

Not my Circus, Not my Monkey
New Work in Scots & English
From
Sheena Blackhall & Tom Hubbard



ABERDEEN: MALFRANTEAUX CONCEPTS 2020

Not my Circus, Not my Monkey

Poems & Tales in Scots & English by Sheena Blackhall & Tom Hubbard

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The cover image is of an Aztec monkey god

Acknowledgements (1) Sheena Blackhall

Ozomatli the Aztec monkey was considered the companion spirit ('nahual') and servant of the god Xochipilli (god of music and dance). The monkey was a creature associated with the arts, games and fun. The song 'Elphinstane' was written to commemorate the Institute's 25th anniversary. Others celebrate the recently opened Music Hall & Art Gallery in Aberdeen. Gairden Veestors was inspired by a calendar created by the wildlife photographer Catriona Low of Kintore. Dreams was written in Glasgow's Botanic Gardens inspired by a tea tree, during a workshop overseen by Larry Butler. Blythe was one of the first poems written as Makar for the Doric Board. Blythe Yule in Aiberdeen was published in the Evening Express. Thanks are due to Philip & Vicki Watt for their ongoing help and support.

For more information on publications by Sheena Blackhall, visit <http://sheenablackhall.blogspot.com> or the on-line catalogue of the Nat. Library of Scotland www.nls.uk/catalogues/online/index/html. All of Blackhall's poems in Scots and English, are now uploaded on www.poemhunter.com. Her website can be found on <http://smiddleton4.wix.com/sheena-blackhall>. An interview in podcast form with the poet appears on:

<http://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/connect/podcast/sheena-blackhall>

Thanks are also due to Malfranteaux Concepts for agreeing to publish this Collection.

Sheena Blackhall, March 2020

Acknowledgements (2) Tom Hubbard

Not all the pieces in my section are 'new' in a strict sense, but they appear here together, along with more recent items, for the first time. Thanks to the Ledig-Rowohlt Foundation for my 2012 residency at the Château Lavigny, Canton of Vaud, Switzerland, where a number of these pieces were composed.

I'd also like to thank the Elphinstone Institute of Aberdeen University where, as a Visiting Scholar in 2012, I gave the lecture on William Alexander; I'm also indebted to my friends at Glasgow University's Slavonic section (School of Modern Languages and Cultures) for inviting me to present the paper on Pushkin in Scotland at a weekend conference in December 2019. I was fair joco when Sheena invited me to share this pamphlet, the third of our collaborations since 2012! My daughter Claire Hubbard has helped with the pagination.

Thanks, too, to the editors of the following publications where some of these pieces appeared for the first time: *Bella Caledonia; A Festschrift for Duncan Glen at Seventy-Five; Frax; The Glad Rag; Lallans; The One O' Clock Gun; Scotia Nova; Scottish Poetry in Translation.*

For details of my recent books of poetry and fiction, please visit the website of Grace Notes Publications. Details of these and my other works are also available on the online catalogues of the National Library of Scotland, Glasgow University Library, and the Scottish Poetry Library.

Tom Hubbard, March 2020

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Pushkin in Scotland

SHEENA BLACKHALL

Not my Circus, not my Monkey (Polish Proverb)

Not my Circus, not my Monkey
I live in a totally different country
Where even the Cheshire cat is chunky
And every dustman owns a flunky
Where mice are huge and giraffes are stumpy
Porridge is spicy and tramps are swanky

In The Bazaars of Hyderabad

Owersett in Scots from a poem by Sarojini Naidu

Fit dae ye sell, O venders?
Richly yer trock's ootlaid.
Turbans o crammosie, siller,
Claes o poorple brocade,
Keekin glaisses wi amber,
Dirks wi haunles o jade.

Fit dae ye wey, O vendors?
Saffron, lentil an rice.
Fit dae ye grind, O lassies?
Sandalwid, henna an spice.
Fit dae ye cry, O pedlars?
Chessmen an ivory dice.

Fit dae ye makk, O gowdsmiths?
Bracelet, anklet an ring,
Bells fur the feet o blae doos,
Dweeble's a dragon-flee's wing,
Girdles o gowd fur dauncers,
Scabbards o gowd for kings.

Fit dae ye cry, O fruit venders?
Citron, pomegranate, plum.
Fit dae ye play, O musicians?
Sitar, Sarangi, drum.
Fit dae ye chant, O magicians?
Spells for aeons tae cam.

Fit dae ye wyve, O flooer-quiues?
Wi tossels o azure an reid?
Croons fur the broo o a bridegroom,
Chaplets tae garland his bed,
Sheets o fite flooers new-gaithered
Tae perfume the sleep o the deid.

Jottings for a Noctuary

The darkness of the dead hours
Chills all night musings bitter to the bone

An owl floats, wings like rippling velvet,
Across the moon's stark face

In somebody's house, life
Gutters like a candle
Someone's Adam's apple
Rattles like a snake

A teddy is slumped, wall eyed
In a yesterday house I lived in long ago
It was never really my teddy, but I pretended

'It's your brother's,' mother told me
Though he was fourteen, smoked and went with girls

My shadow is hunched on the bed
Like a kicked bean bag
It never learned the knack of charming others

Softly, softly, like owl-breast feathers
The snow drifts down,
Into the waiting arms of the frozen world

In the 20th Century, specially invited Tarland folk went through the Curler's Coort to become 'made' curlers:

The Curler's Coort

Hae ye heard o the Curler's Coort?
It's a Britherhood that's secret
An foo dae ye jyne it, ye say?
It's a secret. The curlers keep it!

Dae they bare their knees in the ice?
Dae they hae a Masonic goat?
Are they blinfauld in a haa
Wi a curlin stane roon their throat?

I've heard that drink is taen
Bit thon's aften the wye wi men
Did ye gyang through the Curler's Coort?
Gin I shook yer haun, wid I ken?

Gerard Rochford, i.m. December 2019

He may have gone away,
His home be dark and cold,
His words will always stay.

His life was never grey
From Worcestershire's threshold
By Hong Kong's rich array.

To Aberdeen's highway
A Dead Good Poet, bold:
With much of worth to say.

His poems were global, stray
Against all war and ill
Such poems are here to stay
He has not gone away

Furryboots City

I'm a native o Furryboots City
Far Winter is giein it laldy
The onding is smorin the cassies
Which is sair on the heid gin yer baldie

The scurries are dour an carnaptious
The doos are disjaskit an dour
Bit wyte till Spring lowses her kirtle
See Furryboots city in flooer

See the granite in siller glents skinklin
See the Dee an the Don reach the sea
Like twa airms raaxxin oot frae the kintra
A wattery bosie tae gie

O Embro has ghaisties an Ghoulies
An Glesga has boats on the Clyde
Bit in the North East we hae smeddum
A fine herbour... a bield frae the tide

Gin ye wauk doon the toon fur a daunder
Ye'll surely ken somebody ye meet
Preen yer lugs back tae sook in the Doric
That's spukken in shoppies an street

Hear the scaffies teem bins blythely fusslin
Hear a waddin outside the toon haa
See the spires o heich kirks an cathedral
Wis there iver a city sae braa?

