

2020

Echo Revisited: Incapacitation, Exploitation, Reverberation

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STRAVAIG #8

Rivers and Forests



Part One

Poems

Art

Essays

Geopoetics

- places the Earth at the centre of our experience
- develops heightened awareness of it using all our senses and knowledge
- seeks to overcome the separation of mind and body and of human beings from the rest of the natural world.
- learns from others who have attempted to find a new approach to thinking and living, e.g. 'outgoers' like Henry Thoreau, Nan Shepherd, Patrick Geddes, Joan Eardley, Kenneth White and many others.
- expresses the Earth through oral expression, writing, the visual arts, music, geology, geography, other sciences, philosophy, combinations of art forms and of the arts, sciences and thinking.
- develops a network of Geopoetics Centres with a common concern about the planet and a shared project to understand geopoetics and apply it in different fields of research and creative work.
- opens up the possibility of radical cultural renewal for individuals and for society as a whole.

More information:

www.geopoetics.org.uk

<https://www.facebook.com/ScottishGeopoetics/>

<https://twitter.com/SCGeopoetics>

Front cover Image: Georgina Coburn, *By Bow River*, Charcoal

Back cover image: Georgina Coburn, *A Single Piece of Earth*, Charcoal

Design and layout by Caroline Watson

Contents

Editorial - Rivers and Forests in the Age of Ecological and Climate Emergency	4
Explaining a Few Things to Neruda - poem - <i>Elizabeth Rimmer</i>	5
Like a River Flows - poem - <i>Liz Zetlin</i>	6
Altan Dhu (Black Water) - art - <i>Jan Kilpatrick</i>	7
Rivers – Trees – Rewilding - essay - <i>James Murray-White</i>	8
Seawards Haibun - poem - <i>Amanda Bell</i>	14
Spate - poem - <i>Stuart A Paterson</i>	15
Poo Climate Autumn and Poo Climate Summer - art - <i>Menno Verburg</i>	16
Echo Revisited: Incapacitation, Exploitation, Reverberation - essay and poem - <i>Martina Kolb/Emiliana Russo</i>	18
The Ancient Oak and the Sacred Pool - essay - <i>Katy Ewing</i>	22
The Minister's Pool - poem - <i>Katy Ewing</i>	29
Membership	30
Contributors	31

Rivers and Forests in the Age of Ecological and Climate Emergency

Editorial

What's the connection between the failures of Governments in response to the global Covid-19 pandemic and the ecological and climate emergency? Would it be too simple to say: capitalism? Not really. It's those who believe in the 'free market' and austerity who have underfunded health and social services and who refuse to take action against the corporate multi-nationals responsible for polluting and destroying the natural world and so many of its species.

At our June 2019 Expressing the Earth Conference at Wiston Lodge near Biggar, we had many talks, films and workshops about rivers and forests, so we chose them as the theme of *Stravaig#8*. Then came the Extinction Rebellion actions and Climate Strikes at schools worldwide, so we made the Ecological and Climate Emergency a key part of our theme. As a result, we received fifty poetry, nineteen essays and thirteen art submissions — more than ever before. The standard was so high that this issue became 95 pages long.

However, since the Covid-19 pandemic has prohibited the printing and distribution of issue 8, we have decided to publish it online in 3 parts. The first part focuses on rivers, the second mainly on trees and forests, and the third mainly on rivers again. You will find differing opinions on the large scale planting of trees in the Highlands in essays by James Fenton and others. We hope this will stimulate discussion about the best way forward. The poems, prose and artwork provide very personal responses to our theme and yet they form a cohesive whole.

But what use is a creative journal to activists who are campaigning to reverse the effects of climate change on the planet and the extinction by humans of so many species, you may well ask? As the creative expression of the Earth in arts, sciences and philosophy, Geopoetics offers an alternative vision of the world which deepens our understanding of it

and sustains those who wish to celebrate and conserve it. Geopoetics combines a love of and attentiveness to place and particularity, with a knowledge of global and historical issues of geology, climate, and culture. A truly green politics must have the generosity and imagination to connect the local and the global, emotion and strategy. *Stravaig*, the annual journal of the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics, is an important way of bringing together those who believe in a better world in which humanity sees itself as part of the natural world rather than separate or superior to it.

The Covid-19 pandemic is a worldwide human tragedy and it has taken from us Tim Robinson, one of the great exponents of geopoetics in his writings about Connemara and the Aran Islands. In the late 1990s he gave a talk to members of the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics in Edinburgh at the invitation of Tony McManus. Yet this crisis has also shown the tremendous courage and self-sacrifice of health and social care staff and how communities can work together for the common good despite the many failings of the UK and US Governments. It remains to be seen what lessons will be learnt from what has happened and whether people will allow those in power to return to business as usual.

We hope that *Stravaig#8* will provide you with stimulating reading when staying at home and will encourage you to be as aware as possible of the landscape, bird life and other forms of life in the course of your daily walks outdoors. We welcome your thoughts on its contents by email, on Facebook and Twitter and we would encourage you to respond creatively to the Earth in whatever medium you decide.

Editors: Sue Bell, Norman Bissell, Ullrich Kockel, Callum Sutherland and Caroline Watson.

Explaining a Few Things to Neruda

Elizabeth Rimmer

You will ask why my poetry
speaks of leaves and green rivers
and that family of geese
spinning and diving and drifting downstream
on the ebb tide this rainy morning.

Where are the unemployed? you ask,
the litter, the broken windows,
graffiti curse-words and allegations,
the lost generation, the hope of revolution?

You will ask why my poetry is so pretty,
all those woodlands and winter skies,
when jobs are scarce and art is strangled
and freedom is bought and sold with oil.

In those fields we have no lapwings,
no hares, a stillness of yellow rape,
and wheat after barley after wheat.
The skylark song is quenched in rain.
The moon rises over green absence.

Once there were bitterns in those reeds -
salmon, kingfisher, tufted duck,
children at the village school – all gone.
We wash the guilt of extinction off our hands.
Oh, see, the blood of extinction on our hands!

Like a River Flows

Liz Zetlin

*I would love to live
Like a river flows,
Carried by the surprise
Of its own unfolding.*

