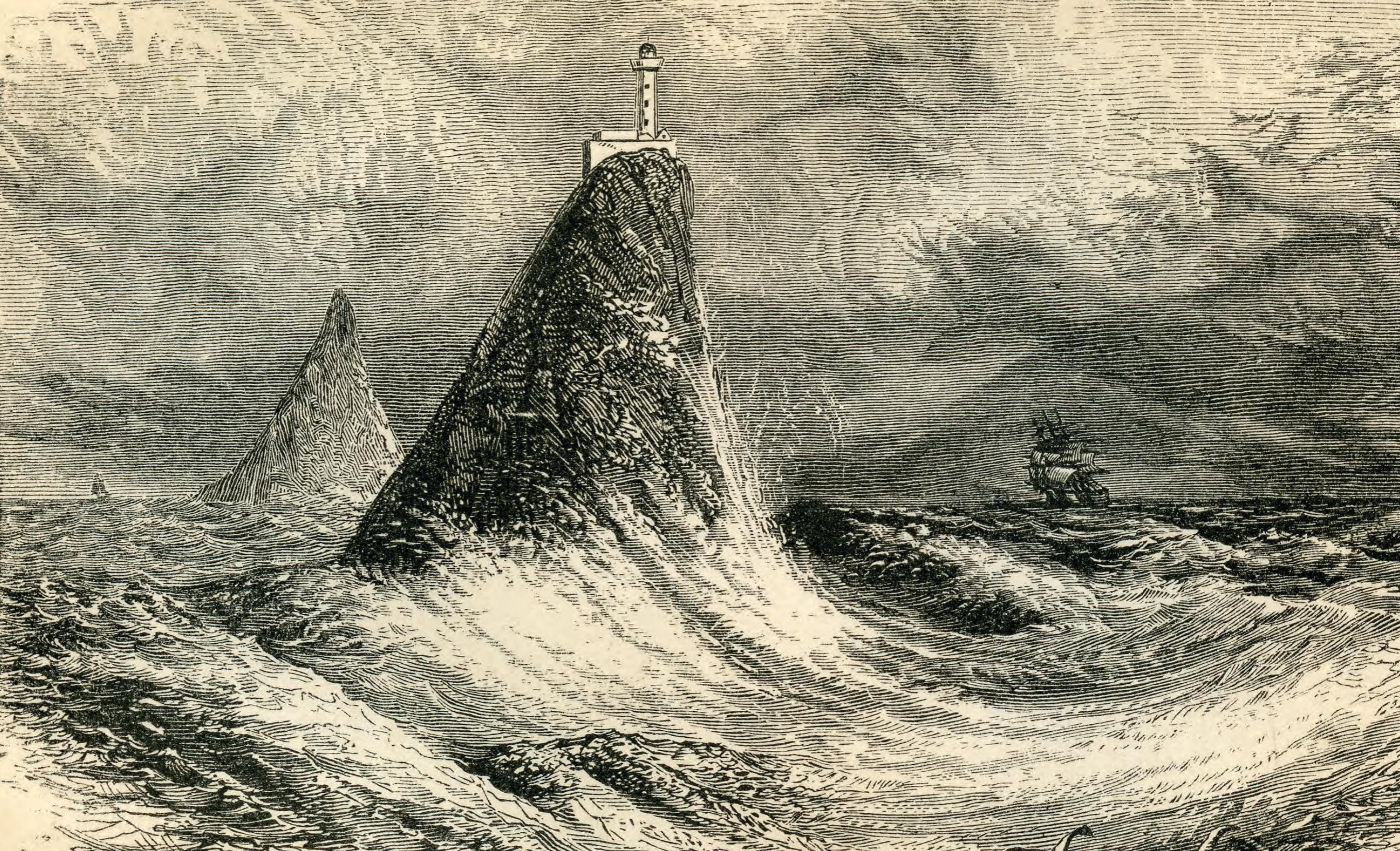


ARCHIPELAGOS

Poems from Writing the North



WRITING^{THE}
North 

First published 2014

ISBN 978-0-7486-9755-7

ISBN 10 0-7486-9755-1

Edited by Linda Andersson Burnett and designed by Mark Haddon

Published by the University of Edinburgh

Typeset in Caslon 540 and Trajan Pro.

The inside cover image: John Thomas Reid, 'Lighthouse, Unst', from Robert Cowie, *Shetland: Descriptive and Historical*, 2nd edn. (Edinburgh, 1874).

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This publication has been made possible with the financial support of:



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH



Arts & Humanities
Research Council

ARCHIPELAGOS

Poems from Writing the North

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About this Book

Writing the North was a year-long project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council to explore the history of Orkney and Shetland writing and what it means to readers and writers in the present. The project was a partnership between the University of Edinburgh, the Shetland Museum and Archives, and the Orkney Library and Archive, with additional support from Orkney Islands Council. We held public events and workshops in Edinburgh, Stromness, and Lerwick, leading to a major exhibition of Northern Islands writing and its contexts at the Shetland Museum and Archives. Our aim was to open discussion as widely as possible with an interactive website, interviews on Radio Scotland, and a schools programme that brought students in touch in innovative ways with their own literary heritage.

In a key element of the programme, *Writing the North* brought together university researchers and creative writers from Orkney and Shetland. We wanted to explore continuities between the history of Orkney and Shetland writing and poets and novelists at work today. We chose texts from the early nineteenth century to the mid- twentieth to give a suggestion of the richness of writing from and about the islands. Some are by Orcadians and Shetlanders, others by visitors; some in standard English, some in dialect; some already canonical, others less well-known outside the islands.

The partnerships were given a free rein to discuss any aspects of their text. Sometimes the researchers filled in literary or historical detail, but both partners responded imaginatively to the earlier writing. The dialogues discussed the literature but also the creative process. Writers were able to make contrasts and parallels between their own experience of writing and the earlier examples, and the conversation turned to ideas about language, the response to landscape, how we respond to history, the sense of place and locatedness, how different voices are represented in literature.

At the end of the discussion, the writers created the poems in this book. Some are personal responses to the ideas of the source text. Some re-imagine the world or the life of their authors. Some pick up and rework words and phrases from the source text, while others touch more tangentially on the original material. The poems use a variety of forms, styles and languages and we have left it up to each poet to decide how much of their texts they want to ‘translate’ into standard English.

The original dialogues can be read in full at www.writingthenorth.com/the-dialogues and a list of the source texts appears at the end of this book.

On 4 August, 2013 the Fair Isle poet Lise Sinclair tragically died aged only forty-two. Lise had been part of the *Writing the North* project from the start and her poetry and music have been terribly missed. This book is dedicated to her.

Discovering the North

By Penny Fielding and Mark Smith

In 1814, Walter Scott, the most famous living poet at the time, set off from Leith on a tour of the lighthouses of Orkney and Shetland with Robert Stevenson, the celebrated lighthouse engineer. Two hundred years later, the *Writing the North* project has retraced his journey in a collaboration that took us from the University of Edinburgh to the museums and archives of Shetland and Orkney to discover a seam of the Northern Islands' literary heritage that had fallen out of view.

