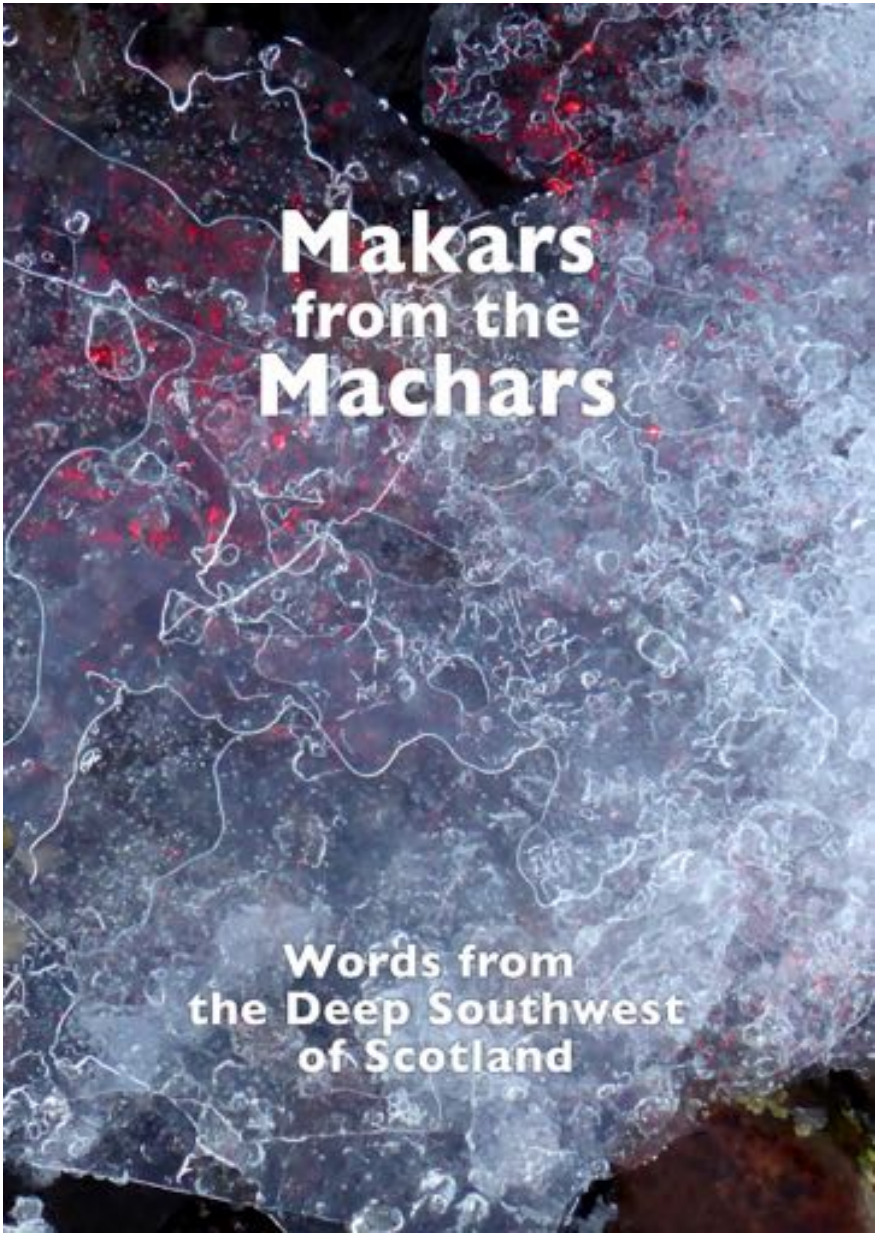
Makars
from the
Machars
Words from
the Deep Southwest
of Scotland

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An anthology of
recent poems
by members of
the Unit3 Poetry Group

cover illustration by Maggie Kellie
layout by Ian Wood
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Unit3 Poetry Group

In 1997 Lor and Irene Wakeman created
a small Arts Centre in what had been the
Co-op Creamery in Bladnoch.

Together they transformed one of the
large storerooms, known as Unit3,
into an exhibition area where arts & crafts
of all kinds could be displayed.

Including both a poetry and an arts group,
with exhibitions changing every month,
it was a lively place. Eventually the
Wakemans moved on. For 25 years the Unit3
poetry group has met regularly in public spaces
or in private houses.

After Covid, the group had a reboot and was
refreshed by a wave of new members who
were happy to join in and support the
original spirit of the group.

Meetings are about the delight of reading
our own and others' poems to each other.
The evolving complement of open-hearted
and enthusiastic members has brought change,
publications, events and, best of all, new poetry.

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Renita Boyle

The Old Harbour

See the haar billow in on ghostly sail; shroud
Solway silt with smugglers tales; blot out all trace
of Wigtown Bay with its mud-flats and salt-marsh
and inky brackish scribblings.
Before the river changed its course,
somewhere here, or here-abouts,
the boats came in and the boats went out.

In this haunting tidal estuary,
where Bladnoch and Cree meet the sea,
you may yet hear the ferry from Creetown;
row boats and schooners, muscled by oar or wind;
the rumour of a wooden pier and stony quay.
Somewhere here, or here-abouts,
the boats came in and the boats went out

with coastal cargo: wool, hides and woven cloth,
gravel and grain, timber, stone and salt,
wine in bottles and whisky bobbing in barrels
full bodied as the moon.
Under watchful eye of the revenue man
somewhere here, or here-abouts,
the boats came in and the boats went out.

continued

Nets and knots, coops and creels,
        Ropes and rudders and fluted reels;
the clop of the horse carting goods
in to town; the rattle of rigging
gossip and shouts-
        somewhere here, or hereabouts,
the boats came in and the boats went out.

Psalms from the kirk on the hill drift down.
Boats berth on the banks
or are moored like martyrs to stakes at high tide.
And if you cast your eye there, in the fading mist,
three tall masts from a foreign ship sketched in the wind
        somewhere here, or hereabouts.
The boats came in and the boats went out. . .
        and out. . . and out.

Wigtown Pippins

What will become of our pippins
planted for reasons of our own
to take scrabbled root on rocky soil
and bear fruit when we are gone
become an ancient variety ourselves
black and white images
archived for future generations?

How will we celebrate our being
our livings, longings and belongings;
the fruitfulness of our days
in Croft-an- Righ, the garden of the king;
become open handed Friars
skilled in the cultivation of kindness
nourishing grateful pilgrims?

