

PENNING

MESSAGES



DECEMBER 2016

CONTENTS

3 EDITOR'S NOTE

15 GERDA STEVENSON

Mixed Messages

4 FEATURED

17 A.C. CLARKE

Letter to My Brother

4 POET: GOLAN HAJI

18 BRIAN JOHNSTONE

5 TRANSLATOR: MARILYN HACKER

18 Markings

19 Samizda

6 To Aras Bengo

7 To My Youngest Sister

8 To Raed Naqshabandi

9 To Akkad Nizam Ad-Din

10 To Mohammed Samy al-Kayyâll

11 To Ruwa Riché

20 SHORT STORIES

21 LYNSEY CALDERWOOD

Anti-Social

12 POETRY

13 PEKKA KYTÖMÄKI

Untitled

13 TRANSLATOR: DONALD ADAMSON

EDITOR'S NOTE

The Chambers Dictionary offers these definitions for the word 'message'. Other dictionaries are, of course, available.

message noun **1** a spoken or written communication sent from one person to another. **2** the instructive principle contained within a story, poem, religious teaching, work of art, etc. **3** (usually messages) chiefly Scottish an errand; household shopping • Just nipping out for the messages.

verb (messed, messaging) to transmit something by signalling, etc; to send it as a message.

The writers selected for this edition of PENning extend and enrich those sturdy definitions, each contributing their own distinct narrative.

The teenage narrator in *Anti-Social* by Lynsey Calderwood offers an entertaining monologue, chattily detailing a busy, interesting and interested life. Lively, confident, politically aware, she is full of admiration for her friend's YouTube rap about racial discrimination, reveling in the positive feedback it receives – 'we couldnae believe how brilliant it wis'. But when Harpreet turns her YouTube skills to a reinterpretation of The Billy Boys, the narrator finds herself well outside her comfort zone.

A stormy June day, good intentions, a visit to a hospital, a message received - A C Clarke's *Letter To My Brother* sheds brief shafts of light on a difficult day.

Gerda Stevenson's *Mixed Messages* tells of a life lived first in the Pentlands, a rural upbringing exchanged for city living. London's a fraught place, where policemen don't appreciate the way Scots use the word 'messages', where such a misunderstanding can lead the 'right glaikit sumph' into serious trouble.

The untitled poem beginning 'When my pen dries up' is a translation by Donald Adamson of the Finnish writer Pekka Kytömäcki's original. Spare and fluid, it tells of a compulsion to share words, even when nobody appears to be listening.

A rural walk reveals evidence of other creatures, if we care to look for it. Brian Johnstone's poem, *Markings*, is an encouragement to observe and to accept that we 'are here/as trespassers.' *Samizdat*, also by Brian Johnstone, describes a captive readership being offered exactly those books which were deemed unfit on the outside, now 'safe to be read since no-one/will make it back to a past/they know has already been lost.'

Our guest editor for PENning Messages was Ryan Van Winkle. He was joined by Linda Cracknell, Lindsey Fraser, Moira McPartlin and Liz Niven. Many thanks to Christina Neuwirth for her careful collation of all the submissions, and to Becca Inglis for her skills in creating this online magazine.

Lindsay Fraser

GOLAN HAJI is a Syrian-Kurdish poet and translator with a postgraduate degree in pathology. He lives in France. He has published four books of poems in Arabic: *He Called Out Within The Darknesses* (2004), *Someone Sees You as a Monster* (2008), *Autumn, Here, is Magical and Vast* (2013), *Scale of Injury* (2016). His translations from the English include (among others) books by Mark Strand, Robert Louis Stevenson and Alberto Manguel. He also published *Until The War*, 2016, a book of prose based on interviews with Syrian women. These poems are taken from his latest collection *Scale of Injury* and are translated from the Arabic.

GOLAN HAJI

FEATURED
WRITER





MARILYN HACKER is an American poet, translator and critic. She is the author of numerous books of poems, including *Names* (Norton, 2009), *Essays on Departure* (Carcanet Press, 2006), and *Desesperanto* (Norton, 2003). Her ten volumes of translations from the French include Marie Etienne's *King of a Hundred Horsemen* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), which received the 2009 American PEN Award for Poetry in Translation; Vénus Khoury-Ghata's *Nettles* (Greywolf Press, 2008); and *Emmanuel Moses*.

TRANSLATOR

MARILYN HACKER

DISAPPEARANCES

TO ARAS BENGGO

The dogs on Kéfé Hill startled distracted people like us. When no one broke the silence and vacancy of summer noons, their barking can be heard behind the hill, all the way to the cypress trees around the well at Ta'liki, where the child asked his mother if she could put out the sun's fire with the hem of her dress. A group of schoolboys arrive, dazed from walking on the steppe. Laughing in the shade, they throw their books on the ground, then they go swimming in the pond, tearing off the scarves they'd tied around their heads, like you.