The Elphinstane Institute

Tune : A cuttie variant o The Wee Cooper o Fife

The Elphinstane Institute's yetts ajee
25 years in the Varsity
O Aiberdeen, it's aye tae the fore
Tae giein a heist tae the North East lore
Wi studyin customs an myths galore

The Director body is Tam McKean
Ian Russell's anither that ye will ken
An here's a list o some PhDs
Fiddles an Immigrants, sang cds,
An Shamanism wi DVDs

Cullerie Wikkeyn an Toulmin enthrall
Wee Boaties, Smithsonian in the Mall
Fiona-Jane in the Tourism Seat
Claire Needler wi Project o Hame complete
Wi Carley Williams on NAFCo's beat

Simon Gall's on Publicity
Veesit oor Buchan Library
Frances Wilkins' ethnomusicology

Alison Sharman's Elph's guarantee
That aa rins smeethly as smeeth can be

Paul Anderson and Pat Ballantyne
Evelyn Hood, Irene Watt combine
Wi Sheila Young an Les Wheeler tae makk
A rowth o lear that'll ay attract
An David Northcroft, wi harns sae swack

There's Sheena Blackhall an Elaine Bradtke
Katherine Campbell, fa'll keep ye wrapt
Robert Young Walser an Traiveller lore
O Stanley Robertson tae explore
An gran field ootins held ooto door

There's Colin Milton, the Elphinstane Kist
Lectures an trysts that's nae tae be missed
Sir Iain Torrance, oor patron presides
Ower aa oor ploys...read oor latest guide
We champion folklore wi grace an pride

James Porter stertit tae publish buiks
On matters o wirth frae oor Nor East Neuks
Frae gospel singers tae Carollers grand
Hardanger fiddlers an a flute band
The pick o music frae sea an land

Nicholas Le Bigre owerluiks th archive
The Friens o Elphinstane help us thrive
Buiks aboot lullabies faith an fear
Fishin an fermin, ye'll finn them here
Gin ye wint tae veesit us, anely speir

Frae fowk an customs, the kilted Muse
Sic a rowth o collections fur ye tae choose
Frae cornkisters an drivin the bow
Frae Routes an Roots sic braws on show
Sic clishmaclavers frae Tam & Co

Mare Solemnis: inspired by a totem carved by Martin Raynor

The North Sea totem is crowned by a cormorant
Shaggy wings outstretched
With a golden fish in its beak
Suddenly snatched by death

Beneath its claws, the head of Aeolus
God of the storm winds, cheeks
Puffed out like a cloud from a pressure cooker
Or an angry Highland piper

The mediaeval sun shines out
Over a nude girl, menstruating
Representing the ebb and low
Of Natural cycles

Two seamen dance attendance by her side
While in a boat below
Sailors row ferociously off to nowhere

Three magnificent ship's cats
Ratters, from whiskers to tails
Gaze out on the glassy horizon
Of the gallery floor
A suitable totem for a Sea Port City

Ma bairn has nae nemme yet

A Scots Owersett o the poem bi the Korean Kim Nam-Jo

Ma bairn has nae nemme yet
Like a new-born chucken or a pup
Ma bairn isnae nemmed yet

Fit nummerless screivins I luiked ower
At daybrakk an night an evenin ower again
Bit nae wird did I fin
That is bonnie as the bairn

Starnie park o the lift
Or howpie o pearlins in the deep
Far can the neemme be fand? Foo can I?

Ma bairn his nae nemme yet
Like an unnamed bird or fite flooers
Frae the farrest lan tae the first
I hae nae name fur this bairn o oors

Scottish Kali: inspired by The Age of Kali by Stephen Bird

Scottish Kali confronts the bemused observer
She is blue as Krishna's skin
Multi-faceted, many headed
Her profusion of legs, dangle
From Celtic kilts, like a spaghetti junction
Of Highland dancers' kilts

Ceramic Kali, Celtic destroyer
Crushes men like walnuts underfoot
She is making a clean sweep of the world
The Eastern Spirit of the Apocalypse

Gairden Veeditors

Inspired by the Wildlife Photographs of Catriona Low of Kintore

At daybrakk a tod cams snufflin in
Draws curtans o nettles back

On the scent o a moose or a mappie
On the gairden's girssy track

A futterat keeks frae a mowdie's hill
On the scran fur a bittie o meat
His een are bricht an his neb is weet
Sherp cleuks on his furry feet

Pyots fecht ower suet an nuts
As fat's twa tubs o lard
Skreichin like fans at a festival
Wi the rooze o a pair o cyards

Squirrel an gled an pheasant braw
Mappie an yalla yeitie
Lowp an flee an skitter about
Wi jaikie, corbie, lintie

They aa help sweeten a Sizzon's day
Thon veesitors, feathered or furred
An flooers an trees aa need the heeze
O the incam o breet or bird

On Ageing

The years have fluttered off like moths
The moonlight casts a sickly glow
My sheets are cold as winding cloth

I'm like a scarecrow grey and wan
Watched many seasons come and go
I wake surprised to see the dawn

And all around is so changed
Now I walk tentative and slow
The climate curdles, grows deranged

People are now attached to phones
It is the winter of the crow
Skies fill with predatory drones

Forests are felled, mile after mile
Once they were home to bird and doe
Mankind is driven to defile

The very air, once rarefied
Is rank, where noxious gases grow
Ice caps and habitats destroyed

Seas, choked with plastic turn malign
Destroying cyclones wheel and blow
While governments ignore each sign

Soon earth itself may be a ghost
Into oblivion, gone tiptoe
All native beauty squandered, lost

Across the world wars suppurate
Whole populations, aimless, go
The victims of the Gods of hate

I have grandchildren. Will their fate
Be compromised, a cruel cost?
Will intervention come too late?
Soon, I'll be dust, part of the dew
Of this small planet, tempest tossed
Earth, what have we done to you?

Le Passeur (The Ferryman) inspired by the painting in 1881 by William Stott, painted at Grez-sur-Loing, dusk

Twa quines bide bi the side o the river Loing
The younger bairnie sprauchles on the seggs
Teetin inno the watter, tint in a bairnie dwaum
Far gloamin's shadda hings.
She's riggit oot in fite, fite cap, fite frock
Fite breekies an fite hose
Like a drappt angel fa has tint her wings

Twa bairnies bide bi the side o the river Loing
On the lip o wummanhood, the elder sister
Flat breistit still, luiks tae the ferryman
Hauns ahin her back, wi fingers twined thegither

The dwinin sunlicht sheenin on her broo
Her lang blaik pleat faas doon tae the tap o her dowp
Warm an wechtit wi aa the ploys o day
Her blaik pumps, weet wi dyew
Her frock, like forget me nots, is blue
She kens noo, life brings cheenges

The ferryman, like Charon's hyne aff yet
Foo faist the years'll pass
Till he moors his dowie boat on the derk ebb tide!

