

Q U A R T E R L Y
P R E S S R E V I E W
FOR ADVANCED EFL LEARNERS

WINTER 2018



Essays

- Shakespeare in Italy? **2** by *Ros Barber*
Of von Kleist **5** by *Konrad Muller*
Literary Patrons **11** by *Serena Godsen-Hood*
Mostar Bridge **14** by *Barnaby Arathoon*
Shetland **19** by *Simon Tait*

Fiction

- The Leprechaun **21** by *Steven O'Brien*

Review

- Scottish Music **26** by *Houman Barekat*

Side by Side

- Ady Endre két verse **30** Two Poems by Ady, Endre
trans. Tárnok, Attila

QUARTERLY PRESS REVIEW

is an electronic magazine consisting
of texts found in the public domain
abridged for educational purposes.

Back issues: <http://pressreview.atw.hu>

Correspondence: tarisz@hotmail.com

Shakespeare in Italy?

by Ros Barber

Did Shakespeare visit Italy? Most scholars insist that the author, despite setting a third of his plays in the country, did not travel there. The most commonly cited proof is that he transformed the inland cities of Milan and Verona into ports. In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Valentine travels from Verona to Milan 'by boat'. In *The Tempest*, Prospero says that at Milan 'they hurried us aboard a bark'. Panthino describes Proteus as 'shipped' and says Launce will 'lose the tide'. Here are clear signs, it is said, that Shakespeare had no idea what he was talking about when it came to Italy. The author, we are told, was a geographical ignoramus.

But recent work on Italy suggests otherwise. It seems that scholarly certainty has led to confirmation bias: the ignoring and reinterpretation of evidence that conflicts with a firmly held belief. *The Oxford English Dictionary* confirms that 'shipped' and 'tide' need not refer only to the sea. Launce himself explains the 'tide' as 'the flood', a valid term to describe the timed rising of water in a canal's locks. Literary scholar Sir Edward

Sullivan established over a hundred years ago that in the sixteenth century Milan and Verona were in fact joined by large navigable canals, and that boat was a preferred method of safe travel between these and other northern Italian cities. But, in fear of encouraging authorship doubters, who tend to make much of the Italian evidence, many Shakespearean scholars feel compelled to refute Sullivan. Scott McCrea, in a book subtitled *The End of the Authorship Question* (2005) declared 'such canals are absurd.'

Yet outside of Shakespeare studies the large navigable canals of northern Italy are well known. Historians and geographers have written about them. Leonardo Da Vinci designed the mitre gate that made them possible. They were mentioned by the period's travel writers Montaigne and Coryat, and many of the scars marking their former routes are still visible on Google Earth. The city of Milan, in 2008, announced it was attempting to raise over a billion euros to restore ninety-four miles of its 'historic shipping canals'. Shakespearean scholars alone deny their existence.

They claim that the Italian details Shakespeare didn't make up, he got from books. Certainly, he could have learnt of 'great barks [sailing] to Milan' from Montaigne's *Travels In Italy* (1581). But what, barring the author's first-hand experience, might account for the discovery that there is a precise location in Florence where Helena, standing on the route Bertram

and his men would take returning to their garrison from the Tuscan wars, would be able to see the city's Port, while pointing out a pilgrim lodge bearing the sign of Saint Francis? This information is not available on any sixteenth or seventeenth-century map of Florence, or any text that might have been available to the author. Nor, in its precision, is it the kind of information one could glean in conversations with Italian ex-patriots or travellers. It is not surprising, perhaps, that both the Port and the lodge, though still in existence, have been dubbed 'imaginary' by those scholars who are certain the author never visited Italy.

Yet a substantial body of research evidences Shakespeare's entirely accurate knowledge of not only Northern Italian waterways, Venetian horses and Bergamo sailmakers (all denied, yet factual) but also Messinian curses, Veronan churches, Sicilian vistas, regional proverbs, customs and fashions, and dozens of other evocative details. Much of this research was published in Richard Paul Roe's *The Shakespeare Guide to Italy* (2011).

But Roe is not the only researcher to have uncovered evidence that the author possessed the kind of Italian knowledge only first-hand experience would provide. Professor Roger Prior of Queen's University Belfast was investigating A. L. Rowse's proposed Dark Lady, Amelia Lanier Bassano, when he discovered some inexplicable links between her family's hometown and

Othello. In Bassano del Grappa, forty miles northwest of Venice, Prior discovered a fresco originally commissioned by the Dal Corno family. Painted by Jacopo dal Ponte on the wall of a house in the Piazzotto del Sale ('the little square of salt') in 1539, its iconography includes a goat and a monkey, drunkenness, and a naked woman, whom Prior identifies as Truth, partially concealed by small doors with slatted blinds called 'jealousies'. After Iago provokes Othello's jealousy and is asked to provide proof, he delivers a small speech that mentions goats, monkeys, salt, drunkenness and 'the door of Truth' in rapid succession.

*It is impossible you should see this,
Were they as prime as Goats, as hot as Monkeys,
As salt as Wolves in pride, and Fools as gross
As Ignorance, made drunk. But yet, I say,
If imputation, and strong circumstances,
Which lead directly to the door of Truth,
Will give you satisfaction, you might have't.*
(3.3.405-411)

This speech so rattles Othello that in a later scene he exits declaiming 'Goats and monkeys!' The fresco is not the only link between Bassano del Grappa and Shakespeare's play. The main source of *Othello* is a story in Cinthio's *Hecatommithi* (available, in

Shakespeare's time, only in Italian and French). But though Cinthio's tale concerned both 'the Moor' and 'Disdemona' (sic), it was Shakespeare who introduced the name Othello. Shakespeare scholars have been debating for decades where the name came from, with many theorising that Shakespeare made it up: using ot-hell-o to echo Des-demon-a, or the Greek word 'ethelo' to indicate 'will', or Ot-hello to suggest the Ottoman empire. They seem entirely unaware of Prior's discovery that in the main square of Bassano in the sixteenth century there were two apothecary's shops: one known as 'The Moor' (being at the sign of the Moor's head), and the other part-owned by a man named Otello. This Italian form of the name Othello was common in Bassano and the surrounding area. Shakespeare's text specifically connects Othello to apothecaries: he has Desdemona's father accuse Othello of corrupting his daughter 'by spells and medicines'. There is no mention of spells or medicines in the Cinthio text. Could this convergence of names and geographical locations really be a coincidence?

Though one might imagine Professor Prior's discoveries would be of considerable interest to Shakespeare scholars, their implication – that the author of Othello visited Bassano del Grappa – cannot be comfortably contained within orthodox scholarship. Professor Prior suggested that Shakespeare visited Bassano – then a key centre for Italy's leather trade –

on his father's business. But there is no external corroborating evidence for the Stratford man's venturing beyond these shores; and there is a generalised belief (hardened by many into a 'fact') that the author simply did not travel. Confirmation bias therefore ensures that any evidence that he did is dismissed as false. Professor Prior's findings were thus published, in 2008, in the University of Malta's obscure *Journal of Anglo-Italian Studies*, leaving mainstream scholars completely oblivious to their existence.

At least twelve (and some say as many as fifteen) of Shakespeare's plays are wholly or partially set in Italy. Ernesto Grillo noted that Shakespeare's works contain over 800 Italian references. As Francesco da Mosto noted in the BBC series, *Shakespeare In Italy*, Shakespeare's Italian knowledge is so good that some Italians believe he was a Sicilian man named Crollanza (crolla=shake; lancia=spear). Born in Messina, Crollanza wrote a play in Messinian dialect entitled Tanto traffico per Niente, which can be translated as 'Much traffic about nothing'. Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* is set in Messina. Whether it was inspired by Crollanza's play, or the other way around, is not yet clear. Indeed, to my knowledge, English-speaking scholars have made no attempt to investigate the links between these two plays, and do not even acknowledge the Messinian play's existence.

