

Wind-Blawn: Poems in Scots and English; Comings & Goings: Poems, Tales in Scots & English; Thursdays: Poems & Playlet in Scots & English; Malfranteaux Concepts, Aberdeen; Lochlands, Maud (x 2); all titles by Sheena Blackhall, 2017, 26pp., £3.00 each.

Sheena Blackhall's reenge is dumfounerin, wi wark scievit in Doric an Inglis an stravaigin thorough aw kins o subjects, past an praisent, frae airt an science, tae luv an daith. Stappit wi a gallimaufry o aw kins o orra facks an fowk, lik 'Waterloo teeth', 'Smugglerius', 'Vickensport', no tae mention 'Desperate Dan at Holyrood', her darg is aye kittlin. Add tae the mixer-maxter a when o owersetts, a wee play an a haunfu o prose observes, an ye hae a hail vaige o discovery.

Aw thorough this darg, the makar's dule, followin the daith o her son, kythes ben her bricht tapestry o wirds, lik muckle black steeks. A haunfu o poems speak o her hert-scaudin pyne, her tinsell an her guilt; an her seekin fur weys tae thole it:

I sat wi him, my kistit son

Seelent, rowed in his windin sheet

Grief roared inbye, a drumly linn

Far sorra, guilt an langin meet

(‘Lament for a First-Born Tint’, Thursdays)

The maist eerie o thaim is the eldritch ballat ‘Ghaist-Spikk’:

Fa dae ye tryst wi in the derk

Ma darling son, ma lammie?

I tryst wi the deid fowk bi the kirk

They're ma friens noo, ma mammy

In ‘Wind-Blawn’, ye can fin poetic tourist airtins tae Embro, featuring the Hop oan-Hop aff bus, the Paurliament, Auld Reekie's ghaists, observes oan a when o picturs in the National Gallery an a byordinary listin o artefacts in the National Museum:

Limestone carving of an Assyrian king

A prayer wheel house from monks of Samyé Ling

Thunderbird transformation mask and outfit

Amethyst geodes, fossils, Kenyan garnet

Twa ither 'listin' poems desserve a mentioun. 'Memorabilia: Aberdeen' (Comings & Goings) is biggit wi plosive wirds that are as stieve an pithie as the granite o the city, while 'Savon de Marseille (Extrapure Mediterranée)' (Thursdays) is an ironic list o aw the 'naitral' saip's chemical hotch-potch. Mair peyntit irony can be fun in 'Three famous guests en plein air' (Comings & Goings):

'Because we don't exist on a physical plane

Doesn't lessen our power to influence generations', Aurelius stated

'Ah, but how many hits do you have on Twitter

Or Facebook'

Dickens countered.

It maun be said, houeever, that there is ae poem, 'Paedo' (Wind-Blawn), it nicht hae been wyce tae leave oot o the kirk: readers can judge fur theirsels. Monie fowk wad agree that Blackhall is at her best whan she scribes in her ain braw rauchle an hailsomely lyrical Doric, yaisin wirds ye can juist aboot taste in yer mou:

It's gledsome tae watch the burns

Breenge heigh-ma-nannie doon the bens

Scoorin panjotterls o leaves frae the puils sides

Feelin the shmoodrichs o sna

Faa saft on yer jeeled cheeks'.

('Idioticals', Thursdays)

Ann Matheson

Jennie Lee's Homework Project, William Hershaw, Grace Note Publications, Ochertyre, 2017, 50pp., £6.50

This is 'a play suitable for upper primary/lower secondary school ages' and involves Jennie Lee, who 'doesn't like school much, let alone history', but through the magic o the theatre (an a Davy lamp) she traivels throu Time to the age o the Picts, then the days o William Wallace, syne Sir Walter Scott an William Adam mak an appearance, an she even meets Jennie Lee hersel, a teacher, no yet a weel-kent politician, wha helpit foond the Open University in the 1960s in spite o muckle opposition.

In the play, Jennie the schoolgirl meets archaeologists wha dig at Lochore (also cried Inchgall Castle) an throu their finds and the time travel mentioned, she (an the

audience, acoorse) learn a wee-bit mair about the past, an no juist the past o the lords an ladies, but o 'ordinary' fowk. It has a fair scowth, frae the Romans til the First World War an ayont, an there's a wry mention o the place for women ... at hame! Or, as the character Peggie says til Jennie the latter-day politician: 'Don't you know girls don't go to university, Jennie? Certainly no miners' lassies like us. How could we ever afford it?'