At the time of Scott's visit, understanding of the islands in the wider world was patchy. In Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein*, Victor Frankenstein is looking for some out-of-the-way place to create his second, female, monster. He chooses a remote island because 'It was a place fitted for such a work, being hardly more than a rock, whose high sides were continually beaten upon by the waves.' This is one of the Orkney islands, a place not well known to many people in the early nineteenth century. Even Lord Byron, who grew up near Aberdeen, wasn't clear where Orkney could be found. In his poem *The Island* his hero is 'The fair-hair'd offspring of the Hebrides, / Where roars the Pentland with his whirling seas'. Orkney? Or the Western Islands? Byron isn't sure of the island geography of his own nation.

Practical considerations meant that there was very little printed literature from Orkney and Shetland until the early nineteenth century. There were no local printers, and mail and transport links by sea were intermittent, making it difficult to publish. Some of the earliest Shetland authors were women. Margaret Chalmers, a gifted but now largely unknown Romantic poet, wrote poems that explored the landscape and society of Lerwick, as well as her own inner responses to these worlds. Dorothea Campbell's equally unknown novel *Harley Radington* of 1821 is the only Shetland example of the 'national

tale', a genre usually associated with Ireland and the Highlands of Scotland and with the novels of Scott or Maria Edgeworth. More successful novelists from this period later slipped out of view. Most people have heard of Jane Austen; her Orcadian contemporary, Mary Brunton, isn't so well known, but her two novels were best-sellers in their day. Later in the century, the novels of Shetland writer Jessie Saxby combined romantic and adventurous plots with an interest in the social life of the islands.

In 1822 Scott revisited his experiences in Orkney and Shetland in his hugely popular novel *The Pirate*. Moving between both archipelagos, the novel's dramatic events and wild landscapes established the Northern Isles as a Romantic region with a Norse culture that made it different from the rest of Great Britain. But Scott's novel also takes a serious look at nineteenth-century calls for land reform and the way the islanders made their living, and his story of shipwreck, piracy and prophecy is undercut with a debate about the islands' relation to agricultural questions that affected the whole of Great Britain.

In the later nineteenth century, the literature of both Orkney and Shetland began to expand. Books were now published in Kirkwall and Lerwick. Newspapers started up: *The Orcadian* in 1854 and *The Shetland Times* in 1872. With new opportunities, writers thought afresh about the islands and their history. Picking up on Scott's vision of the northern isles, this was a period that strengthened the idea of Orkney and Shetland as culturally Norse. Writers such as Jessie M.E. Saxby, J.J. Haldane Burgess and J. Storer Clouston all made use of Vikings in their work, and, in the twentieth century, the Scandinavian past was a rich source of inspiration for the most famous Orcadian author, George Mackay Brown. Antiquarians revived the ancient past in their writing as well as in collections of historical artefacts. Walter Traill Dennison was a great collector of old objects and his sparkling stories in his *Orcadian Sketch-Book* of 1880 are a mixture of Orcadian, Scots and English dialects, blending folk superstitions with contemporary ideas.

Dennison, by writing in dialect, was unusual, because few Orcadians were doing the same. In Shetland the situation was very different. The second half of the nineteenth century saw a considerable upsurge

in dialect writing and writers such as Basil Anderson and James Stout Angus wrote classic local poems which remain influential today. The local newspapers carried lengthy works of dialect prose, the most notable being James Inkster's *Mansie's Röd*, which ran in the Shetland News for years. And, in 1891, Haldane Burgess, a blind writer from Lerwick, published what may be the most important book of Shetland dialect writing, *Rasmie's Büddie*. The story goes that Burgess heard some men from the south comment that Shetland dialect could not be used for weighty issues, and his book is a glorious rebuttal of that naysaying idea.

Moving into the twentieth-century, writers continued to look backwards and forwards at the same time. J. Storer Clouston's *History of Orkney* focused on the Norse culture of the islands in writing that blends history and storytelling. But Clouston had another side as a popular novelist. His thriller *The Spy in Black* is about a failed German U-boat invasion of Britain via Scapa Flow and became the source for the first film by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger.

The twentieth century gave the islands a new literary focus. One notable visitor was the poet Hugh MacDiarmid who lived in an isolated cottage on the island of Whalsay from 1933 to 1942. MacDiarmid became absorbed in the metaphorical significance of Shetland's geology, and here he produced one of his finest poems, 'On a Raised Beach'. Throughout his career, MacDiarmid blended different forms of language freely, refusing to respect a clear distinction between different kinds of words. His Scots poems, for example, often combine everyday terms with complex philosophical and theological ideas. By the time he came to Shetland, however, he had started to write mostly in English. One of the reasons for this shift, he was to explain later, was that he was becoming increasingly interested in science and that there were no Scots words for many of the things he wanted to write about.

In the late 1940s, we can see MacDiarmid's indirect influence in the foundation of the *New Shetlander* magazine by Lerwick Communist Peter Jamieson, later edited by brothers John and Lollie Graham for over four decades. The magazine still appears four times a year, and is the most important publication for local writers. Some of Shetland's best

authors are closely associated with the magazine. T.A. Robertson, who wrote under the pseudonym Vagalund, for example, had a poem in every issue until his death in 1973. Stella Sutherland, who continues to write today, contributed to the early editions; and William J. Tait, who wrote many of Shetland's most memorable poems, and who translated the medieval French poet François Villon into the Shetland dialect, was frequently published in the *New Shetlander*.

As was the case in the Victorian period, the literary landscape in Orkney was different. The islands did produce a handful of significant dialect poets. Robert Rendall, for instance, transposed lyrics from ancient Greek and Roman literature into what he termed an 'Orkney Variant', and his friend Christina Costie gave an Orcadian voice to women and children in her poetry. But, without a platform like the *New Shetlander*, Orcadian writers have tended not to work in their local tongue to the extent that Shetlanders have.

Some writers from the islands need less of an introduction. George Mackay Brown lived there almost his entire life, deeply responsive to the myths and rhythms of 'Hamnavoe', as he called his native Stromness, but his writing also goes far beyond the parameters of the town and into a post-modern world, where he explores issues of belief, conflict and identity. Today, Orkney and Shetland support a vibrant community of poets, novelists and storytellers, whose work in this volume continues to move forward the history of *Writing the North*.

Further Reading

Simon W. Hall, *The History of Orkney Literature* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2010).
Mark Smith, *The Literature of Shetland* (Lerwick: Shetland Times, 2014).

RAMAN MUNDAIR

Source text: 'The Rose of the Rock'
Margaret Chalmers

'The Rose of the Rock' is by the Shetland poet Margaret Chalmers and was published in her only volume of poems in 1813. The poem describes a day's outing from Lerwick to the island of Noss and the sense of space inspired by the scenery. The narrator sees a beautiful flower growing out of a cliff, but doesn't tell her companions, in case a young girl who is part of the party reaches for it over the dangerous drop. But the child finds out about the flower and longs to see it.