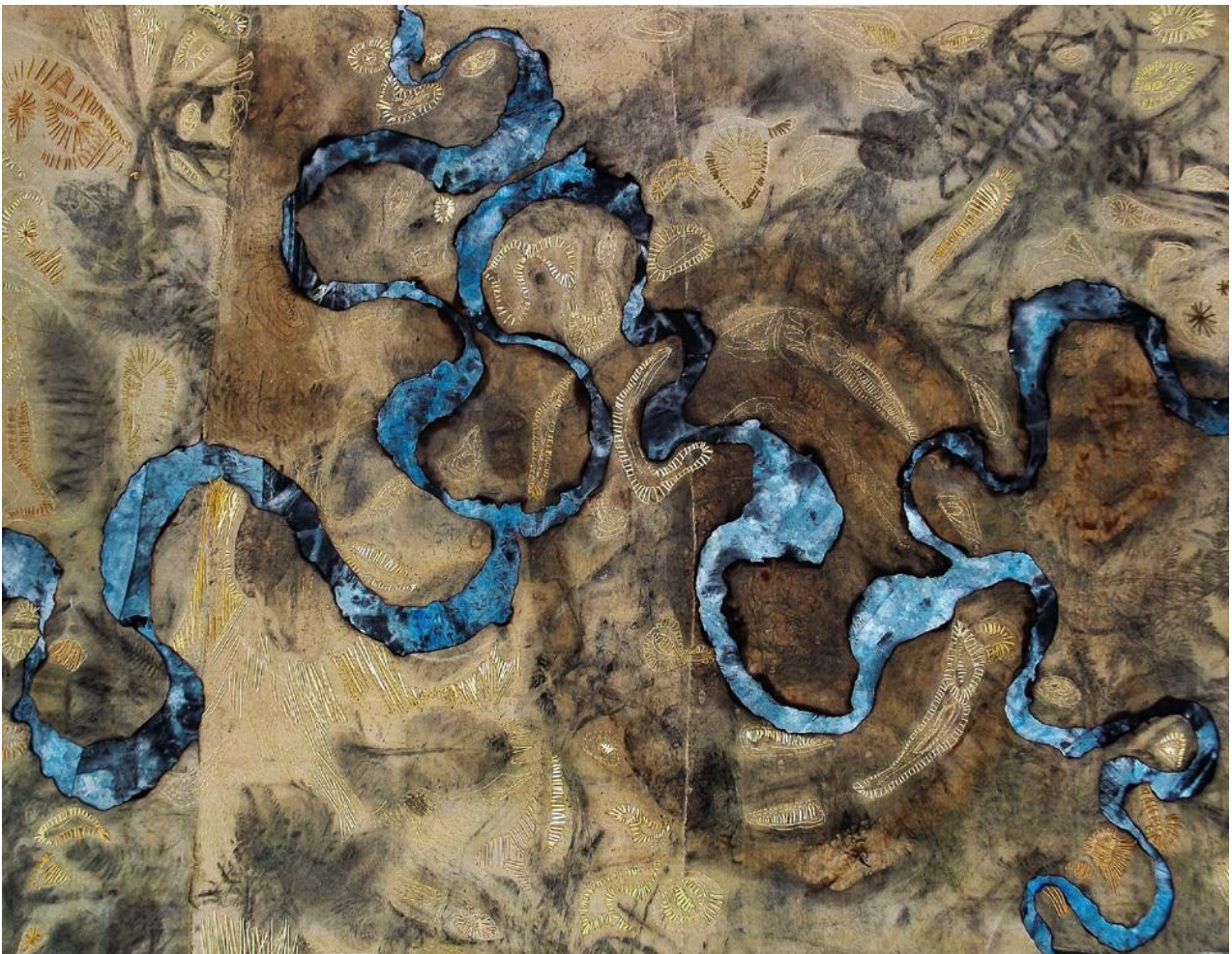
– John O’Donohue, “Fluent,”
Conamara Blues: Poems

What a river wants
is to be wet and held.
With each splash of rain
the stream restocks
swells and clarifies
maybe even forgives
what has passed before.
Just as moments flow
through memory’s sieve,
I would love to live.

In the morning light
there is so much to be seen.
Squirrels sprint through grape vines.
Chickadees swoop and dive.
Two sun sugar tomatoes ripen.
Another two decompose.
I eat three sugar snaps
and yank a handful of weeds
Grazing the garden, time slows
like a river flows.

I have almost always
lived by a river.
In this place, probably
my last, behind our house
a river steadily glides
mostly disguised
by ferns and trees.
Every day I walk past
all that a river implies
carried by the surprise

of a cormorant on a log
drying its wings
a mallard sleeping
a beaver heading upstream
a salmon leaping, too often
with a dread of beholding
the sixth extinction
evolving now beyond
our controlling
of its own unfolding.



Jan Kilpatrick, *Altan Dhu (Black Water)*
Dyes/Print on Textile (Photograph by Ricky Frew)

RIVERS, TREES AND REWILDING:

Rewilding self and society on a stravaig about these Isles

James Murray-White

SECTION ONE: FOX

Last night in Cambridge I felt lucky to see two foxes, maybe mother and son, at an outside bar. They came to scrounge around looking for human waste food — our throwaway, consumer-based society is destroying this planet, but in the process wild creatures like foxes are benefiting from our wastefulness. Urban foxes live in the not quite so shadows, watching, scattering, scuttering away and towards; the shadow of the human psyche - the nearly wild.

We humans sometimes aspire to wildness - I certainly do and this piece will reflect my recent efforts to do just that — and I often feel on meeting urban foxes that they are on a reverse trajectory into becoming a top predator, having populated the detritus of cityscapes, and potentially vying with our species for ultimate dominance.

In most cities I've lived in I've engaged with urban foxes: in Edinburgh I remember one night foolishly putting my hand out to stroke one as he munched on quasi-edible leftovers in the New Town. Thankfully he scorned the stroke as I realised this engagement with the wild wouldn't become a domestic arrangement. In Bristol, the so-called city of foxes, where they are tagged, named and relentlessly hunted down by BBC camera crews and studied ruthlessly by academics, a fox lived in a rewilding space at the top of my road, and many of us would drop off scraps for him, watch as he munched them, reflect on how we were both in a zoo-like situation, and happily chat with neighbours about how he was doing, or had we seen him lately. A neighbourly convocation on the joys and pitfalls on our close connection with the



urban wild — kind of like our 'Stig of the Dump'.

I do sometimes still muse on what it might be like to adopt a fox cub as an animal companion, and, as well as the scary media pieces about foxes allegedly biting children in their homes, rejoice in the feel-good clips of folk 'adopting' cubs born in their gardens, or the Irish farmer pictured with his stunning fox family hanging round his neck. Ultimately I hold off from doing what it might take to become a fox father — unless one jumps into my arms in fear, fleeing from pursuit by foolish hunters. Partly, I think, as I'm a nomadic type, but also because I feel not yet fully in that place with a creature that could be, and should be, really wild and well in the wild, not domesticated and becoming anthropomorphised within a symbiotic cross-species relationship.

What I am able to do in the meantime, is adopt the principles of author Charles A Foster, who tried to spend time becoming fox (and a badger and a deer), and wrote about this in 'Being a Beast':

"...when he was living as a fox, and came face to face with another fox that had stolen his chicken leg. "I felt not just that I was looking and observing, but that I was being looked at and being observed. That was the

reciprocity I had longed for. I don't feel I got that anywhere else." And he came off second best to the real fox? "Oh yes! It was a better Londoner, a better liver. It could run faster, it needed less sleep, its teeth were sharper, its nose and ears were better. It was just superior."

My deepest, most profound engagement came last summer, when, alone in a friend's house on the edge of Cambridge, amidst inner turbulence and a stuck feeling combined with a rage to go a wandering — over three nights in the garden I met Mrs Fox, and our watchfulness of each other grew from a minute to about six minutes. Did this grow into a deep knowing of each other? Certainly a calm sensing, seeing into the soul perhaps — an acceptance, an acknowledgement. This encounter, profound in its quiet, triggered some events over the next few days: a calamitous meeting with an ex, an invitation to undertake a vision quest on the Knoydart Peninsula, and a definite shift into the next stage of my journey. It's too easy to say 'foxes are my totem/power animal', but it's clear that I have a profound engagement with this creature. I feel for it, I see the species as individual yet as a whole, I have a sense of predicament as they are stigmatised, hunted, admired, kept on the edge and I watch as they creep towards us and sometimes we, and I, towards them.

This Christmas just gone, I was housesitting with a friend in an isolated cottage in a hamlet in East Sussex — a truly idyllic spot, with wild space and woods just yards from the door. We felt both spoiled and deeply engaged with the connectivity to nature in the woods, up the track, tucked away. And yet, both being animal guardians, we became gripped with fear on Boxing Day: 'what if we meet a hunt?' We both talked of standing up for the fleeing fox, and what we might do if they did appear, or we encountered an act of barbarity — man ordering dog to chase and rip apart fox.