Will we know how to prune, pare, preserve
what becomes part of us;
savour the sharp flavoured flesh
in the September of our years;
become a promising start
for young crops and new orchards?

Close your eyes and imagine the rootstock
Still scrabbling somewhere beneath your feet.

In response to Galloway Pippin Project *by Natalie McIlroy*

Dark Sky Lullaby

(to the tune of Come and Sing Together)

Come and sing into the night
Celebrate the dark skies
Make a wish upon a star
Underneath the moonlight
Spread your wings and you can fly
Sing a starlit lullaby
Echo of the dark skies

Softly sighing tales of old
Coracle of seasons
Lay your head upon your dreams
Tuck up into moon beams
Find a star to guide your way
Home to ancient Galloway
Echo of the dark skies

Misty whispers of the wind
Ebb and Flo of moon-tide
Drifting on the tides of dawn
Sleepy as the sunrise
Trill your song across the bay
Feathers of a brand new day
Echo of the dark skies

sung at Wigtown Book Festival 'Dark Skies' theme 2012

Sloe Jen

Bide til the blackthorn aches wild
wi yon slaw loss o simmer days
heaves wechtie aneath its sloes
fou an ripe an roond
draik wi the cruin o the jenny wren
whase nest be empie nou

Bide til the wee-oors aifter
the first bite o frost appens thair skins
frees a treel o sweetness
intae blaikent gin skies
stains the speerit blae-black wi fledging
lang ago lullabies

Then gaither aw yon grief can bide
frae awantin him hame
preek yon hert wi the shairp neb o a jag
an lat it greet

Translation in English

Sloe Jen

Wait until the blackthorn aches wild
with the slow loss of summer days
heaves under the weight of its sloes
full and ripe and round
infused with the warbling of the jenny wren
whose nest lays empty now

Wait until the morning after
the first bite of frost splits their skins
releases a trill of sweetness
into pale gin skies
stains the spirit blue-black with fledging
long ago lullabies

Then gather all that your grief can bear
from wanting him home
prick your heart with the sharp beak of a thorn
and let it weep

Winner of the Wigtown Poetry Prize in Scots 2016

BookLovers

Books are such a part of me
Look closely and you may see
Golden letters scripting up my spine
Feel them rise to the trace of your finger
Hear the slow turn of pages in my whisper
Feel the ink pulsing through my veins
Taste the pulp on my lips
Explore my contents
Read between my lines
Under cover
Book lover

Gorse

everything reminds me
crimson breast of the robin
purple robe on the rook
spiny thorn on the gorse
and its faint sweet scent

I would wash your feet
wipe them with my hair
kiss them over and over
anoint you with perfume and tears.

Now I am waiting
for yellow blossoms
on the darkest of days.

All the Moon Long

all the moon long
this quiet thing happens
heron skims the surface of my dreams

by shimmering loch and wandering streams
alights on this moment graced
all the moon long

in the hush, hush, hush of tall reeds
its golden gaze glistens
heron skims the surface of my dreams

bringing peace
on whispered flight
all the moon long

luminous (translucent) beads
thread the sky on holiness winged
heron skims the surface of my dreams

rising and falling on the feathers of sleep
this quiet thing happens
all the moon long
heron skims the surface of my dreams

Aw the Muin Lang

aw the muin lang
this quait thing happens
hegri skiffs the surface o ma dreams

by skinklin loch an daunerin streams
alichts on lown moment gracit
aw the muin lang

in the hush o spirlie reeds
gowden een glisten
hegri skiffs the surface o ma dreams

gien peace
on laftie flicht
aw the muin lang

luminous beads
thread the sky on haliness wingit
hegri skiffs the surface o ma dreams

rising an fallin on the fethers o sleep
this quait thing happens
aw the muin lang
hegri skiffs the surface o ma dreams

Renita Boyle

Renita is best known as an all-age tale-telling, tongue-twisting troubadour, poetry pixie, nature-loving life writer and tea bag artisan. She is storyteller for the Wigtown Festival Company, Lead Reader for Open Book, has been Patron of Reading of SJP and Scottish Book Trust reader for DG Libraries. Sloe Jen *won the 2016 Wigtown Poetry Scots prize. If you ask her nicely, she will teach you how to play the bagpipe with your nose.*

John Atkinson

Spring Spate on the Cree

All of a day and all of a night rain
rain and yet more rain siled down from
the shades of grey that cloaked and soaked

the Galloway Hills, then seeped into
sodden earth along the valley, to darken
and raise a placid river to a spate.

Too much for the familiar heron,
his usual place vacated, gone
to look elsewhere for a lunchtime snack.

The standing wave below the weir
foams and roars on the tea-tinted water,
tumbles a string of ducklings, who

paddle for all their worth to follow
a foolhardy mother, but are sucked
under the spate, rolled round and spat out

yards downstream, called to reunite
at mother's quacking. Miles away
freshwater surges into salt at Wigtown Bay

where a shoal of sparling catch a scent
that will return them to their place of birth.

Bluebells at Clarksburn Wood

Like stooping men grown old before their time
a copse of stunted oak and ash turn backs
of bark on wind-swept cliffs at Monreith Bay.
Limbs bow low to shelter the thin blue line
that hides itself under the ragged leaves.

Gorse paints a yellow blaze around the wood,
carpets of indigo cover the ground
and seize the spectrum of spring. At the rim
of each bloom petals delicately curl;
for those who love the colour of saying

to see the beauty in their Gaelic name –
bròg na cuthaige – the shoe of the cuckoo.

On Monreith Beach

Last winter's storms
have licked
and lashed
half a beach away
left a nest of cobbles
a clutch
for ages to erode
but never hatch.

The cliff-face twists
time's calligraphy
scored in strata
around epochs of rock.
A cave-mouth
speaks an eternity
a stone throat swills
the slaking surf.

Smooth sand
beneath the feet
pale ellipses come
and go with each step
pausing when
oystercatchers' cries
pierce the bay
then fade into the light.

continued

On this side
of the veiled world
the moon pulls
a realm of water
while hearts push
a darker water

between salt cells
where waves pulse
through fissures of sleep
and dreaming
sea-caves
seep with night.

John Atkinson

I came to live in this beautiful corner of Scotland seven years ago. My house overlooks Luce Bay, at Port William, from where I spend time
on my hobby, which is reading and writing poetry, among other things of course. My main subject for inspiration is nature, which I try to pursue as faithfully as I can.