Raman and I were fascinated by the relationship of the child and the speaker, and about the meaning of the rose. The rose is something dangerous and seductive, but also isolated and vulnerable. Does it symbolise the latent sexuality of the young girl, or the isolation of a gifted poet who struggled to have her work published? We also talked about Chalmers's confident pride in being a Shetland poet. Raman's poem returns to the rose and the intimate relationship Chalmers has with the Shetland landscape — the way she claims the terrain as her own and finds a home within it, despite the difficulties she faces. She takes her wild, remote isolation and spins it into a place of comfort, creativity and possibility.

Penny Fielding
University of Edinburgh

MARGARET'S ROSE

(for Margaret Chalmers)

I go for refuge to the high places

buit slips idda djulp
steadies slips an grips da burra

I go for refuge to the high places that free the eye. The open,
the distance, the circling sight — wild, unbound, unkempt, moving,
sizeless, dizzied air.

hunxed ower fornenst da wind
rain-blinndit, sokken

I claim refuge in free-running storm-breath high atop cliff — sea
scent and salt kiss-earfuls of wind-whip and whine.

slopp sheep-gaetit, steep

I claim refuge in the dip and glide of wings
and clamorous cackle and cry.

wind tears rents
idda rain liftin een
tae glowerin sky

I find refuge in roily sea-lurch rise, fall and spill
white gyre, roar and roll.

a bruise upwellin idda soothwast lift
shooer-toarn cloud ower Fitful Head

I find refuge in luminous gannet blades sudden white
against gale-spumed waves, dusk-metal ocean.

banks broo aertbark yallow still
scattered sea-höved staens.
gael-blattered girse doontöm wishen

I take refuge in bed-rock crystal solid substrate torn and twisted,
tossed, tilted by time. Bedding slopes and shelves, extrusions
intrusions, dyke and sill, slow-echoing turbulent air and sea.

maalies hing idda updraa
abön da white kirn o da sea

I take refuge in living watercolour sketches, maps of lichen, finger-tip
touch territory bounded by rock and air, enduring wind and wave and
weather

sea-aeten rock, rotten an rummeled

I take refuge in... a rose?
Alone, unexpected. Constant
in wind thrashed salt washed rock-cleft.
Rosy-edged, rock-rooted, thriving, persistent.

lowse staens sudden slip
aye da fit-hadd ooncertain

I take refuge.
I take refuge.
I take refuge.

ROBERT ALAN JAMIESON

Source text: *Rock-Bound*
Jessie M. E Saxby

Jessie M.E. Saxby's novel *Rock-Bound* was published in 1877. In it we hear Inga Henderson, a young upper-class woman from the fictional island of Vaalafiel, tell the story of her traumatic life. The narrative includes smuggling, murder, a mysterious underground passage, shipwrecks, and a parent secretly imprisoned in a European lunatic asylum. Robert Alan and I focused our discussion on the place-bounded nature of the novel. We thought about how the novel depicts the lives of the islanders who chose to remain on the island at a time of high emigration, and we touched on how Inga's act of telling her story seems to be cathartic for her.

Robert Alan's poem intersperses two ideas in a poem that is both historically and personally grounded, and thinks about how we feel ourselves to be 'bound' in particular times and places. The poem touches on the idea of situatedness in the geographical sense and evokes the way in which the characters in the novel are 'rock-bound' in their manners and customs. But it also explores ideas about the boundaries of mortality, and our feelings when we come up against the reality of death.

Mark Smith
Shetland Museum and Archives

ROCK-FAST

Da tell's lang-telt a'foo da aald fokk
wir trukkit doon ablo da hard laird's heel,
owir blaet ta rys an kowp dir faet,
owir blyd o a bøl, an a bowil a'grooil.

Rock-boond, wir dey,
laek baests ati'dir bizzie,
trampin an brøllin,
laangin fir mødoo girss?

Bit yit dey laaght an wirkit awa, fan
wyes a'winnin trow an makkin merrie,
an wha's t'sae dey hedna mukkil pliesjir
fae dir fiddil an dir veesiks a'da kollie's glöd?
Wis dir aniddir miesjir at dey kent o,
sum iddir wy a'rekknin up lyf's wirt,
at we, fir aa wir gaer, noo dönna ken o —
at we, fir aa wir 'freedoms', kanna chert?

Rock-fast ir we,
fir aa'at we mann raag,
teddirt t'da hop
a'sum 'fortunate' faa?

No dat lang syne, I lookit in apo da faes a'daeth,
liftit up da mort-kloot whaar it lay, an saa
nae glansin ee, nae trimmlin haand,
nae aekin hert — an herd nae soch.
An tocht da boadie bit a paepir-kaesin
at held nae maer da fizz a'waant ir vaam,
nae maer as choost a pierie nest ootgrowin —
a vyndlis vessil wie nae nied a'noost.

Rock-boond ir we,
alesse we takk t'da sie,
till we rys a'da lift,
till we flie.

Prose translation:

The story's well told of how the old Shetlanders / were trampled down
by the landowner's hard heel, / too timid to fashion a revolution, / too
thankful for a place to sleep, and a bowl of gruel.

Rock-bound, were they, / like domestic animals in their stalls, / pacing
and lowing, / longing for meadow grass?

Yet they laughed and worked, found / ways of getting through and
making merry, / and who's to say they hadn't a surfeit of pleasure / from
their fiddles and their ballads in the oil-lamp's glow? / Was there another
measure which they knew of, / another way of reckoning life's value /
which we, for all our possessions, now don't know of — / that we, for all
our freedoms, cannot chart?

Rock-fast are we, / for all we're free to roam, / still tethered to the hope /
of a fortunate turnabout?

Not so long ago, I looked in on the face of death, / lifted up the mort-
cloth from where it lay and saw / no shining eye, no trembling hand, /
no aching heart — and heard no sigh. / And thought the body but a
paper casing / that held the fizz of want and desire no longer, / no more
than just a little nest abandoned — / a useless vessel without need of
shelter.

Rock-bound are we, / lest we take to the sea, / till we rise in the
heavens, / till we fly.

MORAG MACINNES

Source text: 'Da Blyde-Maet'
J.J. Haldane Burgess

'Da Blyde-Maet' is by one of Shetland's most-loved authors, the blind, socialist, and politically committed literary revolutionary J.J. Haldane Burgess. It was first published in the collection *Rasmie's Büddie* (1891). The immediate meaning in English of 'Da Blyde-Maet', might be 'The Blithe-Meat', or, the good meal eaten after the endurance or suffering of childbirth. In our discussion Morag and I looked at other possible meanings of this phrase: the reward of the struggle for regeneration; or, blessing after necessary and chosen pain; or, that which grows goodness after one submits to and goes through an experience of extreme hardship; or again, to limit the meaning to a precise biological reference, the afterbirth.

Morag produced a seven-poem cycle about Aedie's and Effie's (characters who bear some resemblance to Adam and Eve) expulsion, inspired by the immense physicality of Blyde-Maet and the way Haldane Burgess collides the spiritual with the secular. It's an attempt to make an iconic tale very real, to ground it in a bare Orkney croft where real people are struggling with life.