We didn't encounter this, thanks be, and we found out later that much of that land is indeed protected, and while there are hunts across most of Sussex, they are rare where we were. We also heard of a friend of a friend who had stood up to the local hunt, elsewhere, with a crossbow, and they used violence, intimidation and ultimately the judicial system, to force him off his land.

Sadly, on a short section of the A14 outside Cambridge, as I drove towards Norwich today, I saw three dead foxes alongside the road — the further end of the shadow relationship: speeding metal tube hits once-wily ginger-red creature of the night, seeking sustenance or returning from feed, on tarmac, hopefully quickly.

SECTION TWO: TREES - EXTINCTION REBELLION AND REWILDING

Cultural change through XR & protest movements on climate

Over the past two years I've gone from filming a river, indeed a tiny chalk stream, in South Cambridgeshire — wading in the water, looking for evidence of otters and all manner of wild fowl, been up at the crack of dawn to film the river in various hues of light — to setting up a network of rewilders, across the UK and internationally, in the name of Extinction Rebellion Rewilding.

This Network, with 7,000 plus members, is a response to the growing rebellion around the country and the world, created by inaction on climate. We are seeing wildlife decreasing, feeling the air become thinner and tasting more pollutants in it, and we are all sensing how much plastic and chemicals are in our water, in our soil, within all the food types we eat, from animals, to fish, to plants. Just in the bay at Knoydart, eight of us collected a dozen bags of washed up, mainly plastic, rubbish from the mainland and from the boats, in a morning. How should we respond to the crisis that is upon us?

It's crucial to stop, and sense, and grieve, and feel it — and find our ways to act. While I have been on the London streets with XR since November 2018, and will do so again, my action is creating, building, doing — hopefully I can inspire through both. And I'm so much more called to the hills and moors than the concrete streets. Give me the chance to engage with a farmer on the benefits of land restoration and rewilding, or the chance to plant, or do a soil survey (on wilded land for the new Community Farm Project on the edge of Cambridge), and I'll throw myself upon it.



I've challenged all our 7K members to plant at least five saplings of indigenous stock (and care for them on an ongoing basis) somewhere within this current planting season. By my poor arithmetic, that's 35,000 trees! We might be responsible for helping nearly 50K trees be birthed this year! That's an ecological change right there, though who knows how many might survive, or whether it would equal the amount felled, with purpose or not, this past or coming year within the UK.

The debate on rewilding I believe is right at the heart of the huge movement for social change that Extinction Rebellion is at the front and centre of. Where XR doesn't go far enough is to really put on the table the changes that need to be made: XR is in the phase of increasing pressure through roadblocks, and here in Cambridge, targeting the University for its compliance with fossil fuel companies, as well as the Councils for their inaction following declaring a climate

emergency. Councils and Universities breed words and sweet plans — XR and XRR seeks to provoke change and action. The satisfaction of planting one oak sapling is immense, coupled with the future care of it, or having the mind to enable land to rewild itself, or work with a minimum of human intervention. These are systemic regenerative actions, which are steps on the path to rewilding ourselves.

'WATERLIGHT'

The River Mel is a tiny chalk stream that runs between the villages of Melbourn and Meldreth in South Cambridge, and joins the bigger River Cam at an unglamorous, difficult to access, confluence. The poet Clare Crossman lives by it, and wrote a suite of poems responding to the stream over seasons and human/ecological histories. She suggested we collaborate, and over a year and a bit I walked and filmed it, working with local anthropologist Bruce Huett, who brought both his local knowledge and his deep connection to Tibetan and Mongolian river spirits, bridging the gap between east and west. And finally I brought in wildlife cameraman and editor Nigel Kimmings to complete the team. Together we created the 'Waterlight' film (40', 2019), which delves into how humans have responded to, and used, enjoyed, and sometimes abused the waterway.

We've worked with local children, elders, the restoration group, and a rivers specialist to examine the life it holds, and the journey it takes, both literally and metaphorically, for all who engage with it. This has coincided with a campaign on the fragility of the UK's chalk streams — there are only 160 in the UK, and only 210 in the world. According to environment journalist Fred Pearce, they are "England's unique contribution to global ecology".

As Clare writes, for her the Mel "has always been a consolation, a healing force, and a

surprise in that it is different every day”, and she felt driven to respond to and honour it. In her poem, ‘Falls’, she records her desire for connection, and loads water with human sense:

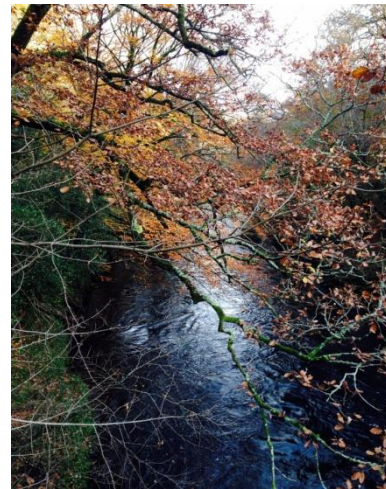
If this chalk stream were more than element
it would know that in this curving fall,
it carries memory, losses, griefs,
away, across this meadow
and that here we live by waterlight

Complementing her words, through visually recording, I found a peaceful pastoral energy — a meandering that seems of itself, present and content in that much human interaction has finished, and the space the river occupies has no interest from humans in exploiting. Once it was wide and fast enough to support nine watermills for flour grinding. Only one remains intact, as a private museum/reliquary of what it once was: an ode to the former industry and ingenuity of humankind.

Walking this space and coming to know and record some of the seasonality has been a deep process — part stravaiging, and part sitting and watching, and then responding with cameras on. This has given me some down-time from the outward activism, and also a deep dive into creative response to a place, and the gentle beauty there. And we are using the project to draw attention to water use, and the importance of chalk streams in the overall ecosystem of which we are realising humans are but a part, not the whole!

It was a pleasure to take the film to the Geopoetics Conference at Wiston last year: situating this project that is both art and ecological campaigning amidst the deep grounding of the ongoing communality of the work inspired by Kenneth White so many years ago. Bringing a reflection upon a tiny chalk stream in the South of our land up to the big mountains and serious water brought up ‘cheeky Sassenach’ nerves, though

hopefully it reinforces the interconnect-
edness of place, land, and we complicated
people.



NOMADISM AND STRAVAIGING THE ISLES — ‘TO FIND A HOME’

Last June I took the decision to rent out my inherited house in Cambridge to a refugee family from Turkey. Whilst assuaging my guilt at having such a valuable asset, this has given me the opportunity to set out literally stravaiging about the Isle, poking my nose and feet into old and new places — looking for the wild, and encountering all sentience that breathes there. I’ve been looking for, as David Abram so eloquently puts it, “the spell of the sensuous, in a more than human world”. From murmurations of starlings on Eastbourne Pier, flocks of rooks at Buckingham Carr in the Yare Valley in Norfolk, a giant hare that slammed into my speeding car late one night high on Alston Moor, to the sea eagle circling above as a group of eight of us completed a vision quest on the Knoydart Peninsula. All these engagements, interactions, soft dark sights in the corner of my eye, things softly present to all in the atmosphere, aware, wary, and alive. The fox on the street, slinking past.