On Monreith Beach was included in Andrew McRae's and Paul Farley's 2019 "The Places of Poetry", a poetry map of Britain (in which, sadly, Scotland wasn't very much included)

Pat Dobson

Flat, Pat, Blues.

Life is so tedious ensconced in a flat
No smoking allowed, no chewing of ghat
No animals exotic, no parrot or cat
No stomping about bashing a drum
1812 overture reduced to a hum
No aggro, no graffiti, no neighbourhood chat
So I've magicked a carpet, well really a mat
on which I will sit one starry night
open the windows, fix Mars in my sight
all systems go, take off in flight
to infinity and beyond earth and the flat
where I'll sing and I'll shout
'Goodbye to all that.'

Keep the Beat a'Going.

I'm a poet man so neat and so cool
I'm a Ginsberg guy but I ain't no fool
I lie on my hammock and get a little high
the words keep a tumbling from the rainbow in the sky
So gather round ma' brothers, gather round y'all
Let's keep the Beat a'going till the big chief calls!!

The Lady's Lament

I'm so awfully mad 'bout my gillie
He's stalking my day and my night
In his camouflage so frightfully dishy
And his corduroys enticingly tight

With his Purdy all cocked and ready
And his gun dogs alert by his side
I feel so terribly giddy
My captive heart swells with such pride

Oh wouldn't it be absolute Heaven
To be with the grouse on the moor
or casting tight lines on the banks of Loch Fyne
With my gillie so stoic and dour

If only I was like Diana
The huntress of beauty and fame
I'd entice him inside some remote woodland hide
And convince my dear gillie
I'M GAME.

Pat Dobson

Pat was born in Prestwick, Ayrshire, attended Ayr Academy then studied at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music & Drama in Glasgow. She taught in schools in Glasgow before moving to Portree on the Isle of Skye. She relocated to Dumfries & Galloway in 2001.

Andy Bolam

Au Café, a painting by Tsuguharu Foujita 1949

Theres a painting on the wall in a simple wooden frame
And trapped behind the glass sits a lady without name.
In a café in Montmartre just below the Sacré Coeur
She's dressed all in black, her costume de rigueur.

Paris in la belle époque where artists meet to dine
Across the road from where she sits, la Petit Madeline.
She draws you in with porcelain skin and sadly downcast eyes
Chin resting lightly in her hand true emotion she belies.

Behind her a waiter with neatly waxed moustache
Polishes his glasses as strangers slowly pass.
An elderly patron in splendid top hat stares
Past a one-legged man weighed down by his cares.

At a white marble table on a red buttoned seat
Sits the lady without name before a letter incomplete.
Pen and ink beside her, an ink-stained blotter waits
Her body language pensive as she sits and contemplates.

Is she writing to a lover, her family or a friend
The blotting paper hints its not the first one that she's penned.
The half-filled glass suggests she's been there for some time
And the second paper coaster indicates another glass of wine.

continued

Could it be a poem with a tricky word to rhyme
Or perhaps its just a doodle while she sits there killing time.
Waiting for that special man to come into her life
Or does she plot a letter telling tall tales to his wife.

The artist paints a story but its just a slice in time
La belle epoque in Paris yet its dated forty-nine.
The lady is contemporary not belonging to that age
A figment of imagination with a canvas for a stage.

Last of the Titans

There's an old tree stump prone in the field
Its bleached bones cast across the ground.
Just think of the tales it would yield
If only a common tongue could be found.

Hunkered down, just a decaying corpse
Its flesh picked bare by wind and rain.
Uprooted and discarded with no remorse
By the man who took its heart for gain.

Last of the Titans brought low
The rings of its life laid bare.
Lies forsaken where even birds won't go
A tombstone in a land of despair.

Fragrance Lingers

Socks hang limp above me,
but the shirt sleeves always wave,
As I lie beneath the clothesline,
watching white sheets misbehave.
Tangled round the line and prop,
they fight their wooden pegs,
As twisting frees a water drop,
to quench the flower beds.

The sun is warm on my face,
as rabbit clouds float by,
Peeking out behind a pillowcase,
in-front of a deep blue sky.
There's a fragrance soap and summer brings,
that's always fresh and new,
And I dream of simple childish things
that bring me close to you.

In Awe of Dogs

Unconditional love,
Loyalty and friendship,
Nothing required or expected,
Just their love reciprocated,
Why can't people be more like dogs?

Andy Bolam

Andy was born in Sunderland, spent many years in New Zealand and recently returned to Wigtown, Scotland. His interest in poetry began in a small town in New Zealand called Featherstone which, like Wigtown, just happens to be a national book town and continues to this day.

J. C. Elvin

Awaken

Who personates, prods with opinions
that leak into sights and sounds that confuse
concepts that curse are not worth the worry

From drawer to death driven
weary wanderings in the ways of the world's reality
but shadows of icebergs melted by sorrows

Notions surface, may be noted
that life can be a waste like
balancing the body atop a wall
made of buckets, brim-full of burdens

A reverter fills voids even
make the body a hobby
beyond what benefits
drive it to satiate desires which only multiply

Jumping behind barricades
entrenchments and battlements defended, without insight
remedy the need for a chief, who
creates causes that concern

Instead awake to the here and now
not be dead before the earth is dug
water all the flowers but recall that they will wither
or……..

Shakespear's Kaleidoscope

Skylarks swirl into slides of sky
above a kaleidoscope of gardens
fast into swoops and sideways out of sight
leave songs behind in drops and rises
catch them again – glide with the beat

Of the butter churn below – the mow
the steady to and fro of boots
that holds the scent of earth

Hear the roots that wrestle
manured with hopes and promises
valiantly they try to grow

Shakespear will roil again
shrive in words and deeds that free
echoes of words once spoke
of 'bravery in the breech'
that drum – now faint – in the shade

Shivering in the hollows – they await
the sun to crack the frost – spread the cloth of gold
and shimmer a shard for all their hearts
to the trill of golden larks

We few behind the banner
ready to pledge our loyalty
wait for a man skilled in knightly courtesy.

Something Stirs

A page to write a poem
blank – blank stares back
will a poem perform on the page
rise from the paper
make a grand entrance, unbidden, unbeckoned
watered with lines that bring life

In an instant – something stirs
a spark ignites the dry, the blind
delight to dream is not denied
nor needs frenzied frolics to survive

Like one hand clapping cannot be explained
but nudges to the unknowable
opens a curtain that covered
lets in light that warms the cold

But don't take fright and
pull at the curtain with all your might.