Alan Riach
University of Glasgow

EFFIE AN AEDIE'S TALE

*Na, what are wae?
Sand, stoor, raith
an rotten ware.
Aedie, pu a wisp oot
o the winna
an lot the sun shine in
on us twa red – assie whalps*

(South Ronaldsay prayer)

Birt o Yule : Pomegranate

it was pleasant to the eye and a tree to be desired to make one wise

First inklan o wrang wis the wey she
wis haddan her shooders, that wis
unkan, so he turned her about.
Her een wis droont, drookit wi weet.
He kent withoot kennan hoo he kent
hid wis salt-soor, that watter.

‘Hid’s no me fault!’
Withoot kennan
that he kent hoo tae, he fund the keel
o her nape an rove roon it
quietweys, harkan lik she wis
a gluffy coo. ‘Pit summeen on wife, thoo’ll
catch thee death, this is the first morn
A’m gotten up in black dark.’

Couldna hadd back tho when
he saw the thing. ‘In the name! Whit
possessed you? Wan rule an you brok it
fur that knappy knorr o shite?’ He gooped his hans
roon the thistley clew — ‘is yon a toy or whit? Who did you let
on me place?’

‘Aedie! ’ (He kent her briss wiss up. That wis his name
she howked oot, new – fangled, awful shrill.)
‘Thu’ll shurley no sherrick a lass that’s
just waitan inaboots, if the gundyman comes by
wi sweetiefolls? Try hid! See if thee wife’s no
bowt weel!’
He bit;
spat seeds and bloody watter, saw
seasons stretchan oot.

Effie's Voar

thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee

Mirkenan, the sters no
reliable, moon nivver wance shinan
on the watter, just the peedie red
ash-light peepan. She gret fur the
owld bonnie days.

The wag at the waa cam then, tick-tokkan,
knittan up like granny by the press.
Hid cut time in shaeves, een peat size, een
planticru. Een wis the size o his walk
fae the ootrun in a gale, anither the size
o a day settan creels.

You couldna trust
beasts either; the pup raised a weet snarl, birlan a coracle o
weet hen in the byre. She browt
the guts in, giban at the hot guff o
newly deid. There wis a pot, on a hook. That's me
inheritance, she thowt.

Knowe o Sterniglo
in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread

No tools but his good hands, his
good eye. Fun, beuy, shovan them in true under the sun
an the lavroos. The heartenan tight in,
the kye rubban its necks on the rags.
'Whit are we
shuttan oot?' (nivver a word o
praise tae him!)
'Faith, the
gundyman fur wan,' he yelled.
She redded up an his black heart smote him.
Mind on she has sorrows to come, hid said, so he clapped her
broon elbow, kittled her hip.
'Beasts canna just
wander like lost sowls. I need an ootfield,
a stone field, a weet field.'
'Slap o Quooybeezie,' she telt him, flaggan them aaf
on her fingers, 'Slap o Smeravil. Virigens. An the watter's
Greeny Grip.'
'How do you ken?'
'Like I ken things spoil, they go
fae swack to stink. Like I ken this is owld
hard land. Like I ken, Lord, I am sick o meal. Like I ken
you mak a grand dyke. I just
ken.'

'We'll get the better o thee yet, gundyman,' he roared, an
raked the guts oot o the cuithes, pegged them
oot by, geed her
vinegar an a sponge fur the spoilt meat.

Ower the Hill
a vagabond in the earth

Times he looked and thowt he saw
the leavans o
ither folk; or saw blue cliffs miles aaf, topped
wi smoke.
'Hiv you got
whit we hiv on wur sand?', he spiered them.
'Under a bugsy sky, look, buddoo,
a skate's purse tight as a nut, but fur
his tagsy strings , like the track o me malt
in the brew; trow treeded.

Here me owld creel, ruckle o ribs
sam colour as a partan shell, rust cut
wi orange. Whit bait
do you find best serves?

Is yur sand grey wi a hint
o the flint? Peedie buckies, pinkie nails,
hidan in the pools? Does yur rocks pivver in the roost?
Do you pit ware
on your grund, dig it in?

Here a sea urchin, whit
wid you call them noo? Ragged vanded lad, this een,
white heid, cut to the
wid, showan the shed, purple
wi cowl.

On a fine day, do you watch your bairns dig
fur spoots, an trip, an caper roond?
Sheu says you do. Sheu says she just kens.

Beltane Tirls
the firstlings of his flock

When the lamb cam oot
hoors late, the owld yow pantan an
growlan, hid wis
no pit thegither right, eye —
less, no
feenished. He pit his boot on it, hurled it
fur the maas, but they were gutsed on cauls.
Hid lay a day, peedie bloody long
legged sprawl in the lambeen snaw.
Singles, twins, a
brech — up an doon in the night, an every time
he saw the epple o her eye open; days she nodded,
haevin herself oot to throw leavins
at the klankan hens, peggan oot in a wind, belly
lik a pomegranate, keepan her back to the
spinnan tails dancan huppity
skippity in the curlie-dodie field.

No even a drawer, let alone cradle. No a rag o claes.
No temptan fate.
'Mibbe hid'll dee,' she said, in the grimleens.
'Hid'll no.'
'Mibbe I will then.'

Aedie's Peat Bank Journal
for dust thou art

Ken thee thy earth. Grund's
pernickety, hid'll no gie up
withoot you pay it heed. Here's
Moss o Cruan: aal summer a
mess o geese, fan o flooers, fine
fur ploys an cuddles, merry jinks atween
the cuttan — lemonade an feels! Her peats is
lightsome as a lass, opens sweet to yur spade.
Mind tho, beuys — whit flers up hot and heisk
leaves naught but stoor ahint.

Tak a spare tusker to
Broona Langa. I doot fae his smell
an the yellow stinkan smoor o him, his roots
is in a hot place. You'll sweat ower him
but the blebs
is worth it; his aamers is red
as tongues.

Mind noo, if sheu nags you
fur a right eezer up the lum, birlan kettle, bannock
haet,
go you to the left side o the bank. Thu'll find
shares the colour o sea, heavy as
slate on the hearth,
Hyon's the laird
o the hill; many a lang night he and thee'll
keep company.
Don't loss this
peedie book.
Thu sees, bairns, I'll no be here
fur evvir.

‘Joy an Hopp’

this same shall comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands

It’s the big O
o that peedie open mooth.
No teeth, just the U
curl o wur tongue, me
side, the family
tongue, carried on.

Oot the gerdin we geed, did we no,
pink as prannies, mooths aal
O.
Bad bairns! Noo
thu’ll be sorry! This is greeting, this
girny pleepan O. Learn it weel.
Cover theesels, there pirkles oot by,
scairts an dunts an blashy wadder.

Centuries, I’m been seeing that O;
Aedies an Effies howlan, hands
clappit ower what they never kent
they had, fae Masaccio
to Munch’s half ower the brig man, fingers
lik oolies
clappit roon a jaw
droppan wi woe.

An we keep makkan more! Here’s this, wur
new een, skelfs o nails
like shell shards, grip o a
limpet.
Whit can I do fur thee, peedie O?
Hadd thee
heid up in me big owld
veiny hands, keep thee fingers
oot thee eyes,
tell thee, hadd at! Learn patience!
The good milk’s cumman.