I’m not new to this. I’ve lived in Mongolia, with genuine nomads in the Gobi; herding sheep and camels, hooked up to diesel generators to watch sport or Russian TV, and lived with sedentary Bedu in the Negev Desert, trying to create a life somewhere

between clinging to old ways and the new Israeli culture. I've no problem going on the open road towards desert land, working with guides, and making slow and steady tracks in that space, going nowhere fast and perhaps going nowhere in particular, dreaming of being a modern day T.E Lawrence or some such romantic idol. But being a nomad here, in this gaggle of tiny islands clustered around this dis-unified one, is odd. I'm coming from a place of great privilege, and trying to get back to a deeper engagement with land, and sense myself within it, and to lose myself, or to lose mind, in walking and responding.

And I want some kind of home, or do I? Maybe this year has to be my 'Year of lost and found', to quote the great Christian theologian and former dean of Westminster Abbey Rev. Michael Mayne who wrote of how illness struck him deeply during a life-changing career shift. Giving up and letting go of a place that no longer serves, to live itinerantly and wander with an ever-opening mind and heart, trying to be alive to the possibilities, is all. I've been an anthropologist abroad, engaging and listening and observing communities, deep in their rituals and patterns, and adapting to life at their pace and in their time-honoured way. My first film 'Steadfast' (40', 2012) was five years in the making, a participant-observer project deep in the Negev, living with and working for Bedouin communities who were adapting to living within a state system and the collapse of old modes of living. Much tribal land was gone or had restricted access, and responding to hyper-modernism and geopolitics is challenging whilst ancient models of nomadic movement and pastoral grazing remain within the bloodlines.

Every time I've returned to these islands after such travel and engagement has been a challenge for me. I struggle to find my place again, and never know where to find my home, and after a while I have kicked up my nest in the dust to go off and wander again. Engagement with indigenous people creates

restlessness to find one's own rooted belonging! Now Brexit is having the same impact, as well as the inchoate pressing in of the need to respond to the ecological crisis upon the planet: the urgency to follow the advice of Prof. Jem Bendell's model of 'Deep Adaptation' and head to the hills, very much on the higher edge lands. To live in community, grow food, dig in, and get one's (ecological) house in order feels imperative. Writer Mick Collins takes this one step further, talking instead of 'The Great Adaptation', where humanity becomes "luminous -- coming out of the dark."

I've been trying to gnaw at the bones — the very marrow of my life. Why am I here on earth at this time? I feel the pull to ask what are my gifts, how do I use them, and do they have meaning for me and others in my life? Should I keep pointing cameras and writing words — any words, these words, and which images — or is a simpler domesticated life of more use, supporting a family and growing deep love with another?

Travel, stravaiging, and stopping does feed me, opening up to new possibilities and the wild and the quiet. This past year saw random and not so random forays into Cumbria and the tip of the Lakes, Somerset and the lovely community of Frome; Sussex, Devon — Totnes and the Moor (including the ethereal Druidic qualities of Wistman's Wood) — tree planting recently on a rewilding small-holding in Carmarthen, followed by a blessed visit to the Druid's circle above Conwy.....

For Nature is love and finds haunts for true love,
Where nothing can hear or intrude
It hides from the eagle and joins with the dove,
In beautiful green solitude." - John Clare

The vision quest I undertook on the Knyrdart Peninsula, guided by a team, with five other fellow questers, all tucked away in our spots on the mountain, for three nights and four days, was the hardest and yet most

invigorating and nourishing experience of the year. Though cold, wet, hungry, I became fully alive to the senses: the misery within me experiencing these points within the elements, and having to overcome and reach higher, looking deep at my inner resources and resilience, and the elements I'm lacking. I felt a deep sense of connection to place, returning to my Indigenous Scottish roots, and, having been to the Peninsula before, for a wild New Year, many moons ago. The journey to and from our base camp: two days drive and a train journey across Rannoch Moor, in all its rewilded elemental rawness, topped and tailed the experience, which will keep deepening within me. I have done 'top up' days since, and am now looking into training as a vision quest guide.

CONCLUSION: REWILDING TO FIND A HOME

Years back, after a period of significant post-University debilitating illness, my search for spirit, connection and inner peace reached its zenith, and I investigated the monastic path. Ultimately it wasn't for me. After some time I kicked against the rules and the dogma of enforced belief, and yearned for intimate connection again. Stravaiging this past year and onwards has been in part a return to a

kind of sense of exploration as wandering mendicant, part trickster, part real-time huckster in the worlds of film-media-art making and promotion. Part deeply looking for a grounded and rooted home in the midst of what I deeply feel as human unsettledness in the face of climate change, social injustice and unrest rising to a head, and part (or in reality, maybe a merge of all of these previous parts to make up the whole) simple enjoyment of movement, looking, connecting, in the rhythms that appear. I've just had a lovely online connection with an XR activist, both of us talking about how we look at streams — "rewiggling" was her choice of word to describe how the movement can be torrents, trickles, forming pools, beaches and banks. It is this deep sense of looking, daring to look, not averting our gaze, even amongst the darkness within or when staring through the eyes and into the soul of fox, that is the rewilded home.



Notes

Foster, Charles A, 'Being a Beast' (2016, Profile Books)

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<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2020/jan/24/wilderness-solo-splendid-isolation-stopped-time-sitting-in-a-forest-24-hours?fbclid=IwAR1uZhscpQZTndn4lPnw5ifpLFQYj2CIClAx7e0SsoExYmshBvMbJxUHE>

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<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/jul/24/threat-chalk-streams-unique-contribution-global-ecology>

XR article: towards a plurality of cultures:

<https://medium.com/@designforsustainability/to-xr-with-gratitude-why-the-plural-in-regenerative-cultures-matters-b00e1d4f2104>

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Collins, Mick: 'The Unselfish Spirit: Human Evolution in a Time of Global Crisis'

2018, Permanent Publications, UK

Seawards

Amanda Bell

My neighbourhood is suspended like a hammock over the River Swan, all seventeen kilometres of whose convoluted course have been culverted and converted into storm drains and sewers. Walking past the Swan Centre, Swan Leisure, Swan Cinema, Swanville Place, it is possible to remain completely unaware of the river network weaving its way mere feet beneath us. But sometimes the river will reveal itself, by sudden subsidence, or geysers of drain water erupting up through shores.

home from work –
a welcoming committee
of floating chairs

The main branch of the Swan rises near Kimmage Manor, and flows past Hazelbrook Farm, site of the original HB Ice-cream, and the former home of Miss North, the well-known water-diviner.

twitching branches –
the weight of catkins
in the breeze

As it makes its way towards the sea, the Swan is joined by four contributing branches whose names are redolent of local history: the Roundtown Stream, the Blackberry Brook, Bloody Fields Water, and Baggotrath Brook. All five branches discharge into the Dodder Estuary near Ringsend. It may be that the river was named for swans nesting along the sloblands here before the land was reclaimed from the sea.

tidal water
feathered with grey light –
cygnets hatching

SPATE

Stuart A Paterson

I'm playing my annual celebratory
game of Pooh Sticks on the Nith,
safely perched high up on Devorgilla Bridge,
48 going on 10, the world near
twice the size & me half as large as then.

By Dumfries, all burns & tributaries are one
blue whoosh of Nith, their names drowned
willingly in liquid twists of sound, Euchar,
Crawick, Shinnel, Cargen Pow now bullying
through the town, wet boisterous boys together.

Great trunks are scudding under, slalomed down from
Auldgirth, Thornhill, limb & root torn & thrown
as if by giants idly passing dark Carsphairn days
away up-river, scattering ducks, barging
their way to Glencaple, Kingholm Quay,
the Solway Firth, then to a beach, & me.