The wiring of the human brain ensures that our fixed beliefs largely go unchallenged; any piece of information that would create cognitive dissonance is filtered out, or reinterpreted. Thus it is perfectly natural that Shakespeare scholars, certain that the author never travelled in Italy but faced with evidence that he did, will either genuinely not register the information, or if confronted with it, find a way to dismiss it.

Yet evidence that Shakespeare had first-hand knowledge of Italy continues to accumulate. We cannot explain it, and have no chance of doing so until it is accepted as a genuine phenomenon. One wonders how long it will take for mainstream Shakespearean scholars to acknowledge that confirmation bias is restricting the advancement of knowledge, and turn their faces – and their research budgets – to Europe. In the year that marks the 450th anniversary of the Stratford man's birth, we might hope it will not be too much longer. ♦

Of von Kleist

by *Konrad Muller*

Riding

He tried to be a soldier. Seven years he spent in the Guards, seven years he described as irredeemably lost. Then, one afternoon, this young lieutenant from a family that had already given Prussia at least eighteen generals, and who would rather study mathematics and logic, rode all the way from Potsdam to Frankfurt, the other Frankfurt, the one on the River Oder, which is now the Polish border, and a town whose modern history – of fire, war, division, Stalinist reconstruction, and demographic decline – reads like a series of catastrophes in a tale conceived by Kleist himself. The date, though, was April 4, 1799, and Kleist was riding. And as he did, fragments from his time in the army streamed through his mind like the torn clouds that blew overhead – the officers he regarded as so many drillmasters, the soldiers who were so many slaves, and this perpetual requirement to punish, when he would always pardon. And Kleist was riding, too, against the objections he heard on the lips of his family, especially

his guardian, his Aunt Auguste:

‘How will you earn a crust?’

‘At twenty-one, aren’t you too old to study?’

‘Haven’t we always been generals?’

Paris

He tried to run away to Paris. He arrived with introductions to ‘entire packs of Parisian savants’ and even ‘attended a few lectures.’ He’d been there for a month, studying science and brooding, when one August morning he went to the post office to collect a letter. The postmaster demanded proof of identity. To his horror, Kleist realised he’d forgotten his passport. ‘Please make an exception,’ he said. ‘My hotel’s half a mile away, the letter is from my family, it would give me great joy to read it, I swear that I am Kleist.’

The postmaster was completely unmoved.

Kleist felt such contempt, or rather, such pity for him. Deceived a thousand times, the Frenchman no longer believed there was an honest man in Paris.

‘Well, that’s Paris,’ Kleist told himself as he jogged through the thronging city.

And it wasn’t so much the narrow, crooked streets, covered with mud and reeking of a thousand repulsive odours, as the pushing shoving citizens themselves. Cynical was not the word. They spoke with laughter

about the serious, with seriousness about the trivial. And how they loved entertainment! Everywhere, it was obvious, the intention was to distract the people with empty pleasures heaped on ad nauseam. Kleist would far prefer a walk in the Silesian mountains to being here amongst the obelisks and triumphal arches, the light shows and the fireworks, the balloons, the bunting, the greased carnival poles, the merry-go-rounds, the portable stages, the jugglers, the tight-rope walkers. Rousseau would weep to see what he had wrought.

Kleist’s sister, Ulrike, was travelling with him. She suggested he might treat his gloom by drinking less beer. This purely physical explanation for his lack of cheerfulness only inflamed him. Yet, amid the unrest, the filth of Paris had left a new sediment in his soul. For like the Persian magi Kleist now wanted nothing more than to till a field, to plant a tree, to beget a child. In short, he wished, in the most literal sense, to become a peasant, even though Ulrike thought this a very bad idea. Kleist told her he was leaving Paris for Switzerland where he would purchase a farm.

Kleist in Thun

He tried to be a peasant. Next year in the spring we see him on an island in the Aar near Lake Thun in

Switzerland. The farm never really happened. Instead Kleist confesses he is a writer. There had of course been signs. In Paris, for instance, he had written in a letter: 'If I wished to write books, I could earn enough. But writing for money – speak not of it!' And he added the extraordinary, almost prophetic assertion: 'It may be true I am some sort of failed genius,' and this before his literary career had even commenced.

If Kleist's life were a string of small beads, then the island idyll at Thun would be one of the most well cut, finely polished stones. We know the facets; Kleist described them to his sister – the cottage he rented, rising with the sun to write, a landscape all enclosed by the Alps, his housekeeper, Madeli, 'a sweet amiable girl,' and Kleist buying her a beautiful Swiss costume; and on Sundays they row ashore together, she going to church and he climbing the foothills of the Schreckhorn; literary types now visit from Bern; Kleist, meanwhile, chews through his inheritance ('You know how inept I am at saving'), but otherwise is quite without distress, except, as he writes to Ulrike, 'It has always been my habit to invent some trouble for myself; now, for instance, I have a strange fear of dying before I finish my work.' The work was his tragedy Robert Guiscard, which Kleist feels certain will be 'a revelatory achievement in the field of art.'

It is entirely typical that Kleist's first serious bid at literature should stall as the money runs out and his

health breaks down. An alarming note was soon sent home – 'I beseech God for death, and my brother-in-law for money' – and the ever-practical Ulrike (she liked to dress in trousers and Kleist called her the 'amphibian') comes riding in a diligence though war and siege to Bern and drags her hapless brother away. He turns up outside Weimar in the home of the poet Christoph Martin Wieland, still working on his *Guiscard*. By the fire one night, Kleist reads a passage to the elder writer. Wieland is ecstatic, and in time a letter follows, which Kleist will carry on his person as a sacred text: 'Nothing is impossible,' it reads, 'for the genius of the Muse who inspires you. You must complete your *Guiscard*, though the entire Caucasus, and Mount Atlas too, were pressing down upon you.' There is a second retreat to Switzerland, underwritten by a friend, Ernst von Pfuel, later Prime Minister of Prussia ('I could have slept with you dear boy,' Kleist writes to him, 'so entirely did my soul embrace you!'), but by October 1803, Kleist is reporting to Ulrike – from whom he has repeatedly borrowed funds – that he cannot finish his drama. 'It was hell that gave me this half-talent; heaven grants a whole or none at all.' He destroys the manuscript; later, the opening is salvaged ('this magnificent torso' in the words of Rilke). Kleist, in despair, talks of levanting to Sydney, the furthest point imaginable, with his good friend Ernst. Instead, he heads off for France, intending to enlist and to get

himself killed in the invasion of England. A kindly doctor intervenes outside Boulogne. He is sent back to Prussia. There is a family conference in Berlin.

The Midnight Factory

He tried to be a civil servant. At the Palace in Charlottenberg, an interview was arranged with Karl Leopold von Köckeritz, Adjutant-General to the King. It was a Friday morning and Köckeritz received Kleist with 'a dark mien.' A memorable exchange ensued:

KLEIST in the doorway: Do I have the privilege of being known to you, Herr Köckeritz?

KÖCKERITZ: Yes.

KLEIST entering: Then I have come seeking your assistance, because, as you may be aware, I have of late displayed unmistakable signs of mental illness. I feel myself to be almost recovered now, and so able to serve my King, and am wondering whether I might hope for an official position, if I dared petition His Majesty?

There is a long pause.

KÖCKERITZ without obvious enthusiasm: Are you really recovered – I mean from the brainsickness and the false notions and the general giddiness?

KLEIST: I was ill, and, except perhaps for a certain weakness the waters might cure, I am fully restored to health.

The Adjutant-General pulls out his hankie and blows his nose.

KÖCKERITZ with an unpleasant face: If I were completely truthful with you, young man, I would tell you I cannot think favorably of you – leaving the military, running away, settling in Switzerland, dabbling with poetry, seeking to enlist with Napoleon. Really, I can do nothing for you.

KLEIST with tears in his eyes: There were explanations.

KÖCKERITZ vacillating: Well, then, write your petition to the King. [The old grimace returns.]

