer. Having failed his English Literature O Level, he came to love literature through reading it in French and German. He writes about art, the body, childhood, society, nature, the spirit of places, the secret lives of words. He believes you can create complex things from simple means.

Sue Mara lives between Bristol and Scotland. She loves to make photography, poetry, songs and small books. A new passion is historical research, after deep-diving into old maps, lost wells of Galloway, and Kells gravestones. She is slowly working on an art and music project inspired by North Ronaldsay, where she lived for two years.

Christian McEwen is a freelance writer and workshop leader, originally from the UK. She is the author of several books, including *World Enough & Time: On Creativity and Slowing Down*, now in its eighth printing. She is currently working on a book called *In Praise of Listening*, from which this excerpt is taken. www.christianmcewen.com

Bruach Mhor lives overlooking Iona and loves sea slugs. His poems have most recently appeared in *Gutter*, *Causeway*, *Dream Catcher*, *Black Box Manifold* and in recent anthologies from Dreich Press and Soor Ploom Press. His concrete poetry has appeared in *Streetcake* and *Tentacular*.

Laurence Mitchell is a Norfolk-based writer with a strong interest in walking, wildlife, local history and landscape. He has written a number of travel and walking guidebooks and is author of *Westering*, published by Saraband in 2021, an account of a slow coast-to-coast journey on foot across central England and Wales. He is currently working on a book on flint, its landscapes and cultural history. His blog *East of Elveden* can be found at <https://eastofelvedenwordpress.com>

Anne Scott has been associated with Geopoetics in Scotland since its inauguration in 1989 and was present at the first meeting in the old Atheneum, Glasgow. She has been a lecturer on literature concluding at Glasgow University in 2019, is an Open University Tutor in Arts and Literature, a guest lecturer on poetry in America and Ireland and does conference work widely, also on poetry. Anne published a book about bookshops in 2011 then a paperback version in 2016. Her essay *On Exactness* was included in *Grounding A World, Essays on the work of Kenneth White*. She has had essays in *The Scotsman* and *Glasgow Herald* including one about the first meeting at the Atheneum to launch Scottish Geopoetics. Also, featured articles in *The Lady*, and an essay in the T.E.S. Anne broadcasts with Radio Scotland - short essays and discussion and *Women's Hour*. She has a new book in progress.

Cindy Stevens lives on the west coast of Barra, in what is believed to have been an important Neolithic settlement and close to the site of the only Viking burial to be found on the island. She has published poetry as well as non-fiction on the subjects of social policy, trees and Sherlock Holmes.

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-visions of Politics, Subjectivity and Ethics*. In his spare time he is a songwriter, often drawing inspiration from geopoetic themes, and an attendee at a local Quaker meeting.

Mary Thomson lives in Glasgow, in her 17th home since leaving her family farm in Cheshire, aged 18. Since she moved to Scotland from North Yorkshire in 2006 she has published seven pamphlets, three of which were shortlisted for the Callum Macdonald Memorial Pamphlet Award. Her poems have appeared in many journals and she was recently awarded the Scottish Association of Writers John Muir prize for her poem *The Wild Atlantic Way*. The northern Yorkshire Dale, Nidderdale, and the Scottish mountains and islands sustain her, but she has travelled widely.

Caroline Watson is a Canadian Scot dividing her time between her studio in an old thread mill and working in housing and homelessness. She completed her studies at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design with a self-directed residency in the Orkney Islands. She enjoys the labour of making drawings in mixed materials depicting light and space to create work that is about our relationship to place. She is a member of the SCG Council and part of the editorial team. www.carolinewatsonart.com @carolinewatsonpaisley

James Murray-White is a writer & filmmaker, and previous journalist & theatre-maker, long fascinated with mediating greater connection to nature, and weaving all the forms of story to do this. www.findingblake.org.uk is the project website for his 2021 doc *Finding Blake*.



June 2023