By the time they've reached Mersehead
I'll have willed those thin twigs into mighty trunks
thrown by the giant I thought myself when
days were lighter, waters slower, rivers jumped.



Menno Verburg *Poo Climate Autumn*

Linoprint depicting a familiar crew of friends (with apologies to E H Shepard) being frustrated in their favourite pastime by the effects of climate change.

Echo Revisited: Incapacitation, Exploitation, Reverberation

Emiliana Russo and Martina Kolb

Footfalls echo in the memory / Down the passage which we did not take [...] Time present and time past / Are both perhaps present in time future / And time future contained in time past. / [...] / Footfalls echo in the memory / Down the passage which we did not take / [...] My words echo / Thus, in your mind / [...] Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind / Cannot bear very much reality. T. S. Eliot: *The Four Quartets*

The world of the past and those civilisations that preceded ours is no longer. Our poems and stories cannot comfortably stage anymore “fresche, chiare et dolci acque” like those in Francesco Petrarca’s famous poem, where they appear as a harmonious background for characters of the natural kingdom.¹ Today, they capitulate instead to the presence of contaminated waters bearing the signs of impending death or incipient destruction. Such are our expanses. In our world, Echo, the still disdained nymph in love with prideful and haughty-hearted Narcissus, can no longer naturally inhabit a landscape of unspoiled beauty. Instead, she finds herself residing in woods and along rivers soiled with filth, darkly tinted, and increasingly subject to human dominion. To phrase things differently, in our time and day, Echo, incapacitated herself, would dwell in a waste land of incapacitation, exploitation and death.



The Susquehanna River, Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania January 2020 (Photographs by Emiliana Russo)

Eco

Emiliana Russo

*Siedo lungo i tuoi
fianchi, stanchi.*

*Non posso proferir parola -
la voce mia è muta.*

*Non oso guardarti -
l'incanto svanirebbe.*

Lui non è qui...

*Vagava tra i boschi,
volteggiava, rideva,
vicino a te incedeva;*

*Sitting beside your
tired side.*

*Unable to utter a word -
my voice is mute.*

*I do not dare to look at you -
The spell would vanish.*

He is not here ...

*Meandering through the woods,
he vaulted, laughed,
close to you striding, majestically;*

*occhi come la pece,
pelle ambrata e levigata,
labbra tumide e rosate.*

*eyes like pitch,
skin smooth and amber,
full lips and rosé.*

*Incrociai il suo sguardo
e di passione mi inebriai,
cieca, folle diventai.*

*My eyes met his
and, drunk with passion,
blind and crazed I was.*

*Immersa dentro di te,
la sua bellezza contemplavo
e di me tutto scordavo.*

*Immersed within you,
his beauty I pondered
forgetting all about myself.*

*Le tue acque erano nitide,
dolci, fresche, chiare,
a me infinitamente care.*

*Your waters were gleaming,
sweet, pristine, clear,
to me infinitely dear.*

*In un abbraccio mi tenevano,
per certo mi proteggevano,
ma allora vederlo non potei.*

*Embraced they held me,
most surely protecting me,
but then seeing him I could not.*

*Dalla tua stretta mi liberai
e a lui mi avvicinai.*

*From your grip I broke free,
and to him I drew near.*

*Con le labbra
la fronte mia sfiorò
e all'orecchio mormorò:
"Qui uniamoci!"*

*With his lips
my brow he touched
and to my ear he murmured:
"Let us here become one!"*

*"Uniamoci" ripetei,
ma subito
da me si allontanò,
sul volto suo
un ghigno si disegnò.*

*"Let us become one" I repeated,
but suddenly
he withdrew from me,
on his face
a sneer drawing itself.*

*"No, mai" urlò,
e ridendo via andò.*

*"No, never" he screamed,
and, laughing, fled.*

"No, mai" gridavo.

"No, never" I cried.

"No, mai" ripetevo.

"No, never" I repeated.

"No, mai" sussurravo.

"No, never" I whispered.

*Lungo i tuoi fianchi caddi,
nel cuore solo veleno.*

*Falling beside your tired side,
with nothing but venom in the heart.*

*L'aria trascinò le mie membra
in una caverna;
il mio corpo si dissolse,
la mia voce in un soffio
si tramutò.*

*The air dragged my limbs
into a cave;
my body dissolved,
my voice transmuted
into a sigh.*

*Questa è la mia storia,
la storia di Eco
che ancor mille volte
hai conosciuto
qui, ieri, oggi.*

Ma tu ora non respiri, ansimi...

*Le tue acque traboccano
di fango, di scarti,
di umana fuliggine.*

*Testimone silente
della nostra follia,
del nostro egoismo
sei vittima.*

*Io sono morta e
tornata alla vita
mille volte,
ma tu per sempre
sei condannato.*

*Letale è il nostro veleno -
il veleno di chi uccide
e va via.*

*This is my story,
the story of Echo
that you have already
known a thousand times
here, the other day, today.*

But now you no more breathe, wheeze ...

*Your waters brimming
with filth, with waste,
with human smut.*

*Mute testimony
of our folly,
of our narcissism
you are the victim.*

*I have died and
returned to life
a thousand times,
but you are condemned
for good.*

*Lethal is our venom -
the venom of he who slays
and flees.*

[“Echo”, English translation by Martina Kolb]

This Echo sees – in her mind’s eye – her story or that part of it that still torments and haunts her – those segments on which her thoughts cannot help but linger, that is: the encounter with an unnamed Narcissus, the game, the unrequited love and her incapacitating transmutation. The Echo of the poem, who is its speaker, is a descendant of the mythological Echo, remembers her, and, more precisely, is a creature that recognises herself in the nymph’s unfortunate events, who, at the dawn of time, had fallen in love with Narcissus, if only to be rejected: “Questa è la mia storia, / la storia di Eco / che ancor mille volte / hai conosciuto / qui, ieri, oggi” (Russo, lines 49-53).²

Recalling the mythological Echo and letting her torment reverberate, the speaker addresses the river – the expanse of water located before her and that, in her imagination only, witnessed her encounter with Narcissus.³ Love, which is triggered by her sight of Narcissus, is conveyed poetically, in a melodious and harmonious carrier, or, perhaps, as a reflection of Echo’s inner beauty or beautiful soul. Harmony and beauty, however, begin to fade away as Echo is rejected. She tries to preserve it, but her endeavours turn out to be in vain. This is the moment when the path toward free verse is paved. Yet, passion that will never be satisfied through her story with Narcissus, is linguistically recreated in the ambiguity of the first lines: “Siedo lungo i tuoi / fianchi, stanchi [...] Non oso guardarti – / l’incanto svanirebbe” (Russo lines 1-2 and 5-6).⁴

While the speaker relives Echo’s story in her mind, the river, which recalls the pond that initiates Narcissus’s egocentrism and obsession and constitutes the natural element in which the speaker

seems to seek solace, lies next to her, yes, but is turned into a waste land by pollution and exploitation. If at the time of the mythological Echo, the waters were splendid and shining, they are now brought to the verge of death by those who only care about themselves – those narcissists that are only in love with themselves, and in whom the speaker recognises herself. The mythological Echo, bodily and spiritually dead, came back to life in different human forms (vv. 49-53), similarly to the songbird in John Keats's *Ode to a Nightingale*, which is preserved by the survival of the species and despite the death of the single nightingale.¹ The waters of our climate are not clear (as Wallace Stevens writes in *Poems of our Climate*). And yet, our troubled waters, wasted as they are with human poison damaging them most probably beyond repair, are our waters.