Kleist was granted a position. Nine months he spent working in the office of the Finance Minister (sometimes through the night), then he was transferred to the University at Königsberg to study economics and sit on the Commission on Crown Lands. He had forsworn literature. Nevertheless, he backslides. And now Kleist, the civil servant, in the deep factory of his soul, writes by night. Masterpieces begin to form under his hand – the Broken Jug (regarded as one of the funniest comedies in German), and the short stories the Marquise of O and The Earthquake in Chile. It is inevitable something will break. That something is his career. The upshot, after two years, is another resignation letter. But, being Kleist, this is not just any resignation letter. It is possibly the most extraordinary resignation letter ever composed in the Prussian Civil

Service. Kleist writes to the Finance Minister, Karl Baron von Stein zum Altenstein, announcing that for several months he has been afflicted with ‘the most exceeding and stubborn constipation.’ As a result, not only is he unable to do any work requiring effort, he is hardly able even to turn the pages of a book. ‘Dear Sir, I sit as though over an abyss pulling myself up by the hair,’ he informs the Minister.

All winter, I have felt uncertain whenever my turn came to report. My mind went blank when confronted with the matter at hand: it always seemed as if I held an empty page. I would tremble to appear before the Council. It is a great disorder in my nature, I know it.

Kleist has now burnt his bridges – twice. There is nothing for it: he is a writer, and the ensuing years are the apogée.

Yet even now as his moment blossoms, Kleist displays his utter incapability of adapting to the rules. Returning to Berlin, he is arrested by the French occupying forces, who conclude the former Prussian officer must be a spy – what else could he be? – and he is packed off to France and imprisoned in a vault, where he works happily enough for months. Released, Kleist moves to Dresden and launches a literary periodical, *Phobus*, with the conservative intellectual Adam Müller. The pair rapidly manage to offend good taste – chiefly through Kleist’s published works – and the magazine folds within a year. Around this time, too,

there is the celebrated spat with Goethe, already a living institution; Kleist goes out of his way to insult him publicly. And then there is this indelible moment: May 1809 and we see Kleist wandering about a battlefield, that of Aspern-Essling, because he has been in the neighbourhood and wishes to view the site of a French defeat. There he is discovered by Austrian troops. Under suspicion of espionage again, he is asked to identify himself. In all seriousness, Kleist offers as ID signed copies of poems he has written. He is arrested by his own side. Nevertheless, through all this, and the chronic problems (financial, physical, emotional), the works continue to flow (*Penthesilea*, *Michael Kohlhaas*). ‘I write,’ he tells a friend, ‘only because I can do nothing else.’

A Family Drama

Quite incredibly, he tried to be a soldier again. He offered his services to the Prussian King and received a response that was not exactly negative. It was enough: back to Frankfurt he went, seeking funds for a uniform. Ulrike answered the door. Her face told the story. ‘You took such fright at the sight of me, dear girl,’ Kleist wrote to her later that day, ‘that on my life, I swear, I was shaken to the depths.’ He added, ‘Can you give me luncheon, after all? I’ll be back in half an hour.’

When he returned, Ulrike was not alone. Auguste, another sister, whose husband was in charge of Kleist's finances, had joined her. It was a true family bloodbath. Over lunch, Kleist announced the King had given an order for his military appointment and said he needed money for a uniform. The sisters expressed their scepticism. Kleist grew confused. They then demolished him, attacking their wayward brother for his entire sorry existence – his besmirching of the family name with a failed rag and a few scandalous books, his endless leeching of funds from poor Ulrike, his moral bankruptcy and all his worthless, worthless projects that never amounted to anything.

Kleist was shattered. To his cousin-in-law and lover (unconsummated), Marie von Kleist, he wrote:

I have always loved my sisters from the bottom of my heart. Though I seldom spoke of it, one of my deepest and sincerest wishes has always been to give them joy and pride through my work. And so to see myself as a completely useless member of society in their eyes, deserving of no sympathy, that is exceedingly painful to me....It robs me of the joys I have hoped for in the future, and poisons my entire past as well.

Last Letters

And so, when finally he decided to kill himself, having entered into an arrangement with Henriette Vogel, a young woman dying of cancer – consenting to shoot her first and then himself, under the pines trees, above the sandy banks of the Wannsee – Heinrich von Kleist, aged thirty-four and already the greatest of German dramatists, provided another illustration of how the writer might properly conduct a life.

At his lodgings in Berlin, on a street that no longer exists (the space is now occupied by the German Federal Commission for the Disabled), Kleist got together all his remaining papers – his literary notebooks, his unfinished works, his pieces of correspondence, a novel-in-progress, various odds and ends; and no doubt *The Prince of Homburg*, too, would also have been consigned to the flames if he hadn't given the manuscript to his lover, Marie von Kleist, to read – and all this Kleist watched burn in the grill. He had no need for tracks in the sand. Everything he needed to say had already been said.

There were just a few last letters to compose – to his sister Ulrike, 'I cannot die, serene and happy as I am, without first making peace with the whole world, and so too, above all others, my dearest Ulrike, with you ...'; to Marie von Kleist, 'My dear Marie, if you knew how death and love took turns crowning these last moments of my life with blossoms, surely you would be willing to

let me die ...'; to a senior bureaucrat whom Kleist requested come quickly to tie up the ends, '... I forgot to pay my barber for the month, and would ask you please to give him one Reichsthaler, which you will find wrapped up; the costs of the burial, as regards myself, will be covered by my sister ...'

The deed itself was done with very great effectiveness. The Official Report notes that under the left breast of the female there was just a small bloodstain about the size of a thaler on her dress, with what seemed to be burn marks around; the male was bloodstained about the mouth, but only slightly. His jaws were tightly closed and later would have to be levered open with a crowbar. Otherwise, there were no signs of external violence on either body.

They lay slumped together in a ditch. ♦

Literary Patrons

by *Serena Godsen-Hood*

During a recent drive-by of the Saatchi Gallery, in Duke of York Square, I found myself pondering the good fortune of such artists as Damien Hirst and Tracey Emin for having enjoyed the patronage of the eponymous founder of that venue. While Charles Saatchi may now be more notorious for his mastery of the chokehold in fashionable London restaurants, there was a time when his name conjured visions of the art world and the, now no longer particularly youthful, Young British Artists. This led me to a consideration of who the literary equivalents of the age might be, and I found myself unable to produce a single name. The closest I could come was someone like the late Felix Dennis, a successful publishing entrepreneur with a penchant for poetry. However, Dennis's financial championship of poetry readings primarily applied to his own work, during recitations of which he would usually provide free wine. I went once during the first year of my PhD and found that the performance, coupled with the liquid refreshment, somewhat

trumped the poetry itself. However, I don't wish to say anything to fracture the happy concept of wine and poetry, provided gratis; I rather wish that more rich publishers would follow where Dennis led.

Another thought I had was of the wonderful Shakespeare & Co bookshop on the banks of the Seine in Paris, where struggling young writers are still allowed to stay for free while they work on their latest project, provided they book in and extract themselves from their beds in the upstairs portion of the shop before it opens for business. Both of these constitute excellent ways of supporting the arts but they remain a far cry from the salons of nineteenth century France, or the financial championship of such individuals as Lady Augusta Gregory and Lady Ottoline Morrell. The decline of the tradition of aristocracy championing intellect appears to have left both the poorer for it.

Lady Ottoline was, herself, the chronicler of the so-called Bloomsbury Group, an environment she both inhabited and made possible. Morrell, who numbered among her lovers Bertrand Russell and Henry Lamb, once described herself as a 'magnet for egoists'. Yet one could, with no less truth, invert the observation and opine that it was egoists whom she found eternally magnetic. In the greenhouse of her encouragement and largesse, such writers as Lawrence, Eliot, Huxley and Strachey flourished and, it is fair to mention, so too did pictorial artists like Mark Gertler and Dora

Carrington. The point is that what Morrell fostered was more than just talent, it was a social environment saturated with bohemian glamour, which orbited herself and her home, Garsington, and irradiated both with a kind of subversive splendour. I do not at all mean to suggest that Morrell was a charlatan with no capacity to appreciate literature; only, perhaps, that the mode of life educed by the creative meant as much to her as the work they generated.

