

McLellan Poetry Competition 2023

One of the cornerstones of the McLellan Arts Festival is the annual Poetry Competition. This year, in addition to the main standard English competition, we also ran a Scots poetry competition, the results of which were announced at the McLellan Scots Poetry Evening in Corrie, Isle of Arran and are announced below.

We are delighted to announce that the results of the McLellan Scots Poetry Competition 2023 are in from our judge, Hugh McMillan, and are as follows:

FIRST PLACE

Alistair Lawrie with his poem "Twists And Turns: A poem in two parts:1. Circe and 2 Penelope".

SECOND PLACE

Finola Scott with her poem "Isobel Gowdrie encooters a Devil, efter the peintin by Ian Howard".

THIRD PLACE

Donald Adamson with his poem "The Sang".

Highly commended poems:

- Ann Craig for "Witches' Goodbye"
- Kevin Connelly for "Ane Prayer for the Pest"
- Zoë Green for "The Johnshaven Unicorn"

Congratulations to all of the winning and commended poets, and thank you to all who entered the Scots Poem competition. All poems are included in full below, along with a bio of each poet.

FIRST PLACE - Alistair Lawrie, "Twists And Turns"



Alistair Lawrie was born and grew up in Peterhead, by the sea. Winner of 2016's William Soutar Prize, his poetry and short stories have appeared in various literary magazines, including Lallans, Leopard Arts, Northwords Now, Poetry Scotland, Poets' Republic, Pushing Out The Boat, the Scottish Poetry Library (on line), The Interpreter's House and various anthologies. He coedited the Scottish sea anthology "A Glimmer Of Cold Brine". A collection of his poems, "Caal Cries", is being published by Drunk Muse Press this summer. He leads sessions for Mearns Writers collective in Stonehaven where he lives, by

the sea. Of course.

"I write in English and Doric Scots, relishing the diversity afforded by the possession of both, but the rhythms of the latter breathe through it all, giving it what Heaney called "original juice and joy".

Our judge's comment: "A wonderful rich retelling in two sections of the story of Odysseus from the viewpoint of Circe and his long suffering wife Penelope. Vibrant, funny and boisterous. The great Willie Neill (among others) noted that Scots was a particularly fine medium to retell the classics. Neill himself overset The Odyssey into Scots. It's the biggest compliment I can give that this is of as high a standard as that great work."

Twists And Turns

“ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, μοῦσα, πολύτροπον (“Odyssey”)

1

Circe Tae Dothers Aawye

(After the painting by JW Waterhouse)

Trees on the sea's bed, waar on the braes -
lees fae his sleekit mooth aa his orra days.
Richt fae the start I kent a fisher loon's
nae gweed tae hae, nae god avaa, bit yet
he haud my hert fu sair. E'en then I kent
as I poort oot iss bath for you, wi aa
the spite I hid, sax heided dugs an snakes
intil't, tae send ye tae your faither's dreich
an wattery gate-en, files kennin - aye fu weel
I kent my faither's sense o foo tae big
a poem, a tale, mair lees, daft prophecies;
foo aa his licht aye needs the mirk. I kent
his bow bent back tae shot across my bows
wid gar me feenish far I bide an wait

til that yon ither seaman comes wi's twists
an turns an joukerie tae win safe through
you an your gutsie sister's clashin clasp
tae swick me wi his lovin lees, afore
he gings stravaigin aff intil his tale.
Your men are shipwrecks, mine are gruntin pigs
that canna tell the lees their een eence brocht,
files we become the poem wir faithers vrocht.