Glossary

<i>harkan</i>	whispering
<i>clew</i>	ball
<i>briss</i>	temper
<i>gundyman</i>	tinker
<i>wag at the waa</i>	clock
<i>planticru</i>	small plot or garden
<i>ootrun</i>	far field
<i>giban</i>	sickened
<i>lavroos</i>	larks
<i>heartening</i>	infill of dyke
<i>rags</i>	top stones
<i>swack</i>	fit, good
<i>bugsy</i>	dark
<i>buddoo</i>	friend
<i>buckie</i>	cowrie shell
<i>piveer</i>	shake
<i>shed</i>	parting
<i>spoots</i>	razor clams
<i>vended</i>	striped
<i>gutsed</i>	filled up
<i>deules</i>	aimless
<i>curly-dodies</i>	clover
<i>grimleens</i>	dusk
<i>heisk</i>	excitable
<i>tusker</i>	peat cutter
<i>aamers</i>	red embers
<i>eezer</i>	blaze
<i>shares</i>	peats
<i>oolies</i>	eels
<i>blashy</i>	wet and windy

JIM MAINLAND

Source text: 'On a Raised Beach'
Hugh MacDiarmid

First published in 1934, Hugh MacDiarmid's 'On A Raised Beach' was written during his years on Whalsay, and is inspired by the distinctive geology of Shetland. It reflects the poet's preoccupations with what he calls 'elemental things': language, religion and science; the nature of the universe and mankind's place within in it.

In our dialogue Jim and I tackled the difficulties of the poem and the way the Shetland landscape comes up against the 'stony silence of the unimaginable ages'. We talked about the poem's explorations in new forms of language and the way it uses different voices. We felt that this is a poem of visionary imagination which aspires to a kind of spiritual austerity, but that the poet is drawn back down to earth by his sense of human finitude — and by his distinctive sense of humour. Jim's poem is a response to the style and structure of MacDiarmid's poem. He comments: 'it was the sheer variousness and scale of the poem that impressed and intrigued me after studying it, so I did what I always do when I come across a beach — comb it, glean it, and as we say in Shetland, lay things up, by claiming them for future use.'

Alex Thomson
University of Edinburgh

FROM A RAZED BEACH

Reassembled from beach-scattered remnants, what is believed to be, after analysis by electronic concordancing and linguistic corpus, an uncollected poem by Dylan Thomas:

The Bead-Proof Seas

Let that larking dallier, the sun,
Beg bread from the stars;
See that the stone
Hungry at the mouth of the grave
Is overthrown;
Let brightness through a burning crystal seek
Innumerable shapes that heavier and colder and quieter are.
Only a mind as open as a bird's
Sees the vexing foam-bells on the hidden currents of being,
Hears the rocks rattling in the bead-proof seas.
But the red blood which braves
The beauty of the maiden's cheek
Is indifferent-dumb to palace or pigsty;
And I must conjure a fescue to teach me
That the moon moves against the waters,
That her daughters muffled, buoyant, prelapsarian,
Will braird again.

The Scots word 'braird', abandoned by MacDiarmid on the beach, was first returned to its phantom-Norn form 'breer' and from this fragment wisps of DNA were 'cradled' forward to reconstruct the entire genome of this poem by an unknown Shetland writer:

Breer

An eftirwirds, if he looked langer
an saa clearer, saa ferdir mebbe, if he heard
whit played on beneath da soonds around him —
hoo da burn at ran undergrund sang
wi a different air, hoo da blackbird
could turn da gairden intae a grove
as oorie as ony in a draem —
if he held his tongue whin he could've spoken,
or wis first ta see da breer despite himsel,
or wis gluffed be his ain shadow waalkin at night,
aye waalkin, or if da sea rolled in an a day started
an kerried on fine — it wisna ta spite him,
it wis joost da wye at he, wha thowt he didna care,
wis mindin on her mair an mair.

A small cairn of Norn words was removed from the beach and computer modelling used to replicate the missing material:

Hildina Fragment

Hraun duss de ronis
Queedaruns wo quirto
skreefa gregi scrannu din
hellyina i prap grö.

Hvarf! Hvarf!
Whgara nus qualpin
Havàrf havàrf
Errsoota gien Jarlin.

Geedum lontu oruckle
Tispierrà dramde
Dja hicksi hicksi
Asunde var um oxe.

An avon à hurdisfjell
Fanna øg kolgrefja
Sora bakka ayre
Û sark idda gretha.

Bretta wheeda
Soodn ü Hildina fletta
Whidna kollyarum
Ønddo milya kletta

By running a computer simulation it has been possible to re-allocate most of the axiomatic material that covered a large area of the beach. Here is a selection of the Self-Help manuals from which these aphorisms originated:

The Self-Help Manuals: A Selection

From:

Is that a Broch you're Building or are you just Pleased to see me? Ten Stupid Presumptions that Block our Psychic Pathways:

The widest door is the least liable to intrusion.

There are plenty of ruined buildings in the world but no ruined stones. What happens to us is irrelevant to the world's geology; but what happens to the world's geology is not irrelevant to us.

There are no twirly bits in this ground bass.

From:

Unlocking the Beige and Bistre Personality: Ten thousand Stones, Nine Conversations, Five Disciplines: One Tool to Bind them All:

What the seen shows is never anything to what it's designed to hide.

No visitor comes from the stars but is the same as they are.

Men cannot hope to survive the fall of the mountains unless they are more concentrated and determined than these stones, and as inerrable as they are.

Choose your enemies carefully. Do not argue with me. Argue with these stones.

From:

How to Awaken and Unleash the Language of Lapidary:

Twenty-one Principles that Bespeak the Ultimate Pebblepower Effect:

An emotion chilled is an emotion controlled.

We must reconcile ourselves to the stones, not the stones to us.

These stones will reach us long before we reach them.

The intense vibration in the stones makes them seem immobile to us.

The stones will have their revenge.

When Alan met Christopher: a Psychogeographical Phantasy

'The mole has a rich sexual colouring in due season under the earth'
- Alan Partridge

Of course, the beach works on the principle of accretion and accumulation. It won't give you any answers, no matter how long you muse on it. Trust me. Beaches don't. You won't get a deckchair steady on that either. Cantilevered.

The Doppler effect?

Not even that French guy, the designer.

No place for a man in kilt and sporran and the trimmings. Daft. That's one of your words, Hugh, and it's a word I like. It sort of does what it says on the tin. Like combover, and tensile, another two of my favourites. And Febreze.

The best sporrans, the real McKay — see what I did there? — are made of badger skin, I believe. Of course, with considerably more capacity than you would think from such an ideal blending of the practical and the ceremonial and it has to be real like the shaving brush, the wet shave, me too.

What do you keep in yours, Hugh, eh? Words? Of course you were always into your wee metaphors. But I like to deal with the real world, University of. Believe me, there's more than enough freight in that. There's the thing, there's its name. Touché. Especially if it's top of the range, iconic. Your metaphor's hand-me-down, compared to quality goods and craftsmanship. The incomparable to which we all aspire, eh? Although fortunately I've a lifestyle that still affords considerable luxury as standard.