Rigging

The orchestra of onshore wind
the estuary alive

Low moans and tireless moving halyards
as craft move at anchor – swing but stay

In all that movement there is peace
felt by those who smell the salt

No need to make a break, for the sea.

The Valley

Brushing bushes of hawthorn
skewing down the slope
where curved sides slide down

Looking left to right
the valley bottom
meanders out of sight

Yearning to walk – impacts
to feel touch of foot
to taste thoughts of solitude

Tailing the birds
treading in trails – of badger and deer
shadows – shapes of trees – leaves
treading the ground – simply grips
sates – is the ultimate in crowns.

Skillets

From church gates cautiously come
like shadows of peoples past
black figures on white
who have finished the ritual rites

Now alone the grave:

Hesitating on the ice
seen when looking out

They move towards the house
solid in stone warmed by fires

Take off your coats! Come!

Into the coddling of the cook
who with delicious delicacies
and quiet calm – overflow
the aura of her balm – seeps
bathes cooks – long passed
when here their skillets and pots were fillin'

Aye! …life's that echo still
around footfalls padding faintly
hospitality then and now
a match and worthy of a bow.

Sundown

Grasses tall murmuring in the breeze
swirls of air moving among the trees

A bank of foxgloves – seeded from other years
the ferns solid – young – clumped
still faced the sun

The very timid tree
tastes the air – consciously

The peach is forlorn
much too northern

Shadow and sun flitter and
dance frenziedly
early evening –
yet a chill of melancholy

We cannot hold the day
and must soon away
the birds lose height
take a low lope in flight
'twixt shadow light
sight enough to hail the night.

Farewell to Autumn

Mist hung heavy on the haw
as autumn's gate gathers pace
heady days of harvest finished
insects have diminished.

Swallows due elsewhere to flourish
gathering before flight, a tragic sight
young birds innocent of the enterprise
to fly oceans by.

Depend on boldness of wise birds
who have flown before
dared on frugal fare of wing and prayer
sparseness that would weary Spartans.

Winter needs waited out
before a day when some return
and delight again with frenzied flight.

J. C. Elvin
From Dunoon Argyll,
presently a chuckies throw from Wigtown.

In England was a 'Winchcombe Poet'
part of the yearly art festival there.

We read our poetry when we were invited to
'The Cheltenham Literature Festival'.

Writing poetry continues and a first book 'Reacherland'
which may inspire a publisher.

Maggie Kellie

All our relations

So how are we getting on with our relations?
Well, it's not good.
Mostly, in the industrial-military complex
we are trying to kill them.
Axe them.
Burn them.
Destroy them.
To make space
for traumatised and
poisoned land.
To grow
monocrops.
To feed other victims of our greed.
Whom we shall later kill
and sell on cut price offer
in plastic trays
in cold cabinets
in supermarkets
where we wander
bewildered by so much choice
it's giving us a headache.

Victoria Park Café

A hot sunny afternoon
two muscular suntanned women
are playing tennis.
Pop…pop, pop…pop.
I enjoy them, they are very good
and laugh a lot.
A woman arrives and sits to have tea
next to two middle aged men.
I catch bits of her conversation.
'I can't you see because I'm on drugs '
'I have to keep on with them
I go insane without them.'
'… no, no they can't cure it,
only sustain it you see.'
They try hard to ignore her,
'How's business?'
'Improving a bit?'
'The nice weather's coming on now.'
'I can't watch telly or read you see
I can't concentrate.'
And then back to business.
Pop…pop, pop…pop
And as I'm ending, she's saying
'You see I worked for the MOD
before I was ill.'
The tennis players stop for a rest.
Two sentences later she thanks the men
and leaves very abruptly.

Realities

When I am still
I'm not plugged in
because I am not that interested
in virtual reality.

I am passionate
about actual realities,
alternative realities,
parallel realities
and otherworld realities.

So no, I won't settle for virtual,
near as dam it,
almost reality.
Seemingly safe
but blind to my own bodily presence.

Because I remember
the dark pool in the winter wood.
Where the girl
places her foot
gingerly on the ice.
And as she steps out
she hears a crack
forming all along the edge of the pool.
And she knows
if she takes a step further
She will fall into the icy depths.

Opening night

Across the room
I recognised it
like a jewel spread out on the grass
of that summer morning.

We slept the night there
not knowing where we were,
the heavy canvas flapping gently in the breeze.

In the morning we woke
to find ourselves surrounded by red banners
glittering in the sun.
Filled with colour
like children
we slipped quietly way.

Earth manifestation

Red sandstone
layered like cakes
rising from pale sand.
Dark loam in my garden
an underworld of
sweet smelling comfort
for the tender roots of plants.
In the wood
The eagle
The frog
The toad
and others too strange to name
Sculpted by the rushing, peaty burn
Speaking to me about
that particular place
or care
or knot.
The bog we cut one day
big slices of turf, wet and inky black
to dry for the winter hearth.
And somewhere I believe
Deep, deep in your heart
is carbon
so dense it shines
reflecting the stars above.

Shades

Where has my green cord skirt
edged with lovely gold and red braid gone?
Where has my pink bedroom with the cold lino floor gone?
Where has our sitting room with the dark wooden dresser
and the black hearth gone?
Where is my forest?
The pool which froze in winter?
The secret animal path I crawled along?
The hollow oak I climbed up inside?
Where has my altar of carefully arranged stones
around my bedroom hearth gone?
Where is the flickering fire light on my bedroom ceiling?
My mother's charm bracelet that fell into the earth?
Where has my orchard full of spring blossom gone?
Where has my father disappeared in the night gone?
Where has my mother consumed with grief gone?
Where is the perfume of the newly mown lawn?
The sweet dark plums of our neighbour's tree?
Where have the snap dragons
with their tender necks and velvety colours gone?
Where is the little girl in her green cord skirt?
Where have I gone?

After Nobody Knows in Liking in Silence by Kim Sa-in translated from the Korean by brother Anthony of Taizé & Susan Hwang

Stag

The lovely meadowsweet
blossoms, bright frothy cream,
are growing thickly now,
tall amongst the green bog grasses
in the place by the ancient ash
where the stag lies down to rest.

The taste of the river

One day I wake in the forest
and I see the river rising into the air.
I am breathing her in
and I realise that
often, when she is running wild
and rising up,
though I am breathing
my mind is closed
and I do not notice
how she washes and blesses
everyone around her.