Naethin will bide o this scene
Bit watter, seggs an trees
The clouds that wyte an watch till the warld's daen

Music Haa

The Music Haa, the Music Haa
Doric Column an granite waa

Archibald Simpson's Assembly Rooms
Wi public subscription an private means
Wi siller gaithered ahin the scenes
Helped bi Duke Gordon, an Skene o Skene

Freemasons laid the foundation stane
In full regalia in Aiberdeen
The Heivens opened, the rain poored doon
The sune tae be jewel in the Granite toon

By echteen twenty two, t'wis biggit
Inside an oot maist brawly riggit

Charles Dickens gied readins in ae room
Fowk pyed tae gawp at the dwarf Tom Thoom
John Anderson entertained an thrilled
The best magician in aa the warld

Thirty years passed, rebranded, braw
Renamed bi Prince Albert the Music Haa
Rooms fur Concerts, Lectures, Meetins,
A handsome ballroom, an exhibitions

Jenny Lind sang like a nightingale
An Clara Butt aye toppit the bill
Musical Recital an cinema
The Philharmonic Orchestra,

Fur the Dyce Bazaar in nineteen hunner
George Bridges turned the Haa tae a wunner
Rigged oot like a Montreal ice palace
Lichts like aurora borealis

Bocht bi the toon fur the 'Common Gweed'
Fur prize givins, pet shows o ilkie breed
Budgies an cats, an floers an singin
Sales o wirk, roller skatin, wrestlin

Bowie, Led Zeppelin trampit its boords
Emeli Sandé, gran days o awards
Programmes o classical, folk, rock, pop
Jaxx an kintra, an fiddle non stop
Seminars, art, craft, conferences
Graduations, genteel tea daunces

Categ'ry A, wi an input o cash
Like Phoenix it's risen again frae the ash
Fellow citizens, audience ane an I
I gie ye oor weel lued Music Haa!

The Mouse in the Corner

I am the mouse in the corner
Clicking and clacking, skeleton's teeth
My worries scuttle under rocks
Trying to stay out of sight
My masks change frequently
Mechanical as clocks

Time ticks by.
I don't do family quarrels
I'd rather stand alone and watch the rain

I grow afraid of steep stairs, slippery ice,
But I remain as punctual as a train

After happenings I need a day to recover
For the sediment to settle
I dislike fuss and bother

Life gives no chance to edit out mistakes
Grief has no grave, it dogs me constantly
Daily tasks are my little pegs of normality

So late, so late
I learn what I should have held dear
I am the mouse in the corner
Knowing the cat draws near

Walkabout in a Psyche

There are days I want to swop myself for another version
I'd like to change my world view,
The bed I sleep in, even the food on my plate
I'd like to peel myself like a black banana
And change into a lychee, luscious and lascivious

I could be a stone in a Zen garden
No need for haircuts, podiatry, crowds of people
No digestive system, weight issues, no diabetes

I'm weary of juggling days like a clumsy clown
I'd swop long dinners for dynamic fields of roses
I'd body-swerve mini-dramas for a dark loch
I want to be a diamond, frosted and mute
I want every day to be Sunday, that slumps like a tired sofa
I want to diminish the seepage of tears from grief
I want to be a string of sausages, tormenting sausage dogs

I could be ten pips in an apple, and mother orchards

Theodore Roosevelt's Pets

A conglomeration of guinea pigs
Bishop Doane, Dr. Johnson, my Dutch Reformed pastor; Father G. Grady,
Fighting Bob Evans, and Admiral

Dewey

Imagine the squeaks and squabbles
Worse than Noah's Ark, and all in the White House!

Eli Yale the Hyacinth Macaw, shared home
With two white rabbits, and buck called Peter
Josiah the badger, and Algonquin the pony

There was, furthermore,
A small bear named Jonathan Edwards
A lizard named Bill
A pig named Maud
And Baron Spreckle the hen

Not to mention
a one-legged rooster, a barn owl, and a hyena;
Emile Spinach, a pet garter snake
Sailor Boy, a Chesapeake retriever,
Jack and Pete, the terriers,
Skip the mongrel

And a small black Pekingese named Manchu
A gift from the last empress of China
Which danced on its hind legs
In the moonlight on the White House lawn.

Jute

Jute coffins are now marketed to meet the growing demand for environmentally friendly burials.

Jute, jute, fit's it about?
Makkin shrouds fur the deid
Kits fur fin they're laid oot

Nae langer jist used fur as pyokes fur yer shoppin
Or espadrille soles fin Med.island hoppin

Jute's biodegradable, green as can be
It'll rot wi yersel in the green cemetrie

Fin buyin a coffin, takk tent o yer loot
Choose the pride o Dundee, vrocht in India, jute!

Eco Warriors

Rabbis, royals, pundits, pupils
Students, workers, OAPs
In 60 cities folk wake up
To world pollution's certainties

Protests on deforestation
Protests over plastic waste
Protests as more populations
Become climate refugees

In South Africa, a 'die-in'
Hunger strikes took place in Rome
In Brussels picnic protests sat
Australians danced, the protest's grown

In London there was 'strength in grief'
Buddhists, Muslims, Christians, Jews
Held a faith bridge prayed and pleaded
For our future. We must choose

Greenhouse gas emissions causing
Floods and droughts and acid rain
Eco warriors march and rally
Give voice to the world's pain

Dreams

Written by the Tea Tree in Glasgow's Botanic Gardens

I dream of a nub of ginger
I dream of a pinch of spice
I dream of a tea plantation
Where the pickers dine on rice

I dream of the great god Ganesh
On his shrines in Sri Lankan hills
I dream of the fruit bats flying
Where a slope with darkness fills

I dream of my kinsman crossing
The coolie lines to wed
Who left their wives on retirement
Sailed home to a single bed

Standing in the Queue

In 8 minutes the school bell will ring
In front of me, a dithering puffball
Of a woman procrastinates
3 times she lifts a bag of peppermints
3 times she puts them down again

To buy or not to buy
Does the shop stock Maltesers?
Down in the stockroom?
She's happy to wait, they're nice
After all, they've rung up half her purchases

I flex my fingers into a kneaded fist
I grit my teeth
I will her boiled in lava
I would like to smother her with her woolly hat
In 3 minutes the school bell will ring
Now it's lottery tickets she's after
Not one, but ten. The lottery machine
Jams, stutters, spits out what it should swallow
My blood pressure's off the scale

In 20 seconds the school bell will ring
I leave when she takes out a sack of her Xmas mail
I haven't bought anything

Blythe Yule in Aiberdeen

We hae a toun tae be prood o,
Frae the Mither Kirk sae fair
Tae the carollers in St Machar,
It shines in the frosty air

We hae a toun tae be prood o
Art Gallery, Music Haa
As guid as ye'd see in the warld
An parks that are lued bi aa

We hae a toun tae be prood o
Santy's favourite lair
Far else wid ye celebrate Xmas
Bit Marischal College Square?