The ultimate image into which the poem breathes life is that of ruthless humankind unable to love fellow creatures and nature — and, by playing the game too long, kills. And this is the reality, a state of emergency perhaps, we must learn to partially bear, and hopefully to partially change — “to be men not destroyers”, as Ezra Pound had it. As Echo seems to imply, beyond our hubris, we are endowed with the capability of love and creation. Within and outside ourselves — reverberating in our incapacitated psyches and environments: *resonabilis Echo*.

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¹The poem is n. 126 and the line in question runs thus: “Clear, cool, sweet, running waters”. Mark Musa (Ed. and Trans.) *Petrarch: The Canzoniere, or Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*. Indiana University Press, 1996, 195.

² “This is my story, / the story of Echo / that you have already / known a thousand times / here, the other day, today.” Translation by Martina Kolb.

³ Ovid's story is set in the woods. The body of water in which Narcissus contemplates his reflection, is a pool. Echo, however, as a nymph, may well conjure the presence of rivers in her ambience. See Ovid and Rolfe pp. 67-73.

⁴ “Sitting beside your / tired side [...] I do not dare to look at you – / The spell would vanish.” Translation by Martina Kolb.



The Ancient Oak and the Sacred Pool

Katy Ewing

I'm haunted by a place. I knew it quite intimately between the ages of five and seventeen, or so I thought. But now I find I want to know it more. I've returned here many times, both in memory and physically, but now I'm searching for something else. I want to know *who* this place is, not just what or why or how, but all of that and more. It reminds me of the way you think you know your parents because you grew up with them but then at some point find you'd never really seen them as people. I want to gather up different kinds of knowing and somehow layer them together into a whole. Of course, I still won't actually find the soul of the place, but I think I'll take pleasure in trying. I wrote a poem several years ago about a regular childhood experience of

this place; the local kids' river swimming spot. The poem takes the shape of a journey down a steep wooded path, into the safe shallow bit of river and eventually over an unimaginably deep corner pool and out onto the safety of a sandstone ledge over-shadowed by an ancient oak tree.¹ I feel that in some sense this place is complicit in the making of me and something still ties me to it. The pool is in the river Annan at Johnstonebridge, in South West Scotland², and has always been known to me as 'The Minister's Pool'. The tree I don't have a name for, but it seems a centre of sorts, so this will be my focal point from which to see as much as I can.

I know already that the local area is

underlain by sandstone. As well as being visible in places, such as the ledge in the pool, many older buildings in this locale are made of sandstone from local quarries, including the primary school I attended and the church just upstream from the pool — and the stones in its old graveyard. The aged sandstone colour flavours most outdoor experience here, both town and country. The oak tree's roots at the river's edge are exposed clinging on to the sandstone coloured earth worn away by the river's long time current. In trying to see the layers of this place, it seems that the bedrock might be a good place to start.



'the church just upstream from the pool — and the stones in its old graveyard'

On a geological map, I find that to stand under this old oak tree is to stand above the Hartfield Formation of "Sandstone, Pebbly Sandstone and Angular Pebble-grade Conglomerate" which formed "approximately 271 to 299 million years ago in the Permian Period" in a "local environment previously dominated by hot deserts"³. It is close to the boundary with Mudstone formed in deep seas from infrequent slurries of shallow water sediments which were then redeposited as graded beds" on one side and the Corncockle Sandstone Formation on the other. Having peeled the place back to its sandstone bedrock, I hoped to feel more grounded, an effect which sandstone has usually had on me... but the sense of these ancient times churning the very land in fast motion into where I am now is odd

too, disconcerting. All place as in-between place, living out its current incarnation until it can't.

Sir William Jardine, the nineteenth century landowner and naturalist whose Applegarth estate was on the nearby Corncockle Sandstone formation, notes in his 1851 reprint of Gilbert White's *The Natural History of Selborne* that the common larch does very badly in the vale of Annan when "planted above a substratum of red sandstone",⁴ decaying from the inside out, but that "on the same soil the oak grows and thrives well". This oak certainly seems to have grown and thrived. I brought my daughters here from our home an hour's drive away in August 2011, having not been back for twenty years and was so incredibly glad to find it not only still standing but glorious in full late summer leaf, reaching out over the river to drink the extra light.

So, this year I decided to visit again, on my own this time to see what I could absorb. It is Imbolc, or St Bride's or Brighid's day, the 2nd of February 2015. I only found this out last night, thanks to *Orion* magazine on *Facebook* and the knowledge stopped me from dithering about whether this was a good day to visit — an ancient Celtic festival to celebrate the first stirrings of Spring, at which it was traditional to visit sacred wells?⁵



'glorious in full late summer leaf, reaching out over the river to drink the extra light'

It was obviously the perfect day. Funnily enough, I found out by the date of my photos that when we visited in 2011, it was the day after Lammas, Imbolc's counterpart at the opposite end of the year — but we didn't know that. I don't formally hold to any religion, and I'm finding these things out by chance from online sources, almost flippantly, but still there's something about these old ways that appeal to me, and it seems to have added something to my visit, some gloss of otherness, of spirit; of magic maybe.

It snowed last week after a quite mild start to the winter, and although there's been some melt, it's mostly re-frozen, so there is still a thick white covering on most ground, transforming and brightening the place quite dramatically. I'm here alone, which I doubt I have ever been before, knowing that only alone can I properly take the place in, do my own thing. I parked on the verge of the road above, across from the manse on its high bank viewpoint, because I knew the steep road to the church would be treacherous in this icy weather — I was right, even walking down was tricky.

Although my aim was to come here to observe open-mindedly and gather knowledge — to notice species, geographical features, and record immediate experience I seem to have been affected by the idea of the goddess Bride and her festival. The tree was my main objective, but I read that on this day, people visiting sacred wells always go round them sunwise, not widdershins, and I walked here by an unusual route, telling myself it was quicker and felt less conspicuous to stick to the treeline under the manse, not follow the river, but it also meant I could approach the tree by going round the pool the right way. Well, what harm could there be?

It's such a different scene from childhood

or from my last visit in summer. Snow crunches under my feet and I see that the path has been walked recently, by humans, dogs and a variety of birds. The woodland on the far side is utterly story-like, dark slim winter trees enhanced by bright white snowy ground, an archway of branches where the path enters, so I have to peek in there first. A strong fox scent hits me instantly at this gateway. A pair of blue tits try to lead me back to where I'm already going, or away from where I'm not, dancing through bare winter trees and bushes, singing, always just far enough away.



'it was quicker and felt less conspicuous to stick to the treeline under the manse'

The low branches of riverside trees are draped with thin black plastic and off-white, unravelled woven nylon material, like strange decoration. As I approach the tree and the pool itself, I see a figure standing in the water at the far side of the pool, a fisherman I suppose — a shame if I have company. But when I get closer, I get a double shock — first realising the figure is all in black and hooded, utterly still and facing away... and then that of course it's just more tangled farm flotsam, black plastic on a caught up dead tree branch.