2

Penelope

Twenty years it took him tae win hame
an fan he did he drookit wis aa in bleed.
A charmer, aye a clivver chiel, nae doot
that he wis aa o that. Yon loon Achilles,
he twistit him roon his wee finger, fullt
him up wi tales o fit a hero he'd become
fan he wis deid. Aye deid. Fit kind o feel
wis he? Iss last ten years his mither's spent
atoor my door an caain me for aathin.
Aye me. Nae him, he wis nivver here tae caa.
Far wis he then? Fit took sae lang? The gods,
faa else? Sair siccan tae pay back for Troy,
he says, aa blamed on him. At bloody horse.
I've winnert files foo feel he thinks I am.
Gin they were siccan sair tae save the toon
they mith hae stopped the war fae brakkin oot,
gart een o them tae deem jist fa wis bonniest
or, gin they wantit to pay back, jist killt him,
nae chased the gype aa ower syne let him go.
Och ye should hear him tell't, fair taks a trick,
fair maks you sick tae see him spin his lees
tae wide eent bairns an aa thon daft aal chiels
at hing about the herbour. Chased by gods
an muckle ae eent giants he wis, aa ower
at sea oot er, he says; twa clashin rocks
it seems were cravin him tae be a sandwich.
An aye I ken fu weel the kind o sandwich
he'd be lookin for, fool orra brute at's him,
for they were baith eence women cursed by men.
Oor hero king ... bit tell's far's aa the loons
at crewed wi him? Aa deid, backgrun details
tae his tale. Fitten affa time he hid, peer sowl,
Imprisont, wrackit, blewn aff course, glamourt ...
aa likely tales. I bid here aa thae years
wi my young loon aye weavin an unpickin
yon bloody tapestry so as my loon
could hae his heirskip, jist tae stop yon gowks

fae mairryin me afore he cam o age.
An jist as he wins there, the bastard's back
back on his throne as full o lees as ivver.
Monsters gods an witches, haverin brute,
I ken his ploys, his jouks an twists. A fine
time he's been haein aa thae years. Twal bairns
he's gotten, only een o them aff me.
Sax ithers women that I ken aboot for sure
an that's jist them that's mithers. There'll be ithers.
An her's him noo stravaigin eence again,
aa full o fancy spik tae fire up daft
young loons tae ging wi him, aye him that's aal
eneuch tae be their faither, like as nae
he is tae some o them. Tae sail ayont
the sunset leavin savage folk ahin,
at's fit he says. An aged wife. The cheek
o him. Has he teen a gweed look at himsel
o late? An aa they bonny men that's gaan
wi him. I'll hae a queue o mithers greetin
at my door for years tae come. They'll end up deid,
daft brutes. His name'll live for ivvermair.
An mine anaa nae doot, the gypit quine
at hung aroon forivver for at swine.
There's neen'll mind him tryin tae get oot
o gaan tae Troy, him makkin on that he was feel -
oor hero king - a leean twa faced deil.

SECOND PLACE - Finola Scott, "Isobel Gowdrie encounters a Devil, after the peintin by Ian Howard"



Finola Scott confesses poetry is an untreated compulsion. She's grateful that her work appears in magazines and anthologies including *New Writing Scotland*, *Lighthouse* and *Gutter*. Politics, environment and relationships concern her. Although she knows poetry won't change the world, she continues to write. She enjoys performing, finding the writing community welcoming. A slam-winning granny, appearing in St Giles Cathedral, The Scottish Parliament and the Glasgow Underground, she can be heard in a pub near you and found at FB [Finola Scott Poems!](#)

Our judge's comment: "Another ekphrastic poem bursting with rich and rollicking language. This poet has a natural flair for story telling as well as a natural and easy mastery of the leid."



Isobel Gowdie encoonters a Deevil

after the peintin by Ian Howard

Witch! Again thay accuise her.
Yon blamers, thae drummy anes
wha pewl at the crustit scab o her life.
and this deil disappynts.

She's no impressed. He can
bare-scud aw he craves, spoot flams
frae ledder orifices, cluitit tramp
hir chaumer, waxed weengs flappin.

Seen it aw, seen better, she hauds
his spinnie glower, conseeders the bees
dauncin in her bluid, thae rawly bears
couryin in her hinneied jerkin.

She's soukit wouf-men, leapit muirs
wild wi winter. She's burbelt lepfones
in her snuid. In deep midnichts she saft reamt
her mynd wi puddock-stuils.

Noo whan jile's lanesomeness threitens,
the Cailleach veesits, frae the well.
Aw dwaum-glenting she inbrings henbane,
lairks' tongues tae nourish an lowse.

Whan she goams flams in the een aroond,
Isobel spins a hap-lace tae beglamour.
Tired o trowthin, flesh-lockit, she slidders
awa frae tortur, myndins an warslins.

THIRD PLACE - Donald Adamson, "The Sang"



Donald Adamson is from Dumfries. He lived for a long time in Dalbeattie, but is currently living in Finland, with his wife, Riika. He writes in English and Scots and translates from Finnish, and considers it likely that he's the one and only translator of poems from Finnish to Scots. He has been a prizewinner in many poetry competitions, including first prize in the Herald Millennium Poetry Competition and the Sangschaw Translation Competition. His most recent collection, *Bield*, a collection of poems and translations in Scots, was published by Tapsalteerie. He has three grandchildren, Tess, Magnus and Sylvan, and these have

been the inspiration for many poems. He has blissful memories of a childhood holiday in Lochranza, and was really, really sorry that he could not be with us at last Friday's prize giving event in Corrie.