As Love Once

i

I heard they took your beach
and placed it in Arizona,
stone by numbered stone.
With a curator, a webcam, a heritage trail.
Some philanthropist
from the Wallace Stevens Foundation.

ii

And waited until it dreamt its own sea and sand
adrift with the skulls of pigeon, antelope, mountain lion.
Put them to your ear now for their
airful of memory.

Slowly slouching around itself those same low hills,
a hieroglyphed sail on the yawl in the voe.

iii

I see you sometimes down by the shoormil,
where the sea, sullen perfectionist,
writes and wipes and writes —
never quite catching the same likeness twice —
where you like to wander,
these your limits now,
at the surrendering of the light;
and when you asked me, 'Does it still matter?'
I meant to humour you, but, 'Yes,'
I found myself saying, 'yes, it does.'

YVONNE GRAY

Source text: 'To a Hamnavoe Poet of 2093'
George Mackay Brown

'To a Hamnavoe Poet of 2093' is a poem first published in *Following a Lark* (1996), the final collection written and prepared for publication by the Orcadian writer George Mackay Brown before his death. In this poem, Brown gives his poetic advice to Orkney's poets of the future. The poem is filled with timeless Orcadian land and seascapes, and features observations about the islands' shifting weather, and agricultural 'old country images'. 'To a Hamnavoe Poet of 2093' commemorates the people who have inhabited Orkney throughout time, and wonders about those who will live there in the future.

Yvonne and I discussed the way that this poem dramatizes the role of the Orkney poet, and we were fascinated by the influence of landscape and history on poetic craft. We also talked about the sensory nature of Brown's poem, and we were keen to discuss the way that he evokes sound whether that is the 'studdering' gales on Hoy, or 'the pure source, silence', which allowed Brown's imagination to soar. Yvonne's poem also finds solace and time for reflection in silence. Whether the speaker in her poem hears the sound of the sea's roar, the cattle sighing, or news on the radio, there is a time for quiet contemplation when silence inevitably falls.

Linden Bicket
University of Edinburgh

SILENCE

You feel
in the tangle of limbs
for the lamb's fragile foreleg
furled in the dark
of the ewe's crowded womb.
Though the air is filled
with the sea's roar
and wind sweeps the grass
silence falls.

You look
into the face of your newborn child
an unopened bud
tight-shawled in sleep.
You feel his small weight
heavy in your arms
and though voices surround you
and there's clatter in the corridor
silence falls.

You enter
out into the night.
Over the hill the vast Plough turns;
Orion sprangles through fields of stars
and the Perseids sift
from the sky's tilted basket.
Though cattle sigh
and hooves knock on stones
silence falls.

You watch
from the kitchen's west-facing window
beyond broken walls
at Breckness
that slow tumble and toss
of the Atlantic on Braga.
Though a pan simmers
and there's the news on the radio
silence falls.

You listen
as the bows
lift from the strings
and the final chord
fades into stillness.
And though cars might roar
and race round the town
through the nave and transepts
silence rings.

ALISON MILLER

Source text: *Records of the Earldom of Orkney* (an extract)
with introduction and notes by J Storer Clouston

Records of the Earldom of Orkney is a volume collected and edited by J. Storer Clouston and published in 1914. The volume comprises over 200 early documents pertaining to Orkney from 1299 to 1614 with notes and appendices by Clouston. His introduction summarises his understanding of the medieval history of Orkney in its Scandinavian context and the excerpt Alison and I discussed details his reasons for researching Orkney's history in his typically flamboyant and expressive manner.

Alison and I discussed the way in which Clouston was largely responsible for creating the 'Viking Golden Age' image of Orkney's history and looked into his place in Orkney society. Alison combined these aspects of Clouston with her personal family connections to Orphir (her great-grandfather was a contemporary of Clouston and lived in the same parish). Alison's poem imagines an encounter between Clouston (the laird) and her own great-grandfather (John the shepherd), great-grandmother (Eliza) and grandfather (David the apprentice tailor). By intertwining dialect, saga tales and vivid imagery, the poem explores the Viking influence on Alison's imagination as an Orcadian, as a woman and as a writer.

Sarah Jane Gibbon
Orkney College,
University of the Highlands and Islands

J. STORER CLOUSTON STOPS BY THE SHEPHERD'S
COTTAGE IN ORPHIR AND SPINS A VIKING YARN

Eliza: Wife of shepherd/mother of David and Lizzie
John/Feyther: The shepherd
David: Son/apprentice tailor
Clouston: J. Storer Clouston
Liz/Lizzie: Daughter

Eliza He's teen tae stoppan by near every week,
Sometimes noo in winter twa three times,
A writer so I'm tellt, a barrister –
Though folk do say he's never practeesed laa –
Still, a clever man, you aye can tell
Wae aal the bonny words that tummlie oot
The meenit that he steps inside the door.

A funny chield tae lukk at aal the saam;
I hiv to shoosh the boys fae gaelderan
Tae see him struttin roond in his short breeks,
His bunnet like a bannock on his heid.
The finest tweed too, David says, and sighs:
What wad he no gae tae mak a suit
For Feyther oot o such fine cloot as that.

'And whaar wid Feyther wear it, Davie, beuy?
Oot on the Orphir loons? Caain the sheep?
Tak peace on thee, thu're no a tailor yet.'

Hid *is* lightsome for John, I will say that,
When aal the sheep are teen doon aff the hill
And there's no muckle wark for him tae dae
Forbye a brokken fence, or dyke tae mend.
A yarn wi Clouston is the very thing.

And gae the chield his due, he never comes
Tae wir door withoot somethen in his pooch:
A half a dizzen aiggs, a toy for Liz
A brace o snipe he's shot oot on the loons,
A dram for John oot o his peedie flask.

He's fairly teen a shine tae David, too –
'Mutual admiration,' Feyther cries it –
He spiers him aal aboot the tailoreen,
Hoo his apprenticeship is coman on,
And what like claes he'll mak when he gets through.
David's a shy lad, though, and disna spaek,
But Clouston's no weel kent for silences,
He'll aye start up tae chant and rant awey
Wan o his Vikeen sagas.