Maggie Kellie

When she is not writing she is also making art, mainly painting at the moment. She has done lots of other things as well, including most recently, environmental activism and working as policy and campaigns advisor to several Scottish anti-poverty charities.

Mary Wallace

Ode To The Other

I am the keeper of secrets
A vessel of shame kept safe
Your steps are lighter because I exist
You don't look back
You know I'm here

I am the mother of the children
Walking towards the freedom of release
Your expectations fall away because I see them
You don't remember them
You left them here

I am the medicine woman
Spiralling deeper, sight arising, up, through, in
The spring unwinds in slow dance sways
My silence is
I am here

I am the light of presence
Turning towards the darkness of shadow
My radiance envelops each fragment in loving embrace
I do not fear
I am

The Wind

You know it as the wind
Carving shapes of grace
Connecting all the spaces in between
The moments

The Path

My feet are strong
They walk despite me

And how I thwart their steps at every turn
Sabotaging marathon infused ambitions
That cry and roar in their determination
To be heard below the noise

And so I say

Walk the hard roads, the long roads and the hidden roads
Walk on these feet that are strong
Keep walking
Let the earth feel each step
Feel each step
Walk each step and know each step
Keep walking

continued

Know the earth
Know the trees and the birds
Know the ocean and the rivers
Know the fiery places
And know the wind
Keep walking

And know the darkest place that any foot can step and
Keep walking
Set that strong foot down and then step again
Because you can
Keep walking my friend

Mary Wallace

Mary lived in Western Australia for 25 years where she raised her family and continued her career in nursing. Her love of travel, adventure and the natural world led her to live and work on a remote pastoralist station in 2013 where she discovered her passion for writing poetry. Mary returned to her roots in Wigtownshire in 2019.

Anne Dunford

Haiku Recipes for a Lazy Day

Leisurely breakfast
al fresco lunch - watch weeds grow
dine out - early night

No alarm clock noise
relax and forget all work
sleep as the sun sets

First catch a day off
add good weather and good friends
mix well and enjoy

Take a hundred smiles
spread liberally around you
savour warm response

After the Rain

the garden
slumbers under blankets of wet leaves for weeks

leaves
trapped among marjoram and sage
overhang beds of herbs in the Buddha garden

ivy
gifts birds with berries but chokes the clematis
with strangling tendrils in a cat's cradle of tangles

after floods
the sun is shining no wind
disturbs the peace as I work absorbed

Buddha observes
his hands fixed in teaching position I cut back
pull up unwanted ivy

look forward
to Imbolc when shafts of snowdrops
appear white lights that pierce the dark

Autumn Solitude

Time on my own, outside
in the temple of clouds
where the wind speaks,
maple leaves swirl in
a current of colour – amber
ruby, turmeric, cinnamon.

Weeds pierce gravel paths
in spikes of emerald.
Scents of fungi rise as
I disturb the damp mulch,
reveal mushrooms - their
stems hollowed by woodlice.

Fine misted webs glisten as
they sway from stacked logs.
All sense of time is lost,
I focus on cutting back or weeding.
Menial tasks? Maybe, but
peace of mind is found.

Anne Dunford
A member of the Federation of Writers (Scotland), Scottish PEN, Dove Tales and Wigtown's Beltie Poets. Poems published in poetry magazines and online. Readings recently include Big Lit. Gatehouse, Wigtown Book Festival and Dove Tales events. 'From the Mountains to the Sea' published 2019. Blog - Life's a Beach https://annedunford.wordpress.com/

Mark Vernon Thomas

Machars love song

I am drunk again
drunk and drenched
in nautilus light
staggered
on a stonerolled shore
as summer gannets plunge
and plumb true lines between
sea and sky.

I am drunk
and bleary-eyed in love
with curves and cliffs
and curls of rock caressing
folded pleats of deepest time
in love with old stone massaged
by ardent tides
as coastal gulls and ravens sing
their crapulous serenades
into the wind.

continued

I am drunk and reeling
with the dance of lark and yellowhammer
of roe-buck high-stepped strutting
I am cheering
as wheat-field hares go toe to toe
and the Jill weaves and feints
throws a right at Jack

and the moon throws down a ladder
and I climb it washed in silver
and crepuscular swallows
shape-shift into pipistrelles
exchanging feathers for
leather cloaks
and I climb
and I will not fall because
I am drunk

I am deeply drunk
and will keep on loving
and keep on drinking in
this place.

Sycamores

Tudors maybe -
or was it Romans?
brought them over
put their practical
beauty to work

turning and joining
cabinet making
musical instruments
spoons and bowls

now we call them
invasive species
opportunistic
taking up space from
native inhabitants

how long does it take
an immigrant
to become a native –
500 years? 2000? –
no more invasive
than nettles or relatives

continued

much less invasive than
old Charley who leans in
that little bit too close
with his beer breath
Brexit talk
he says *we had no choice*
says *overrun*
says *keep them out*
no matter the cost says
go back where you came from

and now on my way home
sheltering from rain
beneath generous cover
the palmate leaves of
sycamore trees
I think
everyone and everything
came from somewhere else
I think
even the land we stand on.

Owl song

She lives between
the worlds with ghosts
an unseen moonlight terror
silent on soft round wings
midnight's shadow bride

On my morning lawn
is crime scene evidence
a smoking gun -
tawny feather
tan chestnut-brown
fading to grey
a camouflage wave

Bad omen for unwary
nocturnal scurriers -
but her evening concerts
of call and response
bring me comfort
against the odds

Wind harp

White-boned,
flayed by the long sea
a driftwood log lies stranded
high on the litter-strewn tide.
Two vestigial limbs
reach skyward
stiff in rigor mortis,
a tortured supplication.

It doesn't look much - I've passed
without a second glance many times.

Now some spark – a
young guitarist perhaps – has
strung the bark-stripped arms
like a harp: diagonal strings,
top to bottom,
rusty-nailed to
scourged wood,
tuned to the elements.

continued

I watch as the green wind hears the call,
curious, comes to investigate.

Circling left at first, then right,
her long fingers unfurl and
begin to play, caressing,
lingering ripples and rills,
seeking the angel touch.
The sound to me
of her song
by the stones and sea:

it's enough to bring God home -
back home to these stained shores.