Our judge's comment: "A moving piece, well told in fluent and natural Scots which evokes empathy and admiration for its understatement, for the way it affects, but avoids sentimentality."

The Sang

The day A'm her dochter
that dee'd twinty year syne.
That's guid, she'll be biddable, fu o talk
like the times whan A'm her aunt
in Strachur that shuid lear her Gaelic
mair nor the phrase she picked up frae Granny McNicol
sat queen-like in the chair the jiner made:
'I am tired'– Tha mi sgìth.

The past is real tae her, the city is furrin.
She wants to get up, gan oot, meet Erchie the hird
or better his sons, Davie, finishin the schuil,
she hus her eee on him, aa the lassies dae,
an Willie sae fine in his sodger's uniform.
They say he'll be sent tae France.

She talks o the ben she climbed
wi her cousin Betty, sings a sang
about mist on the muntain
faain tae airth as a smirr
tae slocken the drocht o meidaes
in need o it, or chyingin intae music,
a burn pirlin doon a glen,
a laverock's sang efter years o seelence.

We sing her sang, the twae o us,
an flee awaa frae this hot, stechie room
tae the gressy bank o a loch
whaur the tones o an auld leed rise an faa
in the gloamin.

Highly commended - Ann Craig for "Witches' Goodbye"



I'm from a very urban environment but have lived 50 years on a cliff top village in the North East coast of Scotland. I graduated in Drama from Royal Scottish Academy. I hold post graduates in Community Learning and Philosophy and Logic. All of that feeds into my writing and my very Glasgow childhood!!!! I like to write about the magic in everyday life sometimes in Scots. I perform a one woman show about the life of women who was ahead of her time in my village and have toured the whole of Angus with it...I ran a Children's theatre for seventeen years and a professional puppet theatre called The Peek a Boo puppet theatre – I wrote

extensively for these over a twenty year period. I am published in anthologies, online and have a poem on The Corbenic Poetry Path. I have been shortlisted twice for the Wigtown Poetry Pamphlet competition and have been successful in a variety of competitions. More recently I was chosen to perform in front of an Edinburgh fringe audience for a recording for BBC Radio Scotland. I am working on a poetry chapbook called Ordinary Magic and hope to complete it before the end of this year. I am delighted to be placed in this competition and regret not being able to attend in person.

Witches' Goodbye

It took seven days to say goodbye

Furst ah pulled aw yer hair fae the hairbrush,
let it fly away oan the wind

Ah shook the quilt, it sighed,
wan solitary feather floated oot, wiz loast

Ah retuned the radio, enjoyed the static,
new voices tellin me new things

Ah raked oot the fire, reset it,
auld burned oot ashes ditched.

Ah scrubbed the laundry bag, thick
wae remembered intimacies

Ah drank that bottle o bubbly,
let the fizz dance in ma veins.

Ah lit a bonfire wae nae guy,
whirled like a dervish roon the flames

Oan the eighth day ah boiled bones for soup.

Highly commended - Kevin Connelly for "Ane Prayer for the Pest"



Kevin Connelly was born in Dunfermline (28 March 1956) and grew up in the West Fife village of Oakley. After graduating from The University of Stirling he moved to London to work. He lives in Tunbridge Wells, Kent, with his wife Barbara.

Kevin worked as an IT project manager for an international bank, based in London, spending a lot of time on-site in central/eastern Europe, including Sarajevo, Budapest and Kyiv. He retired at the end of 2015.

Kevin was inspired to write poetry after reading the works of Fife poets Joe Corrie and Willie Hershaw. He writes mainly, but not exclusively, in Scots and has been a regular contributor to Lallans (The Journal of the Scots Language Society) over the years.

'Preserve us fra this perrellus pestilens'

Robert Henryson (1425 – 1500) – Ane Prayer for the Pest

ANE PRAYER FOR THE PEST

The King wis feart, he didnae hae a clue
hou he coud stap the meesery an deith.
Whit wis it burned fowk up an robbed their braith?
'I need a miracle, I need it nou'.
He prayed tae God for wittens an for graith.