As for Lady Gregory, her advocacy of Yeats seems to have been born largely out of a shared passion for aspects of Irish nationalism, be those literary or political. She was herself a student of Irish mythology, which so gorgeously and frequently features in the poetry of Yeats. When Yeats turned his hand to an elegy upon the death of her son and penned, 'In Memory of Major Robert Gregory', she recoiled from the subject matter, for reasons perhaps not wholly confined to the sting of personal tragedy. Yeats's treatment of R. Gregory was, if anything, almost too flattering ('Our Sydney and our perfect man'), a mode of expression that harmonizes with the often saccharine extravagance of the diction of the genre. Perhaps Lady Gregory obscurely recognized that Yeats's poem about the great Irish hero Cuchulain entering the afterlife, "Cuchulain Comforted", had more of truth and insight in its surprising negativity than all the reckless plaudits applied to her late son?

The common ground, however, appears to be that there was a time when literary patronage served to afford the givers the means of enriching their lifestyles, their causes, or both. It is a benefit that seems to have waned in the face of the ruthless march of the last hundred years, since the fact of being a writer, and by extension of patronizing one, no longer wields the glamour it once did. As observed, with an amusing lack of irony, in Woody Allen's new movie, *Café Society*, 'You wouldn't have heard of me. I'm a writer'.

Contributing to the above is the fact that the possibilities for self-exhibition are not what they once were. The days of mesmerizing an entire salon of the great and the interesting with a reading, or even of holding court at Garsington, are well and truly behind us. Today, half the signings in Barnes and Noble seem to be for celebrity chefs or retired footballers, and the rising tide of Kindles and iPads makes the future of the book as a physical object increasingly uncertain. One could argue that the starving writers of today are hardly any worse off than they once were. T.S. Eliot, after all, despite enjoying weekends at Garsington, retained a bank job for eight years before shifting into publishing, and neither day job diluted the potency of his poetic output. Philip Larkin, with a kind of numbing obstinacy, continued his role as Librarian for Hull University for much of his life, glumly categorizing it as his 'vocation', while poetry was relegated to the

status of 'profession'. It may be that this kind of drearily methodical mode of procrastination provides the necessary periods of fallowness that render creativity possible. This, however, does not explain the modern day absence of the literary patron, it only serves to cheer us up a little as we face the empty air that they once filled.

What is clear is that there seems to have been a seismic shift towards a favouring of the visual, or that which proves most easy to display, among what we might very loosely term the 'artistically inclined'. Patrons of the visual arts still exist in relative profusion, but the portion of the limelight that was formerly allotted to the recipients of the support of literary-minded people seems to have relocated itself to the stars of the silver screen. These days, individuals are far more likely to attend a movie star having a clumsy stab at Hamlet in the West End than a book reading from an up-and-coming young author (another example of mutually assured poverty). It is ironic to consider the fact that movie stars are, of course, dependent on the material provided by these invisible craftsmen for their own irradiation. The shining ambassadors of Hollywood would not look half so good if they were forced to be silent. It is an irony that was not lost on the actors who expressed solidarity with the 2007-2008 Writers Guild of America Strike.

So the question remains, is there anything to be done about supporting literature in the face of this shift in financial focus? My suggestion would be another kind of patronage, the kind in which successful, solvent authors seek out youthful talent and attempt to provide it with some portion of their own limelight. At this stage in the history of literature, the epistolary novel is already dead and, in the face of the dwindling attention span of a generation too used to immediate gratification, the future of the novel itself appears increasingly bleak. I would call upon the great writers of this age to do whatever it is they can to help and promote those who still wish to make a small, though hopefully potent, contribution to our waning history. But then, of course, I would say that – I'm a 'starving writer'. ♦

Mostar Bridge

by *Barnaby Arathoon*

The oldest person to ever leap off the twenty metre-high Old Bridge in Mostar was a sixty-five year old German, and he broke a vertebra. In 2003 he stepped into the divers' clubhouse on the west side of the bridge, slapped down the €25 (it goes towards bridge upkeep) necessary to be trained for a feet-first jump and demanded they let him do it. After being told he was too old, he said he'd prove he wasn't by trying a head-first dive off the bridge, a far more difficult feat. He did it with just an hour's training and was lucky to survive.

I'm sitting in that very clubhouse, flicking through a large plastic wallet that is used to record the names of each and every non-local to ever jump off Mostar's beloved Stari Most. It's midday and outside I can hear one of the local jumpers trying to pull a few more euros out of the waiting tourists before he drops himself into the frigid water of the Neretva River that flows rapidly through the city. Having seen him jump earlier I know he's wearing a pair of bright yellow trunks and flexing

the muscles under his perfectly shaved skin to persuade middle-aged Japanese women to part with their euros. The official currency of Bosnia & Herzegovina is the Bosnia & Herzegovinian Convertible Mark, and using the euro is technically illegal, but almost all of the un-taxed traders accept both. Ironically they prefer the euro, as the Convertible Mark can't actually be converted. Most UK banks can't get hold of them so I had to make my way with euros until I could find a cash machine.

Next to me sits my cousin, taller even than me, and broader. His face is slightly sunburnt but the brown is coming through. He's examining a foot-long unexploded shell, rolling the dense, rusted metal over and over in his hands. The longer we're in the Balkans, the less like tourists we feel. Across from the both of us is Zika, the owner of the hostel we are staying in. He is thirty-seven, tall, barrel-chested and bald. He wears a faded blue t-shirt and 3/4 length khakis, with flip-flops on his feet. Behind him on the wall of the clubhouse is a framed, faded photograph of a younger Zika wearing a lot less than he is now, at the top of the bridge with his arm around an older gentleman who is also in nothing but swimming trunks. Zika catches me looking.

'My coach,' he says. 'That's me after my first jump. He was killed in the war.'

Zika was a professional bridge jumper for more than

ten years before settling down, marrying the lovely Nina, and opening a travellers' hostel with her. Yet he seems nostalgic as he stares at the picture of himself. There's no sadness, no anger about what happened to his coach, just a quiet prayer for the past. There isn't space for anger in this city. Or grudges. In Mostar (in fact in most of Bosnia & Herzegovina) there are three main ethnic groups. The majority are Turkish-Muslim-Bosnians ('Bosniaks'), then there are Croat-Catholic-Bosnians and Serb-Orthodox-Bosnians. These three tribes are squashed together despite having been at each other's throats twenty years ago. When Bosnia & Herzegovina seceded from Yugoslavia the Serbians attacked, and shelled Mostar into a state that Zika has compared to Dresden at the end of the Second World War. Then, when the dust started to clear, the Croats (who had fought with the Bosniaks against the Serb oppressor) began a well-planned and savage genocide against the Bosniaks on the western side of the river. These three groups now live in a peaceful but tense situation, under the watchful eye of the UN.

The bridge jumpers are one of the oldest manifestations of Mostar's history, Zika explains:

'They started the custom after the original bridge was built. The Ottomans, you know? The first jumpers were the builders who worked on it. They jumped to celebrate its completion.'

I check the guidebook. Commissioned by the sultan

Suleiman the Magnificent in 1557, the original bridge was finished sometime in 1566-7. It's refreshing to realise that people more than 400 years ago possessed the bravery and thirst for excitement that is necessary for jumping off the bridge these days.

We leave the clubhouse and Zika leads us through the cobbled streets of Old Town. I can feel the plasma in the blisters on my feet (painful reminders of the ascent my cousin and I made of Sveti Ilija in Croatia two days ago) ebb and flow as we wander the uneven surface. The thoroughfares were originally built wide to accommodate the Ottoman horse-drawn carts, but now the shops explode out into the road like a Berber souk, with bright reds and whiffs of incense, leaving us to wheedle our way through the hordes of tourists examining the street-mounted wares. The custom of lunchtime in Mostar is to take a long break, perhaps two hours, and leave your stall in the hands of your beautiful, persuasive daughter, so we're smiled at on all sides by dark-eyed, brightly dressed young women as we progress. The majority of them are selling mass-produced scarves, bracelets and ornamental daggers, but occasionally we'll come across a more sombre shop and hidden away in its dark, cloying innards will be WWII, Yugoslavian and sometimes Nazi uniforms, bayonets and paraphernalia.