Blythe

Here is a list o the blythest
O things that the Nor East sees
The Feuch far the salmon rises
The plaid o Balmoral's trees

The peesie that wheeps ower Garlogie
The spurgies that cheep in the sheugh
Far the sauchs wyve their airms in Strathbogie
For Nor-East fowk thon's mair than eneuch

The skirl o the pipes in the Garioch
The lowe o the kye bi Braemar
Twa lovers fas tryst is made cheery
Bi the sweet caller wins o Cromar

The fisher that wydes ben the watter
Bi Cluny, bi Ythan, bi Gairn
The lauch o the climmers fa yatter
Ower stinch Bennachie's muckle cairn

The towrists, an gowfers fa frolic
The sattlers fa're new comin in

May they sune larn the rich, couthie Doric
That they'll hear, the braw spikk o oor kin

A Chronicler of Our Age

Inspired by Aberdeen at Leisure, a photographic exhibition by Martin Parr at the re-opening in 2019 of Aberdeen's Art Gallery

The Hummer Daddy Limo
Catch the mood of a hen party
A tipsy granny, bleach haired and spray tanned
Clutches an inflatable male nude
Penis erect as a cucumber

An onion as large as a beach ball
Is reflected in its prize winning cup
At the Duthie Park
In Exodus nightclub, a couple
Dance like dervishes in the mosh pit
Their hair spins like seaweed in a whirlpool

In Craigiebuckler kirk
39 OAP ladies strip the willow
With 11 OAP men,
Death having thinned their ranks

At the Castlegate,
Members of the City of God
Shake wigs, dreadlocks and bums
Drunk on the power of love

23 female ramblers stand smiling in puddles
Beside 2 men of the species
The others having ambled off to
The great hill walk in the Sky

By Burns Statue on Union Terrace
Hairy legged runners flex their aching muscles
Cheeks lobster-red with sweat

At Pittodrie Stadium
Supporters are snapped mid-cheer

Exposing pendulous tonsils
And irrefutable evidence of dental decay

In the Ashvale Chipper lures folk in with its smell
A whale of a haddock lies lathered in battered
Lolling beside a bed of chips and pies

Reginald Victor Jones CH, CB, CBE, FRS, FRSE, LLD (29 September 1911 – 17 Decem.1997) was a scientific military intelligence expert who played an important role in the defence of Britain in World War II. In 1946 Jones was appointed to the Chair of Natural Philosophy at the University of Aberdeen, which he held until his retirement in 1981. In 1993 he was the first recipient of the R. V. Jones Intelligence Award, which the CIA created in his honour. Jones is buried in Corgarff Cemetery, Strathdon, Aberdeenshire. His papers are held by Churchill College, Cambridge.

R V Jones

The genius who was R V Jones
Had science intelligence deep in his bones
ToWestminster Abbey his corpse hasn't gone
He's buried in Corgarff in Strathdon

Presences

Owl leaves her boudoir on silky wings
Hocus pocus, she's gone in a blink
Slashes she leaves in air flow seamless together

The child leaves her warmth in the bed
A crease in a sheet, after she scampers off

Two hairs by the cat's bowl reveal
The family cat's been round

The Sulabh Museum of Toilets, Delhi

The Sulabh International Museum of toilets is the brain-child of Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak. His painstaking efforts for marshalling even the minutest details about the development of toilet system in the world led to the establishment of this

unique museum in 1992 in New Delhi. The exhibits, so collected, have been meticulously displayed chronologically. Thus, it showcases the development of toilet system of last five thousand years from the third millennium B.C. to the end of the 20th century. The museum has three main sections – Ancient, Medieval and Modern

Do you squat, do you sit
When you're having a shit?
It's a matter of personal choice!
But in Delhi, I've heard, every tinkle and turd
And urinal is given a voice

Señor Salvador Dali kept daily a tally
Of all that emerged from his anus
In China a poo to the sty from the loo
May feed pigs, keep them living in gayness

Fish toilets with carp, when their hunger is sharp
Polish off every faecal emission
While King Henry the Eighth, bared his buttocks with faith
That his groom cleaned his bum with precision

In Oz you might meet with beneath the lav seat
A black widow spider that bites you
In China a rat, or a snake might emerge
From the toilet to greatly excite you

From honey pots, privies, cesspools and cesspits
Commodes, and ye olde thunderbox
Be very aware that before you sit there
Nothing waits that might blow off your socks!

In Japan, (how effete), they warm a toilet seat
And blow dry your quivering hips
Long ago, the UK, in a fanciful way
Had a 'treasure chest' for hunting trips

Roman Caesars of old, peed in potties of gold
Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain*, though fey
Just a simple urinal, so stark and so final's
Worth over a million today!

TOM HUBBARD

The Town Drunk of Grenoble

He entered the tram
 At the hospital stop:
It was clear he'd taken
 More than a drop.

A gash on his forehead,
 Slackness at the mouth,
Publicly inebriate –
 Unusual in this South?

Had he bathed in a pissoir?
 He wore coats of infinite layers –
Yet somehow you felt
 He could waltz up highest stairs –

Even climb the Grande Chartreuse –
 This unique troubadour,
As he viewed his fellow-passengers
 And sang of *l'amour* –

*'D'amour l'ardente flamme
Consume mes beaux jours,
Ah! La paix de mon âme
A donc fui pour toujours!'**

He'd a rich tenor voice
 That would now and then crack:
He smiled at the ladies,
 And they smiled back.

He performed by the door,
 Didn't take a seat –
Didn't pass round a hat
 For a bite to eat –

Just bowed to his audience,
 Smoothed his grey matted hair,
And disembarked deftly
 At the Place Sainte-Claire:

He'd have earned the blessing
Of a carnival pope:
His plaintive anthems
Belonged to all Europe,

And I renew the memory
Of that fella, old and weird,
Who sang of love to strangers,
Then forever disappeared.

*Shamelessly plagiarised from the aria, sung by Marguérite, from *La Damnation de Faust* by local lad Hector Berlioz. Rough translation: 'The burning flame of love / Consumes my days of youth. / Ah! The peace of my soul / Has fled forever!' The French text, by Gérard de Nerval, is in turn based (very freely) on the corresponding German song-poem by Goethe.

Swatch frae 'Zone'

Frae the French o Guillaume Apollinaire

... Ye're in a beergairden at the back-end o Prague
Ye're feelin blythe-like on the table there's a rose
Steid o you scrievin your bit story
You vizzy the golach wha's sleepin ben the rose
Feart you see yersel pictert i the agates o Sanct Vit
You were daithly dool thon day you saw your eemage
You're sib ti Lazarus gane gyte wi the daylight
The hauns o the clock i the Jewish airt are windin backwards
And you yersel are crinin back throu the story-o-your-life
Sclimmin up ti Hradčany and harkin throu the night
At the braw Czech sangs folk sings i the howff ...