I'm spooked too that the pool doesn't look right. The water's very high but I've never seen it so glassy still and yet I seem to be able to see a sandy bottom where it should be deep and dark. Even the current looks wrong. I know it's not just false

memory from childhood because I've been here so recently: if anything, I doubt what I'm seeing now. And no sign of the whirlpool caused by the river being forced around the dead-end corner under the tree. When we were here in 2011, I'd been dismayed that the whole bank from our pebble beach to the big tree was jungled by purple flowered Himalayan balsam, a non-native invasive species. That bank had always been accessible to walk along and view the pool but now it wasn't, and the flowers' strong sweet smell seemed to change the kind of riverside place this was. Of course, they've died back for winter — but I know that they can cause riverbank erosion and I wonder whether their presence over most of the river could have caused enough silt to wash down to this corner pool and fill a hole which was unimaginably deep. Surely not.

I get to the tree and it is genuinely awesome. In its winter form its trunk and branches are magnificent, fresh wet green moss clothing its vast being from ground to sky on this side, the bark close up like the rough intricate skin of a massive creature. The crown like a world above me. At its feet, where the buttress roots form an opening to some under-tree world, a wood pigeon has been sacrificed. Just blooded feathers, but enough to see a story.

The tree is so large that I could only photograph the whole of it from a distance and its trunk seems complex and telling of a long hard life: twists and splits, a large limb lost, long ago healed over and mossy, a rounded stump which used to come in handy for climbing. I consider climbing up today, even just a little bit, as another way of knowing, but the whole trunk on the foothold side is thick with green springy moss, some of which looks scuffed off by a previous climber and I find that I don't want to disturb it. It would just feel disrespectful somehow to the tree's

being, of which I'm very aware right now — as I was as a child, but differently. So instead I look, I try to see as much as I can. I listen, smell, feel.



'the figure is all in black and hooded, utterly still and facing away'

The amazing buttress roots give a waisted appearance and storybook shape. Today these are partially covered by autumn's leaf-fall, a colour that a casual observer might call brown, but which is actually a fascinating patchwork of pinkish and orangey neutrals, mottled with purple patches, the whole patterned by the distinctive wavy lobed oak leaf edges. At its narrowest, the trunk is just over three and a half times my arm span, fingertip to fingertip (I forgot to bring anything to measure with, so have to do it by a kind of hugging, accidentally forgetting not to go widdershins) which I later measure as 228 inches or 19 feet. According to The Woodland Trust, this suggests it might be between 358 and 433 years old and started life between 1582 and 1657.⁶ In the earlier year, Elizabeth I reigned in England (James VI in Scotland), in the latter, the Tender of Union between England and Scotland was passed, soon after the Wars of the Three Kingdoms, and Charles II reigned over Scotland, England and Ireland but had fled to France, and Oliver Cromwell was Lord Protector. In the 1902 book, *Upper Annandale: its history and traditions*, Agnes Marchbank writes that by the start of the 18th century "in Upper Annandale, as, in fact, in all the Borderland of Scotland, the land had got,

by wars and neglect, to be almost bare of trees. One traveller said that you might ride forty miles and not get a tree big enough to hang yourself on".⁷ I imagine my tree in the same spot all this time. How incredible to have lived through some of that and everything since.

I find out later that the tree might be *Quercus robur*, the Common or English Pedunculate Oak, but the only way to be sure that it isn't *Quercus petraea*, the Sessile Oak, would be to see how its acorns attach, on long stalks or not — which I obviously can't at the moment. The leaves of the two are so variable as to make identification very tricky, so for now it could be either —or even a hybrid. According to The Woodland Trust, oak has been an important source of timber, fuel and even food (flour was made from acorns) for a long time throughout human history, a venerated tree held sacred by many religions and in providing "a habitat rich in biodiversity; they support more life forms than any other native trees".⁸

Even in the dormancy of winter, this tree visibly supports a tiny ivy, mosses, lichens, ferns, brambles, as well as various birds. I remember too the artist's fungus which we used to mark in childhood to see the scored lines darken, and find it still here. The fungus is a parasite; a tree disease, and a world renowned medicinal plant: *Ganoderma applanatum* (Artist's Bracket, Artist's Conk, or Flacher Lackporling).⁹ One way to definitively identify *G. applanatum* would be the presence of galls formed by the larvae of the Yellow flat-footed fly (*Agathomyia wankowiczii*),¹⁰ but although this fungus does have holes from which some tiny creatures might have emerged, there are no galls. The parasitic relationship between tree and fungus though has gone on here for a long time: there were similar hardened, older fungal fruiting bodies and fresh ones 35 years

ago. And the tree is still standing with no obvious damage.

I find a seat between the roots to have my sandwich and be still, look out at the pool. The flotsam figure looks convincingly crone-like from here, and slightly tragic. A movement from the right draws my eye and a huge prehistoric form flies slowly, heavily from the trees at skyline level, appears to fly past just to check me out and then turns and goes back. A heron, but I've never met one like this. I finish my sandwich and put the thin plastic bag in my pocket. Keep looking, listening, being still. The blue tits seem to be singing high above me in this tree now but I can't see them. The constant background roar of the motorway is strangely obscured by my childhood familiarity with it. The sun shines white on the glassy pool surface.



'be still, look out at the pool'

The river downstream is a constant music of fast water over shallows. As I look that way, a bird flies out from the trees behind me and by its size and stealthy agile path into the woods I think it's a sparrowhawk. I feel like I'm intruding here, our eyes meet.

I remember that it's traditional to offer food to Brigid on Imbolc and, feeling a little silly, I shake out the crumbs from my pocketed plastic bag onto the root where the pigeon feather offering is and put it away again, giving silent thanks to the tree. Instantly, a breeze stirs the grass in

front of me as if someone was walking there. The tree-swing a few feet away which has hung oddly still this whole time begins to move back and forth and the mirror of the pool is ruffled, the crone animated, flapping. I feel that this is air warmed by sun on snow though, spring's first breath, fresh and sweet and I feel entirely good, if slightly unnerved. I later wonder if the tree was trying to scupper any hope of this piece of writing seeming objective.

At home I find on the earliest Ordnance Survey maps, the first on which the pool is named at all, that it is, or was, the 'Clinty Pool',¹¹ meaning 'rocky' in Scots.¹² I'm glad I didn't know it while I was there and I don't know why. I wonder about the Himalayan balsam and the silted-up pool, whether there is any relationship and whether my pool has gone for good, or will be washed clean in time, born again. My fishery biologist husband points out that a changed current might actually be good for the tree, stopping the bank it's on being any more undercut and feeding its roots with the silty goodness from upstream. Strange but interesting if the death of the pool were to preserve the life of the tree. The relationships here all seem complex, difficult to tell parasite from fellow traveller.

At first I think my plan to see the place more deeply, more completely, by looking for more layers of knowledge has backfired — all seems changeable, in flux, un-knowable. Even my observation was coloured by seeing through a lens of strange magic.

But then I hear the poet Alice Oswald talk about her own connection with a river she knows well, saying that in fact you can't ever capture a place, but rather you keep uncovering its layers — a project always in an unfinished state.¹³ I realise that my mistake had been to think that there was a single, knowable place and try to pin it down. The layers will never stop being uncovered, and that is where I connect, again and again.



'where the pigeon feather offering is'

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The Minister's Pool

Katy Ewing

It wasn't just the downhill run,
flung flying along the wooded path,
that pulled us to the river every summer
as soon as the trees wore soft green,
wild garlic flowered, the sky as blue as mattered.
The water shocking, but survivable with many tries,
or one brave plunge.

It wasn't just the life-thick cold current that tugged us,
kept trying to drag us to the pool across the shallows
from our chest-deep swimming place.
The safe place, where soft weed and slippery algae
cushioned stones for our timid feet
that curious minnows nibbled, tickled.
The edge was never far.