Zika takes us up to an old Serbian machine gun bunker on Hum Hill, to the southwest of Mostar Old

Town. It is next to the gigantic white cross the Croat-Catholic-Bosnians had built after the war, mostly to spite the Bosniaks.

'You are lucky,' says Zika as he leads us along the white scree path over the hills, 'usually I have more than twenty people on this tour. But it is the end of the season, so is just you two.' My cousin and I smile at each other.

Zika points out several red and white striped poles that lead a trail through the rough brush on either side of the path.

'Mines,' he announces, 'occasionally some men from the UN come to disarm them, but not very often. These hills,' he stretches out a tanned arm and gestures to the rolling, placid peaks that surround us, 'covered in mines.'

My cousin and I look at each other again, mentally scrapping our plans to go hiking tomorrow morning.

We reach the bunker, an ugly grey block that has fallen into extreme disrepair despite being used less than twenty years ago. A small snake slips lithely through a pitted loophole and disappears into a stack of copper-coloured sandbags.

Zika begins speaking abruptly. 'During the war I was shot twice. No, wait,' he corrects himself. 'Shot once, and blown up once.' He lifts his Chelsea football shirt and turns around, showing us a scatter of white shrapnel scars in a rose-bud pattern across his back.

'The metal from the shell, still in there,' he says proudly. 'Too dangerous to operate on.' He lifts his right leg and points to his inner thigh, two inches down from his groin.

'And sniper shot me here.' He swings his arm, showing the movement the red hot bullet had taken through his thigh. 'No need to remove that one,' he grins, 'went straight through.'

'When was this?'

'Both '93,' he replies, 'same year the Bridge went down.'

The Old Bridge was shelled to smithereens by the Croats during the nine-month siege. Many people believe the Serbs destroyed the Old Bridge, but in fact they blew up nearly every way over the Neretva River apart from that one.

'I was blown up first,' Zika continues, 'a JNA shell came down from the hills,' he gestures east, 'and landed in the house next door. Blew straight through the wall.'

'Bloody hell.'

'Exactly.'

I thought for a moment, looking out over the hills, imagining them crawling with Serbian soldiers.

'Hang on, JNA? They were the Yugoslavian troops, weren't they?' I ask. 'Why would the Yugos be shelling you?'

'Ah, now, you must remember that Bosnia & Herzegovina had only just declared independence and

broken off from Yugoslavia, and the Serbians controlled the Yugo army.'

I was shocked until I realised that after Bosnia & Herzegovina seceded, all that was left of Yugoslavia was modern day Serbia and Montenegro (Macedonia having declared independence six months before Bosnia).

'So the JNA was basically now the Serb army?' I ask. 'Correct,' Zika replies. 'And they blew me up.'

My cousin and I step cautiously closer to the bunker. Zika laughs at us. 'No mines around here, boys, don't you worry.'

We stop tiptoeing and advance with more confidence. The side facing towards us, southwest, is completely collapsed, leaving just the front (facing the city) and the roof. It's one piece of pebbly concrete, pitted with bullet holes and scraped by shell explosions. I look through one of the battered loopholes, down the hillside and into the city. My cousin points.

'You can see the Old Bridge.'

'Jesus.'

I put a loose fist to my eye and look through it. This is what the Serb soldiers saw twenty years ago. Old Mostar, a sitting duck, naively placed in a naturally formed bowl by the Ottomans in the mid-1400s. Hills all around.

Zika's been rooting around in the rubble outside. He joins us in the wrecked bunker and holds out his hand,

palm up. Lying grossly in his scarred palm are six rusted shell casings.

‘AK-47,’ says Zika, ‘every time I take a tour up here everyone picks up some casings.’

I do some hurried mental maths. Tours four times a week, at least twenty people on each. Everyone takes at least one casing. That means around eighty shell casings are picked up every week. That’s 3,840 a year. Zika’s been doing these tours for more than five years and there’s still casings all around this bunker. That’s a lot of bullets fired, not to mention shells and mortars.

My cousin and I pocket a few of the casings each and Zika leads us back to the car.

‘So your leg?’ my cousin asks as we tramp over the sharp pebbles beneath us.

‘Ah, no that wasn’t JNA. Croats.’

I had been expecting that. While the Serbians had shelled and shot at Mostar and the river, they never actually sent ground troops into the city itself. The Croats, however, had done both. They held eastern Mostar (the Turkish, Muslim side) under siege for nine months, and cleansed the western (Croat, Christian) side of all Muslims. The lucky ones were forced over the river. Those less fortunate were executed, the women raped. Just thinking about this savagery brought bile to my tongue as Zika continued with his tale.

‘My friends and I were off to another friend’s house. To drink, you know?’ He winks. ‘We were sixteen,

seventeen. During the war we had to run everywhere. Standing still made you an easy target. So we were running through the Old Town, trying to stay out of sight.’

I thought of quests to get drunk back when I was seventeen in sunny England, when the hardest obstacles were dodgy fake IDs and the host’s parents coming home early, not flying bullets and giant chunks of masonry in the street. Zika and his friends had had their teenage years taken from them.

‘We were nearly there but then I heard this “crack!” from across the river and then I got hit in the leg.’ He points to his upper inner-thigh again. ‘Lucky it wasn’t a bit higher, eh? Heh, heh, heh. Well it hit me and spun me all the way around, you know? I fell down but my friends grabbed me and pulled me into a house and the Croats didn’t have time to finish me off.’

I stand, agog.

‘Bloody hell,’ I say again.

‘It wasn’t so bad,’ Zika says, and my mouth drops open wider. ‘They bandaged me up and sent us on our way.’

‘No hospital?’ my cousin asks. ‘No hospital.’ ♦

Shetland

by *Simon Tait*

Shetland is a quiet, self-possessed nation of 22,000 whose population still considers itself to be more Norse than British. They like celebrations, *foys* they call them, but the big one comes on the last Tuesday of January, a midwinter relief when male Shetlanders dress up as Vikings, process through the capital, Lerwick – or *Lerook* in the vernacular – with torches and set fire to a galley. The day after is the public holiday to allow the revellers to recover.

The name of *Up Helly Aa*, according to John Jamieson's 1818 *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language*, is from the Old Norse word *uppi* meaning 'the end of', *helly* is 'holy' – the end of Christmas – and *aa* is 'all'. So, given the abandon the festivities are consigned to at the depths of the near-Arctic climate, 'the end of all that's holy' would be about right.

Thousands descend on *Up Helly Aa* in their vast tourist cruise ships, and welcoming as Shetlanders are, much of their chatter will be alien to even the English

speaking visitors. Half of Shetland's residents can still speak their ancestors' tongue, once forbidden by the ruling Scots but still alive, unique and charming, in which the biggest insult is to call someone a soothmoothen, one whose speech comes from beyond the islands. Our 'ith' has been largely lost to dialect, so that 'they' is *day*, 'then' is *dan*. 'Their' and 'there' have both become *dare*, but 'you' is *du* – the 'y' form having once been runic for 'ith' so that *du* comes from 'thou'. *Wat du daan da day, dan?* is 'What are you doing today, then?'

Shetland dialect has German, Old Scots, elements of Latin, even discernible traces of French, but at its base is their own Norn which reclines on Old Norse.

Norn, or *Norrøna*, is essentially a street language. Much as Shetlanders love their sagas and blood curdling yarns of whaling disasters and family tragedy it's largely an oral tradition. Though I have a volume of dialect poetry that takes much from Norn. Despite its Old Norse base Norn relies heavily on onomatopoeia and where there isn't a word to fit a particular situation, a new one emerges from the idiom. And there is its great charm.