Two Musicians

(The Swiss composer Othmar Schoeck, 1886-1957, and his brother)

My brother commanded: *Bring me songs, Othmar,
Make me the voice part for the cello –
We two shall play them here, in the lounge.*
I jumped from my chair (I can still jump, a little)
Placed the beer to one side, the piano's calling me.

I turn to my brother: *Let's go with this, Walter.*
We thumb through the pages of my Eichendorff-Lieder:
Fraternal rogues nodding wisely, each to each.

I hear women's voices, calling over the water.

Walter's guests are away, on the steamer to Tribschen:
We must hope they will find Siegfried-Idylls galore.
The hotel is quiet. My brother and I
Can make all the noise we want. Only the lake lapping,
The pebbles like jewels for a ring that never was.
On Mount Pilatus, they do not slay dragons,
Only tourists. As for us, Walter and I,
We knew other excursions, other challenges,
At the lakeside,
He with his girl, and I with mine;
Some distance from each other, but in sight,
The solidarity of two questing males.

I wrote these songs for *her*. Is it not said
That any creator – not only in sound –
Should be amorous for a singer?

A pause from the keys:

I look towards Gersau, scene of my watercolours,
And I ask myself if I will ever paint again.
My hands shake (except on the piano):
The moustachioed fellow, so quick to an embrace,
Is now withered and wispy, his ears protrude,
He sinks in his suit.

I hear women's voices, lost in mountain clouds.

Walter's on the cello. He's an amateur,
But I could never manage the hotel like he plays.
Always 'the practical one', he can switch – like that –
Becoming almost-ethereal Othmar, me myself,
Then back to the evening menu, deliveries,
Boatloads of those who may or may not come again.
Walter keeps his cellar full, and I mine.

Our music flits out of the room, flirts with the church bells,
Then wraps itself in its dying near-silences;
We negate serenades and affirm laments.

I wrote these songs for *her*, he plays them for another.
Oh my dear Walter, my intruding brother,
Why should I give you these for the cello?
I should have transcribed them for the violin!

For I remember a young Magyar lass,
Could draw her bow across the high arch of Europe;
Bartók fell for her – who am I, but must follow?
There are two women: voices reach me from the water.
Let this old fool confess,
The singer loved me much, the fiddler loved me less.

As we play, Walter and I,
Someone steps into the lounge:
Perhaps a guest returning early and unannounced,
Lingers for a while, steps out,
Whispers to her partner what she has heard.
Nothing more is said,
And we have gathered an audience of the living and the dead.

I wrote these songs for one, revise them for another.
Oh my dear brother,
Across and beyond these four cantons, as we lay by
Our own duets for intermissions,
I hear distant voices cry:
'We are two musicians'.

The Miller, His Son and the Donkey
After the painting by Ferdinand Hodler (Switzerland)

1

'Where are you going, you silly man,
Astride your poor old beast?
And there's your son, you awful man,
Relieve *his* tasks, at least.'

The miller looks on gallantly,
In profile handsome, proud,
You'd think him duke of the distant tower,
Hands in lapels, unbowed,

Appreciative of the sonsie dames
He looks on, debonair,
As if their indignation kindled
Our man's *droits de seigneur*.

'Why, mistress, when my boy's up here,
And I guiding the ass,
He hears folk chide that his old man should ride –
So *whom* should we please, dear lass?

Perhaps we two should bear on our backs
Our long-eared colleague? Fine!
We'll crown her in the village square
As queen of bread and wine.'

2

Many a fellow comes to this,
Where even parallels may meet and then diverge,
Tracks horizontal and trees vertical.
These peasant women are the fortune-tellers at the crossroads,
A helpful huddle. The folds of their skirts, their hair clasped tight,
Headgear tilted pert and practical,
Expressions open, eager, and determined.
Feminine bustle at odds with these stark branches
And the flatness of the fields.

The boy looks away,
Leads his donkey, whose occasional hee-haw
Is speech enough for him.

A challenging smile,
She assessing the Switzer Don Quixote*
Posing as Don Giovanni, the foremost woman
With dancing angle of eyebrows, cheekbones, lips
And gestures outstretched, gives answer:

*'This road leads to your work,
Where you may take your son.
That road leads to the pub,
Where you must not take your son.
Thon road leads to your wife,
Where you must take your son.*

*Which road or roads you take, and in which order –
It's entirely up to you.'*

3

The miller-body trots along
And hums a snatch of a country song:

*'What's best for the common woman than
To show the way to the common man?'*

.....

*Thanks to Heike Fiedler of Geneva for suggesting a Don Quixote connection.

Ophelia: Two Poems

Ophelia

From the French of Albert Rheinwald (Switzerland)

Just my luck to run into Ophelia
In tears (poor soul) down a dark endless hall,
And I said: 'The whole court's snoring, each and all,
What's brought on your melancholia?'

'My Hamlet was raving and threw me out.'
And I said: 'Can't you see that the Prince is a shit
To treat you like that? Just think about it,
You're too good for him, girl. He's an unemployed
lout.'

Then I said in my sexiest voice, on my knees,
On that carpet of soft sombre luxuries:
'How about it, hon'? I'm all that you need.'

And I touched her hand, and purred to her so.
But she, she recoiled, pale, her gown quite faded,
And, still in tears (poor soul), she answered: No.

Dreams

From the French of René Morax

Our dreams all die, downstream they're borne, and
rot.

The withered petals fall haphazardly,
Gladioli, waterlilies, stinkingly
Fester on riverbanks. Such is their lot.

Perhaps, just once, by luck and by the tide,
They're carried gently to a quiet shore
Where you can find them (and why not, for sure),
Amazed to see their calyx closed-up tight.

Perhaps there comes Ophelia, wan and thin,
Gathers these humid flowers and binds them in
To her dishevelled locks, to adorn her brow.

Blend a little hope with your chagrin.
Don't regret your dreams, it's daft to feel so grim,
Put them into verse, that folks can read, and – wow!

Howff

Frae the French o Henry Spiess (Switzerland)

Hairy, flechy, and bohemian,
Aesthete wi warld-weary een,
Fir a hale oor, thon stookie's been
Wi 's gless o cheap green pish, day-dreamin.

Wi 's po-yums (Christ!) his heid's fair teemin –
Bloat burghers ask: whit can they mean,
Words inappropriate and obscene
As hurled at thaim bi oor wee demon?

Ower there, young medics clink their glesses,
Lawyers, students forby (the jessies ...)
And me, my elbucks on the baur,

Wi naethin better under my bunnet
Than ti perfect this present sonnet,
And send it ti some numpty editór ...

Nero

Frae the French o Louis Duchosal (Switzerland)

Ti win free o the stress
O oor richt royal thochts
We'll gaze daftly on lochs
O forgetfuness;

There, whit held us in dool
Sall brak up and sink:
On an island, we'll drink
Like a Laird o Misrule.