Clouston

Ah, tailoring, David, have you heard tell
Of the shirt that changed the course of history
In Orkney, when the Viking Jarls held sway?
No! Man, what kind of teaching did they do
In Orphir School! Just along the road
Not two miles! Not a half mile from here,
Earl Harald planned a great feast at the Bu.
Agreement between Earls Paul and Harald
Maintained that they should spend a bit more time
In one another's company and mend
The bonds of kinship that were stretched and strained.
So Earl Paul would come, their mother too,
Helga her name was. Frakkok, her sister,
Joined them. All were to eat together
On Christmas Day. But, ah, the devlish fates
Had other plans; one Earl was doomed to die.
When Harald came into the room and saw
Helga and Frakkok bent over their task,
The garment they'd been working on, a shirt,

Newly made, of fine linen, white as snow,
The Earl picked it up and wondered at it,
Intricately stitched with golden thread.
'Whose treasure is this?' he asked of the women,
'It's fashioned for your brother,' Frakkok said.
'Why take such pains in making clothes for him?
You're never so particular with mine.'
The Earl had risen lately and wore nought
But shirt and breeches and a tunic thrown
Over his shoulders. So he cast it off
And started to unfold the linen shirt.
His mother grabbed it from him, telling him
There was no reason to be envious
Because his brother had some finer clothes.
The Earl snatched it back and held it up.
The sisters wailed and moaned and tore their hair,
'You risk your life if you put on that shirt!'
He paid no heed. He threw the garment on.
No sooner was the shirt upon his back
Than he began to suffer agonies.
He went to bed and died within the week.
So that left Paul the sole remaining Earl
To rule the whole of Orkney on his own.
He knew of course the shirt was meant for him.
Still, reigned with kindness and was liked by all.

Now, tell me, David, do you think that you
Could fashion me such a shirt as that?

Eliza

Weel that got David flustered, blushan ferly,
And no a single ward cam fae his mooth.
A'm sittan wae me seween on me lap
An than afore I can tae haad me tongue
I spaek, 'Weel, Mr Clouston, I hope no,
My mercy me, for that wid be the end.'

'Well, well,' says he, taks up his kep and stands,
Shaks Feyther's hand and oot the door he goes.

Weel, says I to Feyther and to David,
I'm thinkan that thu'll both be ferly blide
The weemen in this hoose are no like thon!
Whatna weecked pair, what perfect tripe!
Sewan a shirt tae kill wan o their sons.
An education likes o his is fine,
A sookan turkey's got more common sense!
An sometheen else I'll say tae thee forbye,
There isna muckle aeteen on a snipe!

But Feyther taks a faer lukk in his een,
Oot through the cottage waalls, doon tae the shore.
At crack o dawn he'll step oot o the door,
And think I canna hear him lift the sneck,
Or pull his buits on at the ither side,
The tackety clackan doon the big flagstones,
The creakan o the gett.

By eyght o'clock he's makan his wey hame.
I'm been to feed the hens, collect the aiggs,
Seen tae the pig, got everybody up,
I brew a pot o tea, set doon a cup
For John and sit aside him at the teeble.
It taks a peedie while afore he'll spaek.

John

I tuk a walk doon tae the auld roond kirk
And thowt aboot the jarls that biggit hid,
Sailan intae the bay in great longships.
I windered what like folk wid been here than,
Gaan aboot their wark like thee and me,
Tendan the baests, coaxan the oats tae grow,
Gaetheran spoots and limpets in the ebb.

Imagine what hid wid been like for them
Tae see the boats and waatch the Vikeen men
Stride through the fields wae aixes and wae swords.
They wid been fleggit, Lass, they wid been faerd.
I thowt o David and his tailoreen
And windered hoo the lad wid fared.

Eliza

I pat me hand oot, tukk a haad o his,
Melancholy had a grip o John,
The winter dark worms deep intae his soul.
Hoo dae we ken aal Vikeens browt their swords?
Hid could have been some cam wae jars o grain
And were chist lukkan for a piece o grund
Tae wark and live and raise a dose o bairns.

I didna say it though, I didna spaek,
I sat wi him till he had supped his tea,
Got up and raked the fire, pat on more paet,
Set the kettle on the hob tae boil,
Lukked oot the window at the gaethereen light
Thowt on the wards me mither said to me,

We're never died o winter yet.

PAMELA BEASANT

Source text: 'The Heuld-Horn Rumpis'
Walter Traill Dennison

'The Heuld-Horn Rumpis' is by the Orkney antiquarian and folklorist Walter Traill Dennison and was published in Kirkwall in 1880 in *The Orcadian Sketch-Book*. Set in Orkney, it takes place at the home of Lady Crawford, who has designs on the local minister. The story is told during one drunken dinner party, and describes another to which the Devil pays a visit and is exorcised by one of the drinkers, a man named Vellyan, with a psalm-leaf hidden in a cask of gin.

Pam and I talked about how these two stories were connected — and how, despite the comedy, both the Devil and Lady Crawford are portrayed as dangerous forces who need to be controlled. The story has a mixture of characters from Lowland Scotland, the Highlands, and Orkney, and the Devil speaks both English and Orcadian. Pam wanted to reflect this in her poem, and wrote in a hybrid Scots/Orcadian dialect, which drives the dialogue at a fast pace, and heightens Lady Crawford's lascivious inner thoughts.

Penny Fielding
University of Edinburgh

THE REAL HEULD-HORN RUMPIS

The formidable Lady Crawford, hostess of a drunken, gluttonous supper, has retired with the ladies, leaving the men to drink and tell stories. She has designs on the minister, and waits in her bedroom, in a state of agitation, for the men to fall into a drunken stupor.

Enter the Devil

Satan Aye, aye yer Ladyship
 whit like the nicht?

Lady C Ho, ho, yer high-heid honcho-ness
 it's yersel!
 Weel-timed and bonny as ever.
 Yer a sicht fer sair een.
 Ye aye kent when tae show yer face
 an' I sure as hell need ye the nicht.

Satan Ye shouldn' a gotten so pished at supper
 yer a' ower the place
 an' no yersel at a'.
 Ah, Lady C, it's as weel tae be
 stone could sober ahead o' a rumpis like this.

Lady C I tried no tae
 but the wine wis sae guid, I hiv tae say,
 an' I had to get the meenister pished enough
 tae succumb...

Satan I ken. I had a wee peek at the leavings;
It was a feed fit fer a laird

Lady C Or a de'il

Satan Aye! Though the drink disna put me up nor doon,
as ye ken fine.

Lady C Whit a peety you have to miss that lightsome thing.

Satan Ach, it's grand jist tae watch.
They're no' witty
wi' the brawlin an boastin.
Vellyan telt a tale the nicht
mak yer hair stand on end —
hoo he'd sent me up the lum
if you please,
wi' a psalm an a keg o' gin,
efter I'd ben bumping aff his pals
an bringin them back tae life.

Lady C Niver spek! He's a puir witless fool —
they're a' like that, those men,
a' they think about is drinkin till they're seek,
yapping till they're half-deid, and they're no fit
fer wimmin or beast. And weel,
we hiv needs, my freend,
appetites, ye ken...

Satan which shouldna be denied.
Ach... I've a mind tae dae it mesel...
you're a bonny wummin fer a big wife, Lady C.

Lady C Awa' – dinna tempt me,
yer no sae bad yersel, a lang way
fae a' those half-wits put together.

Satan Exceptin mebbe the meenister?

Lady C There's somethin'...
mebbe the air of guid, or Goad, aboot him
heightens the pleasure, an' the challenge...

Satan But he's a skelf, yer ladyship, an' a Jessie,
ye'd et him in wan moothful.

Lady C I ken
but the bite wid be sweet...
Ye'll aid me, won't you, de'il?

Satan Aye, ah wul.
Tak the horn, my lady,
an' this wee boatle.
add it in, shak it weel.
It wilna fail.