Previously published in Galloway Glens Ken words anthology

Mark Vernon Thomas

Mark Vernon Thomas lives deep in the Machars, SW Scotland. He has been a Classical/improv musician, a singer of Georgian polyphony, a Gestalt psychotherapist and a poet. His first collection, Dances with Shadows and Stones, is published by Drunk Muse Press. His second, Tales of Fenris Wolf, is published by Paekakariki Press.

Jacqui Bolam

Gossiping with Robin Redbreast

Robin redbreast cocks his head
Gives me side eye with his assertive stance
"I'm curious" he trills
"are you back because you missed me by chance?"
My darling robin
The same force that drove me to roam
Sent me images of you every year
To make sure I came back home

In the tall trees of New Zealand
I met Tui, that boisterous bird
With a range of remarkable calls
The most bizarre you've ever heard
With his heartfelt mix of tuneful notes
Given with gusto from the Kowhai tree
A cacophony of clicks, cackles, creaks and human sounds
To showcase his cheeky mimicry.

You should've seen him Robin
With feathers of black and iridescent, midnight blue
Glinting bronze in the sun
Gleaming with emerald hue
I watched him swift and swooping
Soaring with acrobatic display
Feeding on fermented flax
Then in drunken fashion he'd fly away

continued

He rarely acted alone
Giving wing whirring chase
Two or more would dive into a canopy of trees
And a variety of birds they'd displace
With the stealth of a fighter pilot
He'd mark out who was with who
Upon which he startled all the other birds
Even the large and gentle Kereru

You and Tui have much in common
As you claim your territory
Both feathered messengers from spiritual realms
We're all part of the same story
I have lived among you both
My allegiance divided in two
But Robin, you've had my heart since I was a child
And it will always belong to you.

The Space In Between

He closes his eyes and searches for her
Sees her, nimble in the shadow
Barefoot, ascending the stair
In white, billowing gown
Swinging, long tresses of silken hair

He hears her in all music
Feels her through yet another door
And in every sirens kiss
Pure virgins bliss
Taunted and haunted and raw

He longs to be contented
And forever beguiled
Hear the song of a Selkie
Drink from chalices of nectar
All things honey and wild

He yearns for her darkness
The taste of her skin
To be electrified
Villified
Find the Holiness within

Trance

Let me take you to that place
Come now, it awaits
It calls you
It knows you
Knows you live in the chaos and violence
Calls you to your inner vision of indigo and black
To absorb you in it's velvet silence

Hush
The wind has whisked and whirled on its way
And the still night drops a gentle veil
It asks that you stay awhile
With the promise to bring you back by dawn.

Breathe
Let's weave Time with threads of thought
A glimpse
Before relinquishing to Source
Hear sounds of your past generation
With rapid recall of your mind's eye

Blink
Sit on granny's knee
She cradles you and rocks you
Smells of roses
Hands coated in butter and flour

continued

Blink
Father with his hair combed back
Wears a week's wages of a suede tassel coat
He puts you on a cushion on his crossbar bicycle
Bumping along concrete kerb and pavement
Of Northern streets named after Prime Ministers and trees
Gathering speed he takes you to his mother's house
For meat and mashed potato
Mother tells you to mind your manners
Put your shoulders back and hold your head up high

Blink
Uncle is on all fours while you ride on his back
And when the giddiness has rans its course
The oversized armchair waits for you to grow
He takes your photograph
While the cat sleeps heavy on your lap

Blink
Grandfather looks on from across the room
No more coal mining for him
Jam sponge and hot custard gently placed on his lap
And eaten carefully before his nap
Later, he lets you stand on a box
And reach up and brush the back of his white hair
While he sits on his low chair
And purses his lips and licks his tobacco cigarettes
Rolling them with proud precision

continued

Blink
Christine, descended from Italian gypsy
Garrulous and gleeful she arrives in your world
And with black, long lash,brown eyes, she gazes at you.
Joy bubbles in her chest and when she can contain it no more
Laughter causes her back to arch and she covers her mouth
With mock remorse
Her body is six years alive with her ancestors past
Who patiently wait for her wisdom to arrive
She comes to play with you
Singing songs they taught in school
Of angels and saints and folk in faraway lands
And the love of God with the whole world in his hands
And she tap dances on the kitchen tile
Clacks the castanets her Granny has given her
You feel her thunder and lightning crackle in your veins
Your father remembers his inner child
And smiles with blatant delight.

Blink
Owl leaves your shoulder as childhood ends
Has followed you through the wood
Now you are drawn towards the city lights
He tells you " this is as far as I can go with you"
There is no sadness
It must be done
The mastery, the mission
The battle to be won
The mysterious glory that is asking you
"Come"

Lament of the Working Class Young Lady

Threads of you running through my mind
Weaving patterns from ecstasy and sorrow
Faded, jaded memories
Flash, tantalising
Leaving whiplash and a dulled tomorrow
Far, too far behind

Scheming plans and parallel themes
Creating spider web delicate dreams
All snapped and burst at the seams

Golden twine
Strong enough to bind me
With hope that might never have been
But bright enough to blind me
To the vain futility

Jacqui Bolam

A relative newcomer to Wigtown, Jacqui was born in Durham, England. She made the pilgrimage to Wigtown and found heart and soul in a likeminded community with a love of words and poetry to make you feel right at home.

Colin Macrae

John Lennnon's Mother

(For my mother and all mothers)

John Lennon's mother told him happiness was the key to life.
John's Lennon's mother was not a poet or a songwriter
or a singer in a band.
She was just a woman who held her son
lovingly in her hand.
Who knew it's the roots that matter
when you need to germinate the land.

She didn't care if he would be famous
or that he'd go on to change the world.
She just cared that he was happy
and it was with happy with which
his life would be unfurled.

You see, happy is what mothers do.
When dark clouds gather
it's mothers where the light shines through.

While politicians point fingers
mothers they just know.
While lawyers always argue
mothers, they let you grow.
Mothers spread love unconditionally
and let the happy flow.

continued

From the bible to the quran to Captain Kirk's bridge.
From the deepest valley to the highest ridge.
Mothers are the rock, the beacon, the stars shining bright.
Mothers are every metaphor, every story, every light.

Think how better the world will be
if we just followed our mothers advice.
That wealth and possessions are just transient
and accept that happiness is the key to life.

They sending Billionaires to space

They sending Billionaires to space.
They spending Billions to join this race.
It's as if world hunger & climate change have all been sorted.
That all the planet's problems have been thwarted.
With a Tweet, a Tik-Tok and a cosy selfie.
Their smugness is the domain of the wealthy.
Though when they leave Earth's atmosphere
There is one hope we can hold near.
That they meet the Martians who go ack ack ack!
Get lost in space and never come back!