Fir a moment, juist, free
O the usual havers,
The brek o day fir 's
Sall blüme gloriouslie.

Thon wee god'll flee doun:
Wi his wine we'll get hammered;
We'll dream we're beglamoured
In a purple gown.

But deid ti aa feelin,
We'll come ti lose
Whit's provoked bi booze,
And hot scents o the willin.

We'll dae weill in dreich years,
Fir oor folk are subdued
Bi the dreams they're allowed:
Free as birds, it appears ...

We'll lull the graund wecht
O oor jadit bellies
Wi sonatties fir 'cellies
And fiddles, aa nicht.

Ti steir oorsels ti dalliance
We'll find accommodatin
Dancers whase undulatin
Sall keep time ti braw ballants.

And gin mair we'd crave,
Gin rare hothouse lilies,
Nor guitars, can fulfil us,
Nor heichest art, save,

We'll fling a torch ablow
Ti set oor slaves ableeze,
And frae oor palaces
We'll fair enjoy the show.

Dae Puddocks Byde There Tae?

Frae the Czech o Jan Neruda

Wee puddocks sat doun in the dub
Govin at the lift: the baldy
Auld puddock-dominie learned thaim hard
– See him? He gien thaim laldy.

He pyntit oot the galaxies,
The faur bricht blinterin sters –
He telt thaim o thae brainy fellaes
Folk cry 'astronomers',

Wha conduct experiments
That accurately clinches
Hou twenty million mile up there
Ye can meisure juist in inches.

'Ti tak ane example
(Credit it, gin ye can),

Neptune's a mere thirty feet frae us
And Venus is no even wan.

'Gin that the sun wis smashed ti pieces'
(The frogs stared – they wis dumb)
'Ye'd get three hunner thoosan planets
Wi mair left ower, by gum!

'Hit's the sun as helps us tell the time –
See its beams, that radiate –
Eternity's scaled ti a year: the day's work
And its shifts, ye can calculate.

'Whit comets is, we cannae guess
Frae muddles and confusions,
And sae I tell the lot o yez:
Nae jumpin ti conclusions.

'No aa o thaim's unlucky,
Nor wickit, nor juist nesty,
Likes in thon horror story telt
Bi guid Lord Lubyenyetsky:

'Yon comet beamed its rays on us,
But concentratit on that club
O soutars at their bevvyn
And caused some rammy in the pub.'

Auld puddock pyntit oot the sters
Athort the firmament,
As gin they were wee suns theirsels,
Green, blae, reid, heiven-sent.

'I doot that, wi oor spectroscope,
The rays reveal, fir whit it's worth,
The metals o thae faur-aff planets
Are juist the same as here on Earth.'

He said nae mair, thon puddock prof.
The puddock students stare:
They speir him o the universe;
They're keen ti learn mair.

‘Juist tell us, Maister Puddock Prof.,’
Said yin, his een protrudin sae,
‘Gin cosmic craiturs live like us,
Dae puddocks byde there tae?’

Count Lubyenyetsky wis a 17th century Polish astronomer.

Mither

Frae the Hungarian o Attila József

This haill week past I cuidna ither
Nor keep on thinkin o my mither:
Thon creakin basket in her care,
She’d trauchle up the attic stair.

I’d mak it plain juist hou I’d feel -
A yowlin, stampin, richt wee deil!
*Lat ither weemen tak thon pile,
That you can pley wi me the while.*

She’d hing folks’ claes up there ti dry,
Nor tell me aff, nor even try:
The line wis gleamin fresh, wis fair
Swirlin about in the brisk air.

Nae greetin nou. It’s ower late.
I ken her stature, and it’s great.
Her grey hairs swish in the clouds, and hers
Is the blue dissolved throu the universe.

The Lyrics o Captain Lebyadkin: *The Clocker, a fable (o sorts)*
Efter Dostoevsky, in his novel The Deevils; frae the Russian

Captain Lebyadkin, pished

There wis this clocker, he lived doun oor wey;
He’d been a clocker since he wis a wean.

The eedjit fell inti a gless, deed-ay,
But hit wis fu o flees, ken whit Ah'm sayin?

His audience

Ya chancer! Fit's that aboot?

Lebyadkin, gettin mair pished as he proceeds

Hit means, come summer, tak a gless or cup,
And nae shadda o a doobt,
Beasties faa in, sae their number's up.
Ony numpty kens that's true.

*Dinnae interrupt, jimmy; gonnae no, hen.
Ah'm tryin ti explain it ti you, AND ti YOU.*

Och, bugger it, we'll stert again.

Thon clocker, he took up a lot o space
And the flees thocht that wis an awfy disgrace.
'Oor gless is ower fu! Ye're gonnae crack it!'
Each o thaim skreeked fir his mammy,
But while they wis makkin sic a racket,
Up comes oor Saundy Bell, eh?
Thon fine auld fellae –

*Ah huvnae feenished! Geez a brek!
Nae probs, though: EH'LL NOT HAUD YEZ BECK.**

Oor Saundy, he picks up the gless, mind,
Ignores aa thon rammy,
And poors the hale lot down the lavvy,
Flees, clocker, and whit have ye,
Though it shuid hae been duin lang syne.
But look at it this wey, and this is braw,
The clocker, he didnae object at aa
Ti the tragic consequence o his faa.

Sae let oor Saundy symboleeze
Th'indifference o NATURE, gin ye please.

**Spoken deid-posh, mock-Kelvin/Morninside. Mind: a flee in Scots is a fly, no a flea. A clocker is a cockroach; Dostoevsky anticipates Kafka.*

Teach Yourself Scots. Lesson One

A rough parrot frae oot o Drumchapel
Squawked pure filth frae the tap o Cairnpapple;
 Sae a Paddy cried, ‘Feck!
 Wring dat wee gobshite’s neck!’
Said a Scot, ‘No its neck, pal! Its thrapple!’

Caledonian Mansions

for David Betteridge

*(At Kelvinbridge, Glasgow; designed by James
Miller, 1896; built 1897)*

Balustrades on balconies; oriels and curlicues,
Half-rhymes in russet stone — those turrets, domed, spired,
To upraise an unlikely Istanbul-on-Kelvin —
Close-knit labyrinth of attic and cellar, strict line, rebel curve:
Clyde-built ship, on dry land, but not too dry,
Restrained inebriation,
Architectural bevvy and no-bevvy, both!

Nothing boringly postmodern about this.
Here are homes, shops, community,
The palpabilities of things made
With the personalities of the folk making them.
That’s the Scotland for us.

Not by Mackintosh - but it seems to have *grown* here,
Organically, imperceptibly - and with human sweat.
A bourgeois building? Ay, but we’ve
 got it now,

Free for the looking, admiring, venturing in,
For falafel and samosa of the co-operative,
Or nerds (like me) among second-hand records:
Lured in by Mozart and leaving with Mussorgsky,
Lured in by Mussorgsky and leaving with Mozart.
A local bookstore with real books in it,
And staffed by those who know what they're talking about,
Who grew up here, can tell you who writes, who reads.