It wasn't just the lurking corner whirlpool of local lore
that scared the swimming power right out of me,
the pool's depth renowned, greater with every telling.
The cold like a spell to pull me fish-deep,
as I gasped and fought to keep the surface,
the dark concealing primal fears, unspeakable
but with a stronger lure than adults' warnings
could hold me from.

It wasn't just its safety
that drew you to the sandstone ledge you'd reach
if you dared to cross and push and pull
yourself right out the sucking water
into the shadow of the massive, ancient,
overhanging oak tree, to seek a warm spot.
Exhausted, weed-specked,
heavy as a new-born.



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The Scottish Centre for Geopoetics is a membership organisation which relies on members' subscriptions to fund its activities which are carried out by volunteers. Its purpose is to raise awareness of geopoetics as a crucial way to approach and creatively respond to the natural world of which we are part.

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Norman Bissell is the Director of the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics and a co-editor of *Stravaig*. His novel *Barnhill* about George Orwell's last years and his poetry collection *Slate, Sea and Sky a Journey from Glasgow to the Isle of Luing* are published by Luath Press. His essays, poems and reviews have appeared in magazines, newspapers and books over many years. He lives on the Isle of Luing in Argyll and is writing a memoir about Geopoetics in Scotland. His website is www.normanbissell.com.

Georgina Coburn is an art historian, writer and illustrator. Originally from Perth, Western Australia, she lived in Canada, the UK and Ireland before settling in the Highlands of Scotland in 2000. In 2014 she established her Arts Blog www.georginacoburnarts.co.uk specialising in visual art, film and photography. As an illustrator, her work is often grounded in the natural world, working with a wide range of media (pen and ink, pencil, collage, watercolour, pastels and oils). <https://georginacoburnarts.wixsite.com/website>.

Katy Ewing is a writer and artist who lives in rural Southwest Scotland. She has had poetry, prose and illustration published widely in magazines and anthologies including *New Writing Scotland*, *Gutter*, *Southlight*, *Zoomorphic* and *From Glasgow to Saturn*, graduated from the University of Glasgow in 2017 with an MLitt in Environment, Culture and Communication and was the winner of the Wigtown Poetry Competition's Dumfries and Galloway Fresh Voice Award 2018.

Jan Kilpatrick is a textile artist living in Assynt, a wilderness area full of peat bogs and lochs overlooked by formidable mountains. Using natural dyes and print-making techniques as the basis for stitched pieces, her work is steeped in the fabric of this land, its rocks, earth, skies and grasses. Often she presents lyrical text within or alongside the work, with this combination allowing for the fullest expression of the thread that connects human experience, both ordinary and sacred, with the natural world within which we dwell. www.jankilpatrick.co.uk.

Dr Ullrich Kockel is Professor of Cultural Ecology and Sustainability at Heriot-Watt University, a Visiting Professor of European Ethnology at Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Emeritus Professor of Ethnology, University of Ulster and Editor-in-Chief, *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures*. His overarching research interest is sustainable local/regional development, especially the appraisal, planning and management of cultural resources, approached from an interdisciplinary perspective. In 2017 he was elected as a Council member of the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics and to the editorial group of *Stravaig*.

Martina Kolb received her Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from Yale and is Associate Professor of German and Associate Director of the Honors Program at Susquehanna University. Her monograph *Nietzsche, Freud, Benn, and the Azure Spell of Liguria* (University of Toronto Press 2013) comes highly recommended by reviewers. Her interdisciplinary, multilingual scholarship concentrates on poetics, with a strong interest in the intersections of literature and the environment, translation and exile studies, and aesthetics and

psychoanalysis. She published “Defying Gravity: Reflections on the Nomadic and the Lapidary” in *Stravaig 4* (2015).

James Murray White is a writer and filmmaker; has been an environmental Journalist in the Middle East, and was senior producer on a local TV Channel. He is currently making films that reveal the crucial elements of the natural world we often overlook: beavers (and the case for re-introduction), rooks (a huge rookery in Norfolk) and preparing for death. His documentary on the contemporary relevance of mystic artist William Blake will be screened later in the year: more info at www.findingblake.org.uk.

Stuart A Paterson has had several books of poetry published in Scots & English. *A Squatter o Bairnrhymes: illustratit poems for weans* (Tippermuir) & *When: New and Selected Poems in Scots* (Chapman) will be published this year. Recently he's been BBC Scotland Poet in Residence & Visiting Writer at Rhodes University (South Africa). 'Spate' is from his collection 'Looking South' (Indigo Dreams 2017). He lives in Galloway, its landscape, language, social history & beautiful stravaigs informing the content of this book & its predecessor 'Border Lines' (Indigo Dreams 2015).

Elizabeth Rimmer is a poet, editor for Red Squirrel Press and occasional translator. She has published three collections of poetry with Red Squirrel Press, *Wherever We Live Now*, in 2011, *The Territory of Rain*, in September 2015, and *Haggards* (2018). She is working on her next collection *Burnedthumb*, (due February 2021) reflecting on our experience of being ‘a person’ and what it means to be a human in space time and community. She has also published a translation of the Anglo-Saxon *Charm of Nine Herbs*.

Emiliana Russo is a Senior Language Fellow at Susquehanna University in Pennsylvania, with a B.A. in English and German languages and literatures from the University of Naples L’Orientale and her M.A. in translation and literary studies from The Sapienza University in Rome. In 2014/15 she studied at the University of Warwick on an Erasmus Scholarship. In 2016, she was granted a research scholarship with the Globe Theatre. In 2018, she was a Fulbright Fellow teaching Italian. She writes creatively (poetry and prose). She is currently preparing a publication on political correctness.

Callum Sutherland is a research associate in the Geography Department at the University of Glasgow. Specialising in geographies of religion, spirituality, and politics, his current work explores emerging conceptions of Acid Communism - a term coined by the late cultural theorist, Mark Fisher - at the nexus between academia and activism. He recently published a book with three colleagues entitled ‘Geographies of Postsecularity: Re-envisioning Politics, Subjectivity and Ethics’. In his spare time he is a songwriter, often drawing inspiration from geopoetic themes, and an attendee at a local Quaker meeting.

Menno Verburg is a retired anaesthetist who enjoys exploring the art of printmaking. Born in Amsterdam, canals and rivers featured large in his early days, whilst later on he spent many years sailing with his wife Janie (and their dachshund Lottie). Living in Cromarty his ideas come from the coast and observing people. Against a background of political and ecological upheaval daily life continues, full of moments of poetry and humour, often unintended. To capture those in lino or etching is his pleasure.

Caroline Watson is an artist working in drawing and mixed media and interested in light, space and our relationship to place. She is a Canadian Scot working and living in Paisley with a strong commitment to her local cultural community. Caroline has exhibited in Canada and Scotland including RGI, VAS and PAI, and is a recent recipient of Creative Scotland VACMA. www.carolinewatsonart.com @carolinewatsonpaisley.

Liz Zetlin is an award-winning filmmaker and author of five poetry collections. She was Owen Sound, Ontario’s inaugural poet laureate; co-founder/artistic director of the Words Aloud Festival; and recipient of Owen Sound’s “Outstanding Individual in the Arts Award. Her forthcoming poetry collection is *Prompted by Happiness*. Her work focuses on the intersections of water and activism, language and the land, nature and human relationships. She directed the climate change documentary *Resilience: Transforming Our Community*; leads the Climate Action Team in her community, and is a member of the international Eco-arts network. www.ezetlin.com.



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