After I finished dancing

I wrote a poem about love.
But it left me.
I saw the words disentangle in front of my eyes
and watched the letters as they
pita-patted across the page.
Then like desiccated raindrops
they left.
They were there
and then they weren't!

Who knew where they went?
Perhaps to the island of lost socks?
To wait patiently for the return of the other?
That will never come.

I'm channelling Motown.
Baby, baby where did our love go?
I've got this burning, yearning, yearning feeling inside me.

Why do the songs that make us dance
come from a place of sadness?

Yet after I finished dancing.

I wrote another poem.

She didn't like the Beats.

She didn't like the Beats.
The boys, and gals
taking a full throttle drive
across the metaphor that is America.
With an extended thumb
and two fingers up
to the mainstream
straight stream.
They hit the slipstream
of desire.

No need for reason or even rhyme
Desirous of everything at the same time.
The ones who burn, burn, burn
like fabulous yellow roman candles
exploding like spiders across the stars.
Like Bowie and Mars.

With Venus extending
her luscious lips to swallow me whole.
Not war wounds, but love lacerations, passion palpitations.
Desire is fire that leaves scars etched across the soul.

continued

Rebels, revolutionaries, layabouts and lovers.
Good for nothing dreamers
who lived like Jazz.
Moments of madness.
With layers of sass.

Drugs, sex and consciousness
They give birth to rock and roll
They altered perceptions
that opened Morrison's Doors.
Gave Springsteen his swagger
And Gainsbourg his Amour.

Those who don't like the beats

ain't got no Rhythm!
ain't got no Soul!

Colin Macrae

Colin is a South African filmmaker, writer and wanderer who landed in Wigtown on a whim. It was in the convivial streets of this quirky town he rediscovered his love for poetry thanks to the fine folks of Unit3.

Tim Cowen

There is a Field

There is a field
Next to the road
On the way into the village.

Where the laughter has flown
And the soil been trampled

There is a field
Next to the road
On the way into the village.

Where the barn is ablaze
And the cows bellow with fear.

There is a field
Next to the road
On the way into the village.

Where the shell of armoured vehicles
Melt in frosted sorrow.

continued

There is a field
Next to the road
On the way into the village.

Where makeshift crosses of twig
Lie upended within broken dreams.

There is a field
Next to the road
On the way into the village.

Where columns of uniformed, frozen men,
March into the fragility of tomorrow.

There is a field
Next to the road
On the way into the village.

Where a red glove fell from a rucksack,
packed with excess haste, just three dawns ago.

There is a field
Next to the road
On the way into the village.

Where a crow sits in a blackthorn tree,
Seeking shelter from his explosive disorientation.

continued

There is a field
Next to the road
On the way into the village.

Where the heartfelt cries of love and resistance
Are captured in seeds blown on the wind.

There is a field
Next to the road
On the way into the village.

Where an ancient tree's leaf has come into bud,
And the thrush holds in her beak, the foundation of a nest.

There is a field
Next to the road
On the way into the village.

Where the ancestors keep a vigil,
And guard all those who return.

There is a field
Next to the road
On the way into the village.

Where women and children,
Are reunited with husbands, brothers, uncles and sons.

continued

There is a field
Next to the road
On the way into the village.

Where a thousand sunflowers grow tall,
A thousand sunflowers grow tall.

There is a field
Next to the road
On the way into the village.

And that field is called peace.

Roadkill

What if that rabbit that you ran over had four sisters and two brothers?
What if that flattened hedgehog was one of triplets?
What if the deer hit by the wheels of a speeding 4 x 4 was pregnant with her first born?

Have you stopped to look at the corpses?
The bloodied, the crushed, the dismembered.
At their faces,
Their souls,
Their dreams.

What if those dead badgers at the kerbside, you see in frequent number had been shot by a farmer, then thrown from the back of a tractor.
An act with no consequence, as the police never investigate.
Except the dead badger, may disagree about the lack of consequences.

What if rabbits drove electric cars?
Hedgehogs were in charge of the buses?
And deers patrolled our motorways in a military style uniform?

continued

What if goats played drums in ska bands?
Sheep sang lullabies to your children?
And salmon swam in clean water?

What if pigs in intensive farms didn't have to wallow in toxic excrement.
Chickens in concentration camps did not have to peck off their own deformed feet,
And cows didn't have to swat away flies from the corpses of their dreams.

What if McDonalds did not exist?
Golf wasn't televised, but abattoirs were.
Peak time viewing, the bloodied corpses hanging in neat rows, whilst commentators drooled.

What if children's TV showed graphic videos
to explain where chicken nuggets came from.
What if football was replaced in the schedules with organic gardening.
And each week hundreds of thousands of fans travelled up and down the country to plant trees.
Singing songs and shouting for their favourite.
Come on you Oaks.

continued

What if the police were replaced with tree huggers.
Every protestor they met, they hugged and gave them a tree.
What if climate activists were not enemies of the state, but heroes
Given their own prime time chat shows and a green room,
A green room, where they were paid to write poems about badgers, frogs and toads.

What if they stopped digging for oil.
Put the crows in charge of trade treaties.
And global finance was administered by bees, or even earthworms.

What if the weasels and stoats read the weather forecast.
What if they announced that flooding had stopped.
And the droughts were over.
And the good times could return.
What if, What if, What If, What if.

Still Time

Don't be put off by the end of the world.
Don't get too downbeat at the collapse of nature.
It's only a blip.
An inevitable cycle.
A sticky patch we're going through.

Don't be put off by the force ten gale
that blew the roof off your Cornish holiday home.
Don't get too downbeat at the news that
your favourite niece has suffered third degree burns
in a forest fire down under.
Statistically these things happen,
from time to time.
And it's just a coincidence that they are happening
rather more often than they used to.

Don't be put off by, by, by …
this giant woke conspiracy.
Don't get too downbeat about losing
the argument with a snowflake scientist
who actually seemed to know her stuff.
Whatever she says,
you can still go onto Amazon Prime
and get a discounted set of sandbags.
Well, you could before the internet died
when the power cuts started.

continued

Don't be put off by the queues,
the endless queues.
The supermarket, the pharmacy,
the fresh-water emergency standpipes.
Don't be too downbeat
at the shelves still being empty.
After all, the supply chains worked absolutely fine
until those posh kids superglued themselves
to the gantry of the M25.
Didn't they? Didn't they?