Life is hard in this land where the sun only shines for half the year, when the men traditionally fished for whale in the winter months and worked the land where no trees can grow in the long hours of the seasons of *simmerdim*, while the women were spinning and weaving, plucking wool from the gorse bushes and

cutting peat all year round. So it is not surprising that the dialect has, for instance, twelve different words for exhausted: you could emerge from the daily grind *daddit*, *debaetless*, *depooperit*, *disjasket*, *forfochen*, *hurless*, *maegered*, *mankit*, *moyenless*, *ootmaagit*, *pooskered* or even *pyaagit*, largely depending on which of the islands you hail from.

To help rescue this beguiling language Alistair Christie-Johnston and his wife Adaline, who live on the island of Yell, published a dictionary, *Shetland Words*, with the *Shetland Times*, compiled because he and his editor, Neil Anderson, feared that many of the intrinsic words were falling out of use and will be lost forever. At the end of the nineteenth century there were thought to be about 10,000 Shetland dialect words extant, by 1970 only about 15% of them were found; through ground knowledge and detective work *Shetland Words* has recorded about 4,000. The book, published in 2010, sold out and a second edition has just been published with 300 more words gleaned from the outer islands, difficult because the accents change from island to island so that the same word might sound quite different at Skerries to the north east, say, from how it will sound at Foula in the west.

The basis remains, and the survival of Norn is remarkable. It began to die as long ago as the sixteenth century when rule reverted from Norway to Scotland and Scots law was imposed with the indigenous

language proscribed, but many beautiful words of Norn remain in the argot. *Bonnhoga*, for instance – from the Old Norse barn (child) and hagi (pasture) – which means spiritual home. *Gauvenliss* is the word for feeble or clumsy; a mouse is a *bohonnin*, which by some old irony comes from the Norse for watchdog; a pig is a *pottisidna*; a clergyman is a *prestengolva* (‘the one in the cassock’). A *swee* is a strong dram, an organic word, and a clock midder is a hen with chicks, but a *hansel* is a commemorative gift, from the Old Norse for the transference of a right; a *cangle* is a quarrel.

Modern life has made its incursions, but in a curious way that leaves a helpful distinction. The shower in your bathroom is pronounced ‘shower’, but a quick downfall of rain is still a *shooer*. Shetland also has its own, not always appealing, cuisine and words to go with it. It may not be a surprise to know that a dish of fish livers mixed with oatmeal, stuffed in a herring’s head and boiled is called *krappit* and is rarely eaten any more.

The etymology of some words is mysterious until you know more of the island life. Wild thyme is *taegirse*, which translates as “toe grass” and makes no sense until you know that thyme here is used as a treatment for athlete’s foot. But Alistair Christie-Johnston and Neil Anderson were not content – *tae* after all is Scots and plants in Shetland tend to keep their Norn traces. They tracked the real derivation down to the Old Norse

word for root fibre *tág*, plural *taeger*, which fits the tight network of the Shetland variety of creeping thyme. You have to be there.

It is an ancient language full of social history, and a glimpse into a lost age, Neil Anderson told me. He is a Shetlander of the old school who can give you the family name of a man he has never met simply because of the way he walks; in the same way, he can tell from which island a person comes from the words he uses. And he had an affirming experience in the Lerwick shop he runs when he offered a young man a foodbag. He didn't know what he meant, but he did know the Shetland word, *maetpockie*. ♦

The Leprechaun

by *Steven O'Brien*

And so it all began with my grandad and the Leprechaun. He was a great man for singing and stories. His generation were happy to turn the television off on a Sunday evening and fill the silence with word-conjure. As I look back now, I see him in his mustard cardigan and suede shoes. His dentures gleam and his hair is Brylcreemed back, as slick as an otter's pelt. The false teeth give his speech a whistling quality now and then. When he tells stories he often runs an open palm over his oily hair. I am eleven years old and he is not much taller than me. Spare and dapper; when he sings he stands by the fireplace with one hand behind his back. There is a bantam dignity about him.

He loves to scare us. Sometimes he puts one of my grandmother's shawls over his head and rises from behind the sofa as the very likeness of the banshee. My brother, my sister and I laugh in a scared-ticklish way. Such is the theatricality of his moaning and hunching over us that we never really believe his banshee story. But with the story of the Leprechaun it was different.

He will tell us about his encounter with the little man in a matter of fact way, in much the same tone as when he recounts his reminiscences of his own raw and half-starved childhood, or when he used to hunt plovers for the gentry. So although I am eleven years old, I am only just beginning to question the veracity of the story. It certainly has no less a ring of truth to it than his claim to have cycled sixty miles there and back in one night just to go to a party.

Imagine you take a picture of us with a 1970's Polaroid camera. The gaudy orange and yellows of the instant photo shows an ordinary family in a neat small house. My father and mother are smoking and sipping their third cup of tea. My grandmother is ironing. We three children are on the sofa. Grandad is in his armchair.

He keeps himself busy doing a bit of painting and decorating and he always wears a collar and tie under his overalls. The talk passes through Mrs Knight's new bathroom which he finished last week, to the next job at the doctor's house. My father mentions the sunset the night before, when he and I were walking our dog Jasper along the beach. Grandad has that Irish way of quietly agreeing by giving a soft intake of breath, like a sigh in reverse. My father stops speaking and there is silence. There are dark corners in the sitting room.

Grandad looks around and says, 'It puts me in mind of the evening I met the Leprechaun.' And to the hiss

and sweep of my grandmother's steam iron he begins to lay before us the tale of his encounter.

'When I was a young man I was coming home one late afternoon in April. It had rained but I had been working all day in a barn, cutting turnips. I remember that the rain had just passed and the fields were all washed new. I climbed over a wall to take the short cut home. The grass wet my boots, especially the one with a hole in the sole. I crossed the field and had to skirt a little wood. It was not far from Kildangan. I could see the smoke coming from our chimney. I was just passing by the trees when I noticed a movement. In those days we always carried our jackets over our shoulders if we could, to be ready to throw it over any stray pheasants. You had to be quick and careful. We needed the meat but the law was against us in that matter; you could get prison for poaching. Anyway, I pricked up and looked again to where I had noticed something moving. Well, the sight of it nearly had me running the other way. I felt like rubbing my eyes to see if they were cheating me. For there, by the bank of an old ash tree, squirming and muttering was a little man lying on the ground.

I went up to him with my heart knocking on my ribs. Yes, he was a little man right enough, about the size of a five year old child and he was dressed in a frayed green coat. He had a crumpled, wrinkled face and he was wearing a tall battered hat. As I came close I could

hear him cursing and, oh, the swearing and blasphemies. It would make a sailor blush. I suppose the length of my shadow gave me away for he looked up in the midst of his carrying on. He flinched, but then straightaway he seemed to change his demeanour. "Well hello Martin O'Brien," he said in a little voice that sounded something like a door hinge creaking.

"Hello yourself," I replied.

"You find me in a sorry situation altogether Martin," he said. "Oh is that so?"

"Yes, terrible," he said. "I was just on my way to see my people and this happened." The little man pointed to his foot. I saw that he had got it stuck under the one of the roots of the ash tree. "Now how would it be if you could give me a bit of assistance Martin? For I want to be half way to Wicklow by midnight."

"Wicklow is very long way from here," I said.

The little man's hazel eyes flashed with annoyance. "I walk very fast," he said.

"Do you now?" I said, quiet like, as if I wasn't the least bit interested. For the notion had come upon me that the fellow was none other than the Leprechaun and I wanted to think about a plan of action. You have to be very careful when you deal with the 'good people.' Get yourself prepared and be as polite as you can. I drew even closer and had another long look at him. He was like a cross between a tramp and fox. He smelled of the damp woods.

"Yes Martin." He took off his old hat and bashed it back into shape. His hair was rusty and long. "I go like the wind and I am running messages all over the country."

"Well then, let me see," I said, as I knelt down. I ran my hand the length of the root. It was a thick one. However, I was strong in those days and, closing my fingers around it, I gave it a great wrench. Now, what occurred next, happened in an instant. I was strong but I was also quick and I knew I had to be on this occasion. As I pulled the root up the Leprechaun gave a great yelp of relief, but this soon turned to a wail, for I had caught him, in mid-leap, by his left ear.