An ideal palace, the model
For a gentle, confident people.
That's the Scotland for us:
Discovered corridors, correspondences, integrative vision.

Bothies: *Two squibs to accompany the sculptor Kenny Munro's exhibition on the theme, Dunkeld, spring 2013*

Thoreau / Twain Variation

Enter the Walden hut:
A pilgrimage, folks say,
Though you're within earshot
Of railroad and highway;

You ain't quite 'lightin' out
For injun territories',
And downtown dudes can never tout
Crops of wild huckleberries.

A North-East Classic

In Willie Alexander's book
Cried *Johnny Gibb o Gushetneuk*,
The past's a fecht ti feed folks' bodies,
The-day's a fecht wi lairds and toadies,
But the future's latent in the dream
O the ferm-loun fir the kitchie-deem.

‘Heely, heely, Tam, ye glaiket stirk’: Tak Tent o William Alexander

O Scottish novels scrievit i the late nineteenth century, the heich pynts are Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Master of Ballantrae*, frae 1889, and William Alexander’s *Johnny Gibb o Gushetneuk* frae eichteen year airtier. Sae lat’s tak an initial keek at thae twa maisterpieces thegither. Stevenson’s buik is a romantic tale wi mainly aristocratic characters – in parteicular the twa rival sons o the Big Hoose o Durrisdeer. In 1871, the *Scotsman*’s reviewer remarked on ‘an almost startling reality’ in Alexander’s novel: indeed, it’s as faur frae bein romantic as ye can get, and the characters are fir the maist pairt ferm warkers, no landit gentry. Thon ‘startling reality’ awes muckle ti the virrsome North-Aist Scots – the Doric – spoken bi the fowk. Forby, Stevenson sets his tale at the ither end o Scotland, within the radius o Ayr and Dumfries.

A landit gent, fir aa that, duis appear i *Johnny Gibb o Gushetneuk* – fir this is a tale o an ideological natur, concernit wi the warsle atween social clesses. The ferm fowk want ti choose their ain meenister fir the local kirk, but the laird, Sir Simon Frissal, is determined ti impose his ain candidate, a body wha can be coontit on takkin the side of the lairds agin the tenants, wha’ll preach frae his poupit that sairvants suid aye obey their maisters! The title character, Johnny Gibb, is pitched inti the leaderskip o the releigious and poleitical opposition ti the laird.

An estate’s tenants appear alsweill i *The Maister o Ballantrae*, forby the warkin fowk o the nearby toun. Certes, there are tensions atween thae characters at the boddom o the heap and the highheidyins up at the Big Hoose. Houever, thir tensions are mair personal and individual rather nor collective, and they centre on Jessie Broun, a quean o the toun made pregnant bi the roisterin elder son o Lord Durrisdeer. She still adores him – he’s weill-lookit and charismatic, unlike his dull and unpopular younger brither. The tenants resent their rents bein collectit (an it’s the younger brither wha rins the estate) but there’s naethin that we’d cry solidarity in the modern sense.

Baith buiks hae their characters speikin Scots: fir the lower orders in Stevenson’s buik it’s their ilkaday means o expression. But the upper orders yuise it anaa, at times o deep emotion or banterin familiarity; or, ti pit it anither wey, whan the psychological temperature o the moment caas fir the yuise o Scots bi fowk wha wadna normally speik the leid. In *Johnny Gibb*, though, there’s a muckle clearer linguistic divide. Sir Simon the laird speiks the Queen’s English. Johnny Gibb, on the ither haund, even in confrontation wi Sir Simon up at the Big Hoose, isnae prepared ti modify his speik. Nae wey will he talk fine ti the laird. (Ither characters in the novel, sic as hae pretentions ti haut-

bourgeois respectability, speik in an awfy taigled mainer - the Suddron juist disnae come natural ti them. The snobs are the main source o the novel's fouth o humour, nae least in the genteel reaction o the pews ti the unfortunate worshipping fermer whase poochfu o birdshite – ti be yuised as fertiliser – fills the kirk wi its distinct reek.)

A leid develops along wi human labour, and mony o the guid Scots words in Alexander's buik are ti dae wi fermin, juist as a less-kent novel (this time set i the Lothian coalfields), Peter M'Neill's *Blawearie* (1887), introduces us ti the vocabulary specific ti the pits. Onybody eident ti extend their command o Scots cuid weill bear aa this in mynd, and recognise that the Doric o the North-Aist isnae aathegither ayont the kennin o readers frae the Central Belt. Ye cannae dae ither nor faa in luve wi a novel that begins wi the words: 'Heely, heely, Tam, ye glaiket stirk – ye hinna on the hin shelvin o the cairt.' Ye'll be swept along bi the sheer pouer o Alexander's Scots conversational prose; forby, aa editions o *Johnny Gibb* cairry extensive glossaries, sae ye've naethin ti fash about.

Sae wha wis this William Alexander (1826-94)? He cam frae a fermin faimily, but an accident ti his leg meant he had ti find a mair sedentary occupation. He wis a bricht loun and becam pairt o the Mutual Improvement movement – whit we'd cry a people's university – wi its debates and the scrievin and discussion o members' essays. William gaed inti journalism, and it wis in the newspapers that *Johnny Gibb* first appeared. It wis the anerlie novel o his that appeared in buik form in his ain lifetime; there wis indeed a buik o short stories (1875), but the ither novels had ti wait until the 1980s and 1990s whan the doyen o Alexander scholars, Dr William Donaldson, rescued thaim frae the newspaper columns and issued thaim as buiks. Alexander wisna pushy; modest ti a fault, he wisnae unlike his Johnny Gibb, thon people's champion wi his dour, ego-free integrity.

Thon chapter towart the end o the novel, whan the agein Johnny kens that he'll süne hae ti haund ower the ferm ti his nephew and niece-in-law, is ane o the maist movin in aa Scottish literature. Sittin ootside the hoose wi his wife, and leukin oot on the grund, aince staney and unpromisin but made fertile bi decades o haurd darg, he muses that 'though Sir Seemon may ca' the rigs o Gushetneuk his, I'm maistly seer, gin the rigs themsel cuid speak, they'd ca' me maister rather nor him.' I've taught this chapter, thegither wi an English owersetting, ti students in Hungary, France and the USA, and it's led ti animatit discussion: efter aa, it's universal, thon phenomenon whaurby there's the few wha awn the laund and the mony wha wark it.

It could be added that, in terms of literary history, Alexander's work belongs to the nineteenth-century European rural realism such as we find in novels and short stories by Ivan Turgenev and Émile Zola.