At the end o the play, aifter aa her adventures, schoolgirl Jennie decides she wants tae become an archaeologist. The laist word gangs til the Pictish lassie Ora, on stage, alone, wha speaks a bonnie poem in Scots, wi the laist stanza:

And I'll bide here aye
Through winds kind and ill,
Till the ice freezes up
As heich as yon hill.

The first performance wis gien at the Lochgelly Centre (Jennie Lee wis born in Lochgelly on November 3, 1904) on the 24th o Februar, 2017, an I hae nae doot it wis very well received.

Raymond Vettese

**Buirds: Poems by William Hershaw, Linocuts by Fiona Morton,
Roncadora Press, Dumfries, 2017, 26pp., £15.00**

This a beautifu series o poems, maistly short, wi superb linocuts created by Fiona Morton. The haill is designed and handstitched by Hugh Bryden in a limited edition o 300. The langest poem is 'Grouse'. Hershaw's perjink cratur fits in weel among the lang tradition o sic poems in Scots:

Imagine the presumption o a tinky, fleppan craw,
Addressing me, in his auld bleck jaicket,
In his jakey's rasp, as if he was ma social equal!

The craw warns o whitna weird lies ahead come August, but the grouse winna believe it:

'Ma dear Sir,' I lauched, 'Ye've affordit much mirth,
But servants hae kent tae obey me since birth,

The thocht o sic murder wad never occur,

For it's no in their breeding tae rebel or demur ...'

The crow, syne, 'wasna there ataa', and as the reader kens fine, the grouse will likely no be there muckle langer either! The shorter verses can be humorous or, as in the case o 'Sparrae', bricht wi beauty:

Fae oot a yoke

o eternal silence and fozzy licht,

Tae burst through a membrane waa,

Tae flee doun a haa,

Atween quick sun shafts and shadows

Afore the daurk enfauld and infaa.

I'm a great admirer o William Hershaw's poetry. He affen seeks new weys for the auld leid, but also has a skeelie graisp o the tradition an a braw technique. Here's 'Eagle':

A speck i the sun, King Gowden Ee

Stoops tae touch airth: becomes

The Guidman o Ballendreich.

I might add that there's a surprise richt at hairt o this pamphlet, amang 'Eagle' and 'Fish Eagle':

The King's Ain brither,

Hail saumon lifter:

Lord o the Western Isles

but I'll no tell ye whit it is, or it widna be a surprise!

Raymond Vettese

The Twelve, Alexander Blok, owerset intae Scots by Frances Robson,
Mossrigg, Edinburgh, 2017, 32pp., £5.00

We're back in Aistern Europe afore the Iron Curtain gaed up, wi this braw owersettin bi Frances Robson. It's warth notin that Frances haes twice wan the Leid Associe's John McPhail Law Tassie for owersettin intil Scots. Sae that's an indication o the quality o her wark. Blok's poem tells o a time whan Russia wis ruled bi a Tsar an the ordinar fowk wis nae mair nor slaves awned bi the aristocarcy. Blok yaised symbols tae get his meanin across, an the reader maun jalouse the trew meanin: wis the 'Twelve' the Twelve Disciples o the New Testament an wis thair leader Christ? Cuid the Jesus o the Tsarist Orthodox Kirk be fechtin in the Red Gairds? Blok leas us tae mak up oor ain mynd.

Frances' owersettin is gusty an authentic sae faur's I kin tell. The Russian vaersion is on the richt side whill the Scots is on the car han side. Gin I cuid read Russian I cuid tell but I canna nor kin I jalouse the Cyrillic letterin it's prentit in. Laein aside the quastion o the owersettin's veracity, this Scots vaersion is a braw read in its ain richt, wi bonny wee illustrahtions throughoot.

See abuin yon hausebane, Karl,

A knife has left a scaur.

An here's anither fresh yin, hen,

Belaw yer breist somewhaur.

Gaun yersel an jig awa!

Yer hurdies are sae sleek an braw!

Blok didna resile frae violent an bluidy eimagery an Frances Robson haes gien us a braw owersettin. This raelly suid hae been furthset in a mair polished buik; it desers tae be in a glossy an heich-bendit volume.

David C. Purdie