How he pulled and screeched. One second he was furious, the next he was in despair, then back to fury again. His language was awful. His little hands pawed at my fingers but I had him fast. "Now, now Sir," I said, remembering my manners. "I have done you a great favour and soon you will be on your way to the Wicklow mountains. But doesn't one favour deserve another in return?"

The Leprechaun brightened up, "Now that you come to mention it Martin" he said, still straining against my grasp, "I suppose it does, but if you just let go now I will be able to do something for you the next time I am in Kildangan. Perhaps a bottle of fine whisky?"

"No, no, no," I replied, giving his ear another little twist. "That won't do at all and if I let you go I will

never see you again.”

“That’s an atrocious calumny Martin,” he said. “I’ll have you know that I am of the quality and I always keep my word.”

“Well this is going to be the way of it Sir,” I said. “I know all about you and your people. I know what a trickster you are. I only want one thing in return for the grand rescue of your good self.”

The Leprechaun stood up as best he could. He held his hat by his side. He looked at me. “You have me bettered,” he said. “What can I do for you?”

“Let me see.” I put on my most casual voice. “I was just thinking that you must have been attending some business in this townland. So my mind is going along these lines . . . if you just show me where your gold is buried I will let you go.”

“Aw, not that! Not that!” He wailed, and it was like the grief of a cat at midnight.

“Yes, that exactly sir.”

“You’ll have me ruined,” he cried.

“Not at all,” I replied. “You have plenty of treasure all over the place.”

“I never had you down for such a Rapparee, Martin O’Brien!” His tawny eyes filled with tears of rage.

“Enough, enough,” I said. “You have been gathering gold for a long, long time and I only want the stash you have buried here. Now take me to it. I won’t let you go until you do.”

He gave one last wail and then became quiet. “Alright, alright,” he said, taking up a little twisted blackthorn stick.

“This way.”

He led me out into the field and then through a gate into a pasture where an old donkey was grazing. All the time I had him by the ear and all the time he was grumbling at the injustice of it all. Several times he looked up at me sideways and several times I nearly tripped over molehills that seemed to spring suddenly up from the grass. But I was ready for these antics. He was just trying to shake me off.

Finally he turned us both around thrice, and with a great show of disgust he thrust his stick into the earth. “There” he said. “It’s below here. You are a robber and a scoundrel.”

I pretended I hadn’t heard this last insult. “Now before I let you go, I must have a promise from you sir,” I said.

“That you will not take this stick from the ground.”

Pain creased across the Leprechaun’s face. “Aagh! You have my promise.” He squealed.

“Good enough,” I said. As I let him go a great sudden wind knocked me on my back. When I sat up the Leprechaun was gone, but the stick was still there.

Where I had nipped him between my finger and thumb I had a sore rash as if I had touched a nettle. But that scarcely troubled me. I ran across two fields

as if my shirt was on fire, then over the wall and up the boreen to the house. The sunset was on my back. My boots clattered in the yard and there was my spade leaning against the wall by the door. Back, like a hare, down the boreen and over the wall with my spade over my shoulder. Now the big red sunset was in my eyes and lust for the buried treasure was in my heart. I would be a rich man! I would buy new boots, a fine suit of clothes and a big house with roses in the garden and carpet on the floor.

I leapt the wall like an acrobat (I was fast in those days) and across the two fields rapidly closing the distance between me and the braying donkey. There was a lash of sweat on my brow, but I was giddy with fine speculation of the treasure. Gold coins lying in the black earth. The Leprechaun's old hoard of stolen money. Soft, generous gold. Enough to set a man up for life.

I got to the gate and vaulted it, landing in the pasture on two feet. And the groan that came from my throat was like a man dying of disappointment. I stood there with my chest heaving and I threw my spade on the ground in anger. For the field was staked and pricked by ten, twenty, or thirty thousand polished little blackthorn sticks, all exactly the same. The poor old donkey was completely stockaded by them. They were almost as common as the blades of grass. The Leprechaun had kept his promise but he had also

tricked me. I couldn't dig up the whole field, so I loped home in despond, and I have never been a rich man.

And that is the story of the evening I met the Leprechaun. Since that day every time I hear a creaking hinge it puts me in mind of that cunning little fellow.'

In four years my grandfather would be dead. He took with him all his de-light in the quizzical and the ghostly and the tragic; the sense of a tricky otherworld, very close to our own. Also the notion of a threshold between these dimensions that was almost casually crossable.

I have had my own encounter with the Leprechaun. When I was in my early twenties I left a friend's house in the early hours of the morning. We had been drinking. I was staying back with my parents for a few weeks. My friend's house was down towards the sea on a very grand avenue, with trees all along the centre. New street lights had been installed but as it was after midnight it was almost pitch black. I was singing to myself to keep my spirits up, for I have always been afraid of the dark.

As I neared the top of the avenue I saw a light to my right. That was Jefferies Lane which led to some old flint-walled houses that had been surrounded by 1930s

villas. There was one iron street lamp there from an earlier age. I still have no idea why this one lamp was still lit when all the others were dark. I walked on past the lane but had a great bolt of sudden shock when I saw a little man dancing in the yellow compass of the light. I stopped quite still, but every muscle in me shouted that I should run like the wind all the way home. There he was dancing in the light, his tiny face looking straight at me. His white socks flicked in a quick-step jig.

In an instant I saw that it was an illusion. It was, in fact, a cat running towards me. The dancing flash of the Leprechaun's socks were the cat's white paws. It might seem daft but for a second I really had believed I had seen the Leprechaun.

A few years ago I related this story to an old academic who has made a great reputation in the study of folklore and myth. I explained that my belief was that at the moment of panic, I drew on the stories I had been given as a child in a kind of unbidden archetypal fashion. The woman smiled and said, 'How do you know that it wasn't really the Leprechaun and that he turned into a cat as soon as he noticed you looking at him?' ♦

Scottish Music, 1983

by *Houman Barekat*

News of the death, back in June, of Bogdan Dochev, the Bulgarian linesman who failed to flag up Diego Maradona's handball in Argentina's win over England at the 1986 World Cup, prompted me to revisit some stills of that infamous goal: the diminutive forward implausibly out-jumping the English goalkeeper, Peter Shilton, to propel the ball into the net with his fist. Aged only five at the time, I have no recollection of watching that tournament, and in all likelihood I did not catch a single minute of it. I experienced Mexico '86 as part of a heritage, in its afterlife on the pages of soccer magazines pored over from 1988 to 1990, the formative years of a lifelong obsession. Those shimmery, low-resolution photographs of sun-drenched Latin American stadia had an impressionistic vitality that would, over time, become inextricably bound up in my memory of early youth. When, twenty-five years later, the photo-sharing app Instagram appeared, with its filters enabling users to doctor their photographs in Ektachrome tones, it was

my generation that flocked to it in droves. The photo on the cover of David Keenan's debut novel is, I am reliably informed, from the author's personal collection: four young lads hanging out, squinting against bright sunshine, in blurry low-res. It is a quietly, understatedly evocative image. They say you should never judge a book by its cover. They are mistaken.

This is *Memorial Device* is composed of a series of fictive interviews with the fictive personalities comprising a fictive music scene in the Scottish town of Airdrie in 1983. The music is broadly categorisable as post-punk – The Fall, Pere Ubu and Iggy Pop are frequently name-checked – along with a smidgen of emergent electronica. The interviews are loosely concerned with retracing the trajectory of a cult local band called Memorial Device, but pan out to a wider panorama of the local subculture of Airdrie and nearby Coatbridge. The unprepossessing backdrop is no accident: this novel is a fond celebration of youthful esprit and artistic energy, which can flourish in the unlikeliest of places. This, lest we forget, is the culturally impoverished landscape of 1980s Britain, where Turkish Delight is considered 'sophisticated – you know, like garlic or pasta'. You have to make your own fun here.

'Behind closed doors at the back ends of estates, in crumbling mansions in Clarkston and modern flats on the main street, in solitary bedsits and grim flats

above chip shops there are hidden some of the most eccentric characters ever to escape from a novel.'