Pushkin in Scotland

In 1917, the year in which the study of Russian was inaugurated at Glasgow University, its Principal made a statement that would prove to be prophetic. Sir Donald MacAlister, a man of wide abilities and interests – a true polymath – expressed his desire that translators in Scotland might address themselves to Russian poetry, and requested them to make such versions in English and Scots.

The University's Slavonic section has gone on to answer that call in its publications and public events, and beyond the Glasgow campus a landmark event was the appearance, in 2014, of *After Lermontov* (Carcanet Press), an anthology of translations – in English and Scots – of poetry by Mikhail Lermontov (1814-41), who was descended from the Scottish Learmonth family. The Scotland-Russia Forum is actively promoting Russian culture in our country, and the Russian-themed events at Moffat in the Scottish Borders have also operated both within and beyond academia.

Lermontov and Alexander Pushkin (1799-1837) are considered to be the two most outstanding Russian poets of the early nineteenth century. It's instructive to focus on how two Scottish poets – Edwin Morgan (1920-2010) and Alastair Mackie (1925-95) – have addressed themselves to an unfinished but atmospheric Pushkin poem which in English has the title 'Autumn'. Its first stanza – indeed the whole existing poem – looks forward to the serene evocations of landscape and nature in the fiction of Ivan Turgenev (best known for the novel *Fathers and Children*) and the paintings of Isaac Levitan who was a friend of Anton Chekhov.

For Pushkin, the autumn is to be preferred to the spring, but the generally celebratory tone of the poem takes a tragic turn with the comparison of autumn to a consumptive young girl, as here in Edwin Morgan's version:

She smiles still, with red lips that fade to grey;
Her face has twilight in its blood, not dawn [...]

The last and twelfth stanza of this fragmentary poem consists of only one line but Edwin Morgan adds to it five lines of his own:

Great to sail off with it [a ship – TH]! But where to go?
What lands shall we now see: vast Caucasus,
Or some sun-blistered Moldavian meadow,
Or Normandy's snow-gleaming policies,
Or Switzers' pyramid array on show,
Or wild and sad Scottish rock-fortresses ... ?

That splendid if somewhat gratuitous reference to Scottish castles seems closer to Lermontov than to Pushkin! Lermontov's awareness of his Scottish ancestry led him to compose a poem 'A Wish' in which he evoked a fantasy Scottish castle. Lermontov had never visited Scotland, but he had read his Walter Scott, as indeed had Pushkin.

So Edwin Morgan is here deploying the Pushkin poem – and why not? – as a springboard for what seems almost to be the beginning of another poem – an original Morgan poem. However, it's Alastair Mackie who engages even further in this manner with the Pushkin poem.

Mackie doesn't actually give us a translation of the whole poem. He quotes individual lines; and yes, he gives us his Scots version of the first stanza of Pushkin's poem – but that constitutes the second stanza of his original poem 'At the Back-End' ['back-end' = autumn]. Here, then, we have eight lines of Pushkin via Mackie, followed by two lines of Mackie speaking for himself:

'October's set in syne; the hinmaist leaves
o the shaw shak fae their strippit branches.
There's a cauld nip in the souch o Aatumn.
The road's freezin; and jist beyond the mill
the burn rins blabberin but the pond's gealed ower.
My neebor's up and aff to the huntin fields
bladdin the winter craps wi his deavin pack
o dugs yowlin, waukenin the wids' deep sleep.'
Pushkin's back-end poems. I browse amang his draughts
and pen my ain texts for the lang mirk nichts.

Note that 'pen my *ain* [own] texts', and before that 'his draughts' [drafts, sketches], Mackie's recognition that Pushkin's 'Autumn' is an incomplete work.

It's as if a fragmentary poem calls on other poets to complete it, as in Edwin Morgan's case, or to use it as a theme on which to compose a set of variations, as a composer would treat a piece of somebody else's music. This is what Mackie is doing with the Pushkin poem. His 'variations' have the effect of

transposing Pushkin's four seasons to Scotland, and he dwells especially on how cold the country can be during autumn and winter.

Alastair Mackie alludes to Robert Henryson's *The Testament of Cresseid*, which begins with that late medieval Scottish poet warming himself by the fire during the virulent Fife winter. There are also references in 'At the Back-End', *passim*, to a range of European cultural figures including Baudelaire and Homer, but Mackie keeps coming back to the Scottish canon, including the ballads, and to Pushkin himself.

A major theme in Pushkin's poetry is the transitoriness of human life; for example, there is the image in one poem of an ancient oak-tree, which was there before the poet was born and which will still be there after his death – and after his times. That's a theme which is very strong in Scottish poetry, and Alastair Mackie quotes another late medieval Scots makar, William Dunbar: 'On to the deid gois all estatis'.

Mackie was the son of an Aberdeen quarryman, and many of his poems turn on the experience of growing up in the city during the 1930s. He evokes working-class life in Aberdeen with his characteristic blend of humour and melancholy, and in a rich Doric to which he adds a wider Scots vocabulary. His adult life was spent mainly in Anstruther in the East Neuk of Fife, where he taught English at Waid Academy. It was here that he nurtured pupils such as Christopher Rush who would go on to make their literary mark and to pay fond tribute to their mentor.

The East Neuk has links to the ancestors of Mikhail Lermontov, for example at Balcomie Castle by Crail, near the easternmost edge of Fife. The county, as it were, points in the direction of Russia. However, as Mackie lived by the sea, the imagery of his poetry is essentially coastal, in contrast to Pushkin whose loci are far inland, except for a maritime image in stanza 11 of the Russian's poem 'Autumn'.

Moreover, a major departure from Pushkin is Mackie's preference for summer: the Scottish poet cites Pushkin's dislike of that season, with its dust, its flies and dry fields. (Readers of Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* may be reminded of the stifling St Petersburg summers endured by the intellectual murderer Raskolnikov.) As for Mackie, though, as it's so cold in Scotland for much of the year, he is only too glad when the sun comes out.

As 'At the Back-End' nears its conclusion, Mackie takes up Pushkin's image of the pale young woman dying of consumption as somehow appropriate to autumn. The Scot sees his own country's autumn very differently, as a season

of intense light contrasting with the mist (the *haar*, as we call it in Fife), as a season of ‘caller amplitudes / o sea and sky’. To Mackie, autumn is a season which is very conducive to the writing of poetry. In his last stanza Mackie echoes Pushkin’s line ‘Pen beckons to finger, paper to pen’ (as Edwin Morgan translates it). Sitting by the fire in his study, Mackie puts it thus: ‘My biro yokey [itchy, impatient] atween the forefinger / and thoom [thumb].’

Alastair Mackie concludes ‘At the Back-End’ with a ‘makar’s handshak’ - a poet’s handshake - with his fellow-poet Pushkin: here is the solidarity of fellow-artists. Pushkin’s ‘Autumn’, together with Morgan’s translation and Mackie’s variations on themes, concerns the effects of nature, and of the seasons, on human creativity – as well as, conversely, how that creativity transmutes nature into art.