Lady C Just tae ken,
whit's in the brew?

Satan A wee bit o' this an that.
Eye o' newt
pish o' rhinoceros...

Lady C Awa' wi' ye!

Satan Ach, it's nothing fancy.
Jist liquid lust
an a grand wee tipple at that.

Lady C I might try a swig mesel'...

Satan On ye go, buddo,
I canna wait tae see hoo it taks ye.

Swigs

Lady C You're friggin beautiful... my *Goad!*

Satan Dinna mention that name tae me!

Lady C Ye ken whit I mean.
Come here, you great stoater
atween my legs
come noo.

Satan My, my, wish I could dae the deed,
yer better saving a' that dirty mooth fer him.

Lady C Aye — let me at him. Noo!

Disappears with the heuld-horn

Satan [To us] Weel, weel.
There'll be a rumpis from hell this nicht
wan way or t'ither.
They're a' alike, these humans
kin be played wi' like bairns.
There's nothin' in that horn bit honey dew
whisky, and a wee bit de'il's spit,
but she's aff like a bat oot o' hell
an the puir kirk man wilna ken whit's hit him.
I hope he kin thole it.
She'd put the willies up ony man.
Whit's this — someone's makkin a stour

an it's no pleasure —
an is that the meenister fleeing past the windie in his drawers?
By, by. She'll be on his tail
fer aye more.
Weel, ma joab here's done.
I'll gie that shit-heed Vellyan a keek -
somethin to mind me
on the way oot.

Exit

Lady Crawford enters

Lady C

Where are ye, de'il —
It didna work!
Come here, you stupid
inhabitant o' hell.
Show yoursel'!
Tak my rage,
tak me!
For Goad or Satan's sake
SOMEONE tak me!

JEN HADFIELD

Source text: *The Pirate*
Walter Scott

Published in 1822, and set in Orkney and Shetland, *The Pirate* is Walter Scott's fourteenth novel. The plot hinges on illicit relationships, family secrets and the rivalry of two young men, but it is mediated through Scott's memories of his visit to the islands in 1814 and the novel did much to popularise an idea of Shetland, its landscape and its traditions in the public imagination.

Our discussion started with the way Scott represents Shetland, captured in dialogues about land management between a local landowner, Magnus Troil, and an agricultural specialist, Triptolemus Yellowley, who thinks he can improve matters. We also discussed how Scott can't resist placing Shetland at 'the edge' of things — something that persists in the depiction of Shetland today.

Jen's poem takes off from Troil and Yellowley's drunken debate about land use. Jen comments: 'It made me laugh a lot, mostly because Yellowley spouts a lot of ill-informed opinions about Shetland that endure irritatingly today; satisfyingly, Troil — a strong, sympathetic character — gets the better of him. I've had this conversation time and time again. If I tackle the preconception that life in Shetland must be an emotionally and culturally barren one, my opponent's final sally is very often: "but how can you live without trees?!" What are trees to people that the idea of life without them is so disturbing? I tried to get to the bottom of it in my poem.'

Alison Lumsden
University of Aberdeen

TALK NOT TO ME OF TREES

Talk not to me of trees —

a forest's an obfuscation, a thicket of footnotes —
too much consciousness to hold

in your head. A cedar's stump's
a homestead

a blood-red broch, a place to perch
our reptile brain

but nothing you couldn't knock up in stone.

A tree's a librarian a hard drive a shelter

the lobes of a great oak
sentient with birds is a mind

a tree's a crowd — but my folk
a birdbrained borderless Birnam Wood.

On cliffs and islets we're hazels
for each other

the aurora our hemlocks
leggy and lichened and I

am my sweetheart's leopard
and shadow and vine.

Biographies

Raman Mundair is a writer and artist. She is the author of *A Choreographer's Cartography*, *Lovers, Liars, Conjurers and Thieves* and *The Algebra of Freedom*. In 2013 she was a Leverhulme Artist in Residence for Shetland Museum and Archives. She is a Rolex Mentor and Protégé Award nominee, a Robert Louis Stevenson Award winner and was identified by the BBC/Royal Court Theatre as one of the 'next generation of promising new writers in Britain' (24 Degrees Project).

Robert Alan Jamieson is a novelist and poet who grew up in Shetland. He has tutored Creative Writing at the University of Edinburgh since 1993, and was also a Creative Writing Fellow at the universities of Glasgow and Strathclyde. His most recent books are a collection of dialect poetry with English translations, *Nort Atlantik Drift* (2008) and the novel *Da Happie Laand* (2010), which was shortlisted for the Saltire Prize and the SMIT Scottish Book of the Year award, and longlisted for the International IMPAC Dublin award.

Morag MacInnes was born in Stromness. She writes short stories, poems and plays. Her narrative poem cycle *Alias Isobel* (2008) followed the story of an Orcadian cross-dresser who worked for the Hudson Bay Company. Other recent dialect poems appear in the anthology *These Islands We Sing* (2011). Her new poetry collection *Street Shapes*, a collaboration with Orkney artist Diana Leslie, was launched at the end of April 2013.

Jim Mainland is from Shetland where he has recently retired from teaching English at Brae High School. His collection *A Package of Measures* was published in 2002 and his second *The League of Notions* in 2013. His poetry and prose can be found in various anthologies, magazines and online.

Yvonne Gray lives near Stromness. She is a writer and musician and has published limited-edition pamphlets of Orkney writing including *Memories of Lambholm and its Chapel*, a reprint of a letter by Domenico Chiocchetti describing the creation of the Italian Chapel. She was awarded a Scottish Arts Council Bursary in 2002 and her collection, *In the Hanging Valley*, was published in 2008. *Reflections* (2012), a collection of her poems with drawings by artist John Cumming, was shortlisted for the Callum MacDonald Memorial Award 2013.

Pamela Beasant lives in Stromness. She is a widely published poet and non-fiction writer, and was the first George Mackay Brown fellow in 2007, and the Scottish Poetry Library's Poet Partner in Orkney in 2008-10. Publications and commissions include the poetry collections *Running with a Snow Leopard, Orkney; a Celebration of Light and Landscape* and the biography *Stanley Cursiter; a Life of the Artist*. Pamela's play, *Long Strides*, was commissioned by the St Magnus International Festival and was performed in 2013.

Alison Miller was born and grew up in Orkney before leaving for university in Aberdeen. Her novel *Demo* published by Penguin in 2006, was shortlisted for the Saltire First Book Award. Alison has had fiction and poetry published in anthologies, and her stories broadcast on BBC Radio 4. Currently she is Scottish Book Trust Reader in Residence in Orkney Library & Archive. She is also working on a novel, *The Making of Veni Isbister*, set in Orkney.

Jen Hadfield lives on Shetland. She is the author of three poetry collections: *Almanacs* (2005), *Nigh-No-Place* (2008), and *Byssus* (2014). Jen won the 2008 T.S Eliot Prize for *Nigh-No-Place*. Walking, foraging for wild food and material for her visual art are as important to her as her language-centred practice. Audio samples of her work are available at www.poetryarchive.org

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