Don't be put off by occasionally being hungry.
Well most days now.
It's good to lose a bit of weight,
and as for the fear and anger,
it's what they wanted from the off.
The doomsayers and purveyors of misery.
The Megan fucking Markelites.

Don't be too downbeat.
You've had a good innings.
Half a life's worth almost.
And besides, there's not much one can do about it,
now.
Other than keep calm and carry on.
Whilst you can.
Whilst anyone can.
Whilst you know,
there's still time.

White Paper

I have no pens.
I have no paint.
I have no crayons.
Only paper.
A4 paper.
Seven sheets.
One for each of the deadly sins.

My sister, her husband
teenage nephews and nieces
stood at the kerbside.
Masking tape around their mouths.
Lips sealed in silence.

I handed around the blank sheets.
White.
Empty.
No words.
No slogans.
Nothing to see.

A man wearing red trousers,
blue top and a white cap,
turned and stared.
His face contorted with hate.

continued

We said nothing.
He turned back,
eyes front.
Waiting for his moment
To cheer his subservience.

Of the seven
I was the only one without tape.
I was the only one who spoke.
Three words.
"Not my King!"

Triggering the reaction.
Violent, but not unexpected.
Fists at first,
and then feet.

I thought of the grouse
- being bred to be shot.
I thought of the horses
- being bred to be whipped.
I thought of them
- being bred to rule.

continued

I was rugby tackled to the floor.
My head hitting concrete hard.
My back crunching beneath.
The bended knee of a bearded man
in a high viz yellow jacket
shouting into his mobile for reinforcements.

My seventeen old niece
ripped the tape off her mouth
and screamed in terrified solidarity.
I clasped my sheet of paper
even tighter.
The white paper was no longer blank,
but stained red.

Tim Cowen

Tim Cowen has been living in Wigtown since February 2021. His poetry is often inspired by the power of nature. Tim writes fiction as well as poetry, and his debut novel Banquet of the Beasts was published in 2021.

List of Makars

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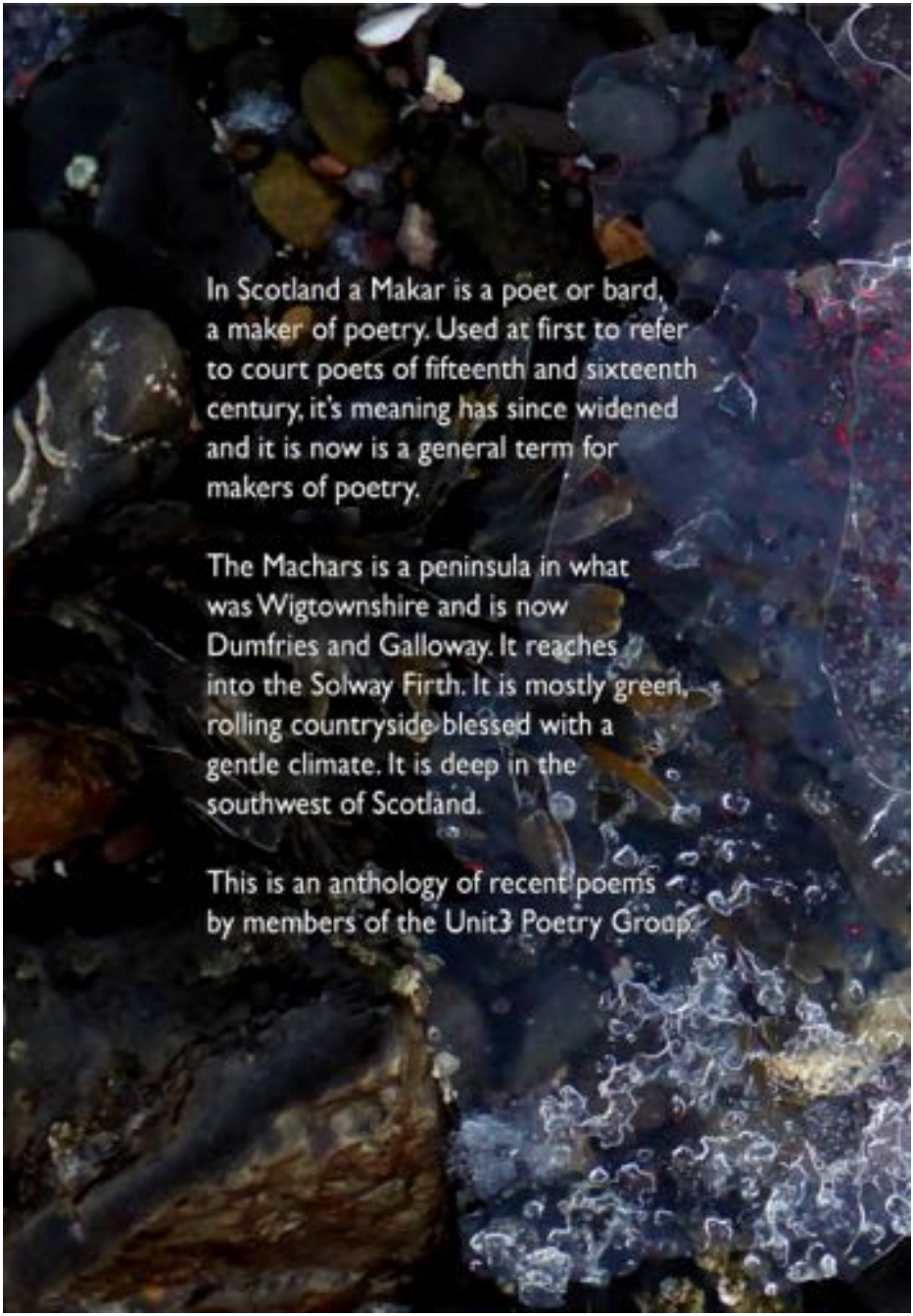
Unit3 Poetry Group, Wigtown, 2023



In Scotland a Makar is a poet or bard, a maker of poetry. Used at first to refer to court poets of fifteenth and sixteenth century, it's meaning has since widened and it is now is a general term for makers of poetry.

The Machars is a peninsula in what was Wigtownshire and is now Dumfries and Galloway. It reaches into the Solway Firth. It is mostly green, rolling countryside blessed with a gentle climate. It is deep in the southwest of Scotland.

This is an anthology of recent poems by members of the Unit3 Poetry Group.