The Guid Man sixed an sheuk his auld grey heid
'Acause thay're no in Eden, it's ma blame?
The hale jing-bang shoud hing thair heids in shame.
The place is rin on gawkitness an greed.
An nou, whan there's a plague, they ca ma name?

I gied thaim harns tae owercome sic ills
an they maun wirk thegither tae be sauft;
tae ser the common-weal wi aa thair craft.
Gin naw, syne they'll just hae tae tak thair dreels.
Ma craiturs, but aftimes they drive me daft'.

The best o thinkers, doctors, priests an thanes
aa cam tae gie thair speirins an thair thochts.
A gandigowe o yickerin an fechts;
while wizards chantit spells an flung thair banes
apothecars tapt pouders wi thair wechts.

'Whit say ye, Michael, fere? Yer awfy quate.
We're duin? Or kin we tease oor wey oot
o this unhaly hash; is there a route

tae siccar saund, or is it ower late?
Maun I jist hap masel in deein cloot?'

'Gin thare's a sain, we wullnae fund it suin
but we maun ettle at it aa the same.
An, in the meantime, play the gemme
the best we can tae keep the deein doun.
Bid aa the fowk tae lock thamesel at hame.'

'A gallus ploy that naebody'll thole.
'Hou lang for?', the fowk'll want tae ken.
They cannae wirk gin aabody steys ben.
An wha'll provide thaim sustenance an coal?'
'In time o war a king maun pruive tae rein.

The Ryal stores are fu, juist feed the fowk
thay're nae a lot o uise gin ab'dy's deid.
Skare whit ye hae accordin tae thair need.
It serves tae buy us time an gie us howp
The people luik for ye tae tak the lead.'

The courtiers war scunnered at the plan.
'We cannae feed the wirkin class for free.
Ye mak thaim sib wi us, whaur wull we be?
Oor precious rank an privilege doun the pan'
but daurnae gae agin The King's decree.

Nou Michael kent he coudnae trust the court;
aa ettlin for tae pauchle fae the store.
'I've seen these robbin baistirts times afore.
Aye cheatin fowk by makin meisurs short.
Ma een's on thaim, an I'll be keepin score.'

Sae, aa the fowk wur fed, but mony deed
an syne, in time, the wysemen fund a spell;
unlucken oor guid kinrick fae the hell
o plague that cam tae us wi muckle speed
an steys wi us, for hou lang; wha kin tell?

Highly commended - Zoë Green for "The Johnshaven Unicorn"



Originally from Angus, Zoë Green lives and works in Vienna. She won a Candlestick Press poetry competition in 2023 and was shortlisted for the London Magazine Poetry Prize in 2022. She read English at Oxford and holds an MA in Creative Writing from the University of East Anglia. Her writing has been published by Candlestick Press, Poetry Salzburg Review, the London Magazine, Ink Sweat and Tears, Atrium, One Hand Clapping, Pushing out the Boat, Coin-Operated Press, and The Interpreter's House. Her mother tests her in the Doric whenever she returns home. Since her grandfather grew up on Arran and her

great-grandparents are buried on the island, it is a particular pleasure to have been commended in this competition. Zoë has just finished her first collection.

The Johnshaven Unicorn

50 years ago, the Excise officer's family was the only one . . . that made use of tea; when the tea kettle was carried to the well . . . children and grown people followed it; expressing their wonder and supposing it to be "a beast with a horn".

The Statistical Account of Scotland, 1791.

Wee burnished belly
wi' its single polished horn,
it has nae shanks of its ane
an' must be carried tae the well,
fat copper pasha;
we loup after for the sport
though hunting's no allowed
on account o' the Earl o' Mar. .
The beast wunnae drink
so they lower it wi' a rope;
he imbibes lang, deep,
an' then they haul him hame,
his armour, for a' that it's drookit,
shining just as bricht,
settle him on the range
where he sowfs and puffs,
blaws steam frae oot his snoot,
until at last he deigns to puffle
an' oot gushes de'il's water
tae brew the leaves
our exciseman seized last Martinmas.
Raise yer cups, lads — here's tae eviting
the impress, Inglis ropes an' chains;
We'll a' set sail for China
where there's tea and qilins,
and everything wondrous

under a smuggler's moon;
an' when we're auld, grey an' fevered,
we'll bring our treasures hame,
if you'll have us, quine who's stauning here
gazing through this glass windae
at this braw copper unicorn,
perfect cuddum, that sings
— of miracles from foreign lands.