Keenan's milieu is indeed populated by oddballs and deviants of various kinds. We are informed that Big Patty, the frontman of Memorial Device, is rumoured to have taken to imbibing his own urine during a short-lived flirtation with Satanism. In his younger days he is often seen with a book sticking out of his back pocket, which is considered a bold statement in itself; an acquaintance recalls his horror at seeing him 'walking along the road and reading at the same time'. A precocious wannabe named David Kilpatrick makes a band entirely of mannequins, who 'play' to a backing track in a shop window; he receives enquiring letters from local artists, robotics experts and perverts, all of whom take an interest in his work. As for Mad Mary Bell, she once drank a bottle of plant food for the hell it. Often the idiosyncrasies are of the carefully cultivated variety – young men and women experimenting, trying things on for size. It is in this spirit that we find Maya, in a white fur coat and white leather jacket, acting 'moody as fuck' and affecting 'total disdain for the world but still trying to impress it'. In a similar vein, a young man discovers that his sister's boyfriend doesn't wear underwear and, when she tells him she finds it sexy, decides it's a good look for him: 'From that day on I threw all of my scants in the bin and just walked about with my bollocks hanging carefree'.

A sizeable bawdy streak runs through this narrative. 'I was a stockings man back then,' recalls one veteran of the Airdrie scene (he doesn't tell us what changed), before proceeding to fondly reminisce about how he used to fantasise about his girlfriend's mother while making love to her. If occasionally crass, the novel's sexual content is by and large affectionate in tone – a good-humoured celebration of transgressive, taboo-breaking subversion rather than gratuitous leeriness. Recalling his crush on the frontwoman of a local electronic band, John Bailey waxes reverential about her breast implants, hailing them as 'a thumb in the eye of fate or God or whoever dealt the cards in the first place'.

One interviewee, who goes by the preposterous moniker Street Hassle, is asked to sum up the Airdrie music scene in one word. He replies: 'Pointless'. Here, as elsewhere in this book, the self-deprecation is mere deflection – the default, protective diffidence of the earnest. He goes on to articulate, powerfully and persuasively, the attraction of punk and its derivative forms:

a lot of people that might have been doing something else with their lives suddenly realised they could get away with being themselves and still survive or even thrive ... punk was a way of aggrandising weird character traits and specific tics and making levels of ability interesting because it got rid of any notion of a

norm so everything became fascinating and every failure became a breakthrough these back-room gigs and wha-out art-centre shows and rehearsal-room jams, which were like new routes to immortality, man, like for a moment everyone was beatified or forgiven...

The easy, anecdotal register of Keenan's prose renders it both realistic and highly readable. There are occasional, playful forays into local dialect ('Do you even know what a plamf is? A plamf is somebody that sniffs dirty knickers.') and bar-room bravado ('I took off my guitar and fucked somebody right around the head with it.'). Every so often we are treated to a delightfully on-point visual description. When a chap called Goosey is scalped – yes, scalped – during a brawl after a gig, the narrator remembers that 'his head looked like a skinned beetroot'. A moment of late-night tension is rendered thus: 'a split second where their moon faces were like a pair of empty brackets () in a crime report or a Russian novel'.

This *Is Memorial Device* may be read straightforwardly as a nostalgic paean to the author's own youth. Its portrait of raw, late-adolescent zeal – often misguided and misdirected, but always energetic and earnest, a force of nature – transcends its socio-historical context: 'Back then,' says one interviewee, 'we were on the tipping point between terror and goad'. But its greater significance resides in its documenting of a mode of cultural engagement that would be rendered

nearly obsolete within a couple of decades. It is impossible for anyone over the age of 30 to read this highly entertaining novel without feeling a sense of dislocation, and of regret – however counterintuitive, however reactionary – for the passing of an era in which cultural capital was so precious that you cherished every little bit you could get your hands on. Young music obsessives – myself included – were once in the habit of compiling lists of our favourite albums, which we often referred to as our favourite albums ‘of all time’. The casual hubris of that ‘of all time’ – equating the forty-year stretch from Elvis until the 1990s, a mere blink of an eye in historical terms, to all eternity – says so much about the solipsistic, naive confidence of a generation who took their singularity for granted, and experienced their heritage as a long cultural moment that would endure in perpetuity.

It is, of course, pointless and futile to dwell on the decline of guitar music per se; it will take its place in posterity’s broad sweep of something called popular music. What matters is the total transformation of the ecology of cultural consumption, in particular the decline of the object fetishism that drove our earliest engagements with music and literature alike. Never mind sniffing underwear – one of Keenan’s characters sniffs *vinyl*. This is what we are losing in a world of digital superabundance: the peculiar numinosity invested in the physical object by virtue of its

connotational properties, its promise of access to something transcendent; and the attendant sense of urgency, bordering on mania, that animates our search for meaning in a world of scarcity. But we have gained so much more in return, and besides, our irrepressible impulses – creative, critical, social and sexual – will find new outlets, as they always must. ♦

Side by...

Ady Endre két verse

A föl-földobott kő

*Föl-földobott kő, földedre hullva,
Kicsi országom, újra meg újra
Hazajön a fiad.*

*Messze tornyokat látogat sorba,
Szédül, elbusong s lehull a porba,
Amelyből vétetett.*

*Mindig elvágynék s nem menekülhet,
Magyar vágyakkal, melyek elülnek
S fölhogadnak megint.*

*Tied vagyok én nagy haragomban,
Nagy hűtlenségben, szerelmes gondban
Szomoruan magyar.*

...by side

Two Poems by Ady, Endre ¹

A Stone Thrown Up, Up

*A stone thrown up, up, my tiny land,
Falling back again and again
Your son comes home.*

*He visits remote steeples one by one,
Feeling dizzy he stumbles in the dust
Of the place where he was born,*

*Always wanted to flee but he can't,
With Hungarian dreams that descend
And well up again.*

*I am all yours in my angry state,
Loaded with fond, unfaithful weight:
Hungarian in sorrow.*

¹Ez a fordítás a Modern Poetry in Translation című brit folyóirat 2018. 3. számában jelent meg.

Winter 2018

*Föl-fölhajtott kő, bús akaratlan,
Kicsi országom, példás alakban
Te orcádra ütök.*

*És, jaj, hiába mindenha szándék,
Százszor földobnál, én visszaszállnék,
Százszor is, végül is.*

*A stone driven up, up, unwanted
I resemble you, my tiny country
In exemplary form,*

*And, oh, any intention is vain,
You threw me up and back I came
A hundred times. Finally.*

Krisztus-kereszt az erdőn

*Havas Krisztus-kereszt az erdőn,
Holdas, nagy, téli éjszakában:
Régi emlék. Csörgős szánkóval
Valamikor én arra jártam
Holdas, nagy, téli éjszakában.*

*Az apám még vidám legény volt,
Dalolt, hogyha keresztre nézett,
Én meg az apám fia voltam,
Ki unta a faragott képet
S dalolt, hogyha keresztre nézett.*

*Két nyakas, magyar kálvinista,
Miként az Idő, úgy röptünk,
Apa, fiú: egy Igen s egy Nem,
Egymás mellett dalolva ültünk
S miként az Idő, úgy röptünk.*

*Húsz éve elmúlt s gondolatban
Ott röptül a szánom az éjben
S amit akkor elmulasztottam,
Megemelem kalapom mélyen.
Ott röptül a szánom az éjben. ♦*

A Cross in the Woods

*A snowy cross in the woods
On a moon-lit, enormous winter night:
Old memory. I was sliding by
That cross on a jingling sleigh
On a moon-lit, enormous winter night.*

*My father then was a cheerful lad
Who felt like singing looking at the cross
And since I was my father's son
I was bored with engraved reliefs
And felt like singing looking at the cross.*

*Two stubborn Calvinists,
Like Time we flew,
Father and son: two opposites,
We sat by one another singing
And Like Time we flew.*

*Twenty years have passed, but in my mind
My sleigh still slides along the night
And though I neglected to do it then,
I raise my hat in homage now.
My sleigh still slides along the night. ♦*