Your cousin ran over a white dog's leg with his tractor. Neither the dog's licking the wound, nor your putting hay, coffee grounds or barley flour on it healed it. Your dog gnawed on his wound and chewed it; the guilt in your eyes glittered in his gaze, till his cry became a whimper, and then ceased. One morning, you saw your dog with his gnawed-off foot dangling from his bloody muzzle. He stood there like Zarathustra's three-legged ass who lives at the bottom of the Caspian Sea, and whose dung drifts ashore like amber that ends up as rosary beads in the markets of Mardin.

You didn't see your relatives. Before your still face, their tear-washed moustaches turned white as the hair at their temples. Like you now, your sorrow is merciful and beautiful. There is no misery in that sorrow, and no regret. Let the mailmen of happiness go somewhere else with their letters, to other houses whose inhabitants know where the mailboxes are.



TO MY YOUNGEST SISTER

Sister, I am you. Your shoes are little arks for frightened animals, they are me looking at you. No dog barked when the two little strangers came to the blind orchard, where their grandfather's curse flapped overhead like the clatter of his shrine's door.

You play the role of the prey, you are dying in a place I know like the palm of my hand, and I cry, tormented, in a locked room.

The ceiling fan questions your neck, your long inscrutable silence, my own silence that unlooses the din of your heart, fear because everything is frightening now, the intruders are behind you. Stretched out like an invalid under the covers, you lose yourself in the clouds, with the tears I begged you to hold back.

Now my body is the sole site of my suffering, the kiss that waited so long to arrive on your cheek found it cold as a stone in the rain.

TO RAED NAQSHABANDI

What you were given to bear was heavier than you'd have thought.

Deir az-Zour, that green knife-slash in the sand, that gathered up the bus of the dead, your near and dear whom I didn't know, my wounded friends. We kept crossing the river in both directions, and we saw other buses, the cafés on the two riverbanks, the foreigners' cemetery behind the bus station and the swimmers' candles in the deep water. We heard songs as we crossed that were not merely the night's longing. I asked you: Will your little Alhambra cigarettes help you out more than God? Will you beat him at chess tomorrow, and set him a forfeit, saying "Read what I wrote backwards in this old notebook!?" He would need a mirror deeper than blood to read your sorrow there, and your silence.



TO AKKAD NIZAM AD-DIN

They speak to you of roofs, but what about the depths?

Your own eyes' light will be enough for you to leave by the tunnel drawn on the wall. Enter it without looking back. That metallic noise in the dusk is only the rust on the locks and the door hinges.

You will cut into the cypress fruit to smell it, and you'll hum a tune as beautiful as you are.

Your heart is your skiff, and your dream will bring you back from beneath the earth.

On the other side, there is a song I never listened to with you. And the schoolbooks you blasted apart with a rifle at the gun club, because you venerate nothing.





TO MOHAMMED SAMY AL-KAYYÂLL

I didn't know you yet that long-ago winter, your coat drenched from the drizzle and your beard silky as the breath of the grass. In the cinema lobby, I said to my friend "That fellow there looks like Chesterton!" Like silent strangers, we watched "The Seventh Seal," and Death in Bergman's film was a clown who made you laugh. During your illness, you thought of al-Niffari, of historians, of children's drawings: what the child said who had drawn an animal with his fingers so his drawing-paper was blank "The dinosaurs aren't extinct, but now they're transparent."

From house to house, from continent to continent, from the café al-Kamal to the Saruja square, behind all the books, there was the tenderness of your shadow and friends' hands nostalgic for the warmth of yours.

TO RUWA RICHÉ

What's the matter with you?
Have pity on me, don't ask me any questions!

What are you doing these days?
I write letters to the disappeared, and I hide.
The light in the streets is painful, and the
curtains are ugly.

Where do you sleep?
My eyes are embalmed in front of the screen,
and my heart flutters like the little orphans
holding scales on the sidewalks.

What are you doing now?
I transform the heat that I silenced into words.
I think of my friends' pain, and of mothers'
hands. I am learning how to live.

Did the fist open up to welcome you?
Not at all! It turned into a slap. Now my neck is a thick sprained cable.

What did you say?
I am not sensitive. I'm sick. My tongue is a saw and my words a torn net. Every
voice bears a bit of the death of its owner.

How would you like to sleep?
Deeply, like someone who has slain fear with one cry, once and for all.

What do you dream about?
I don't remember my dreams, but I create them.

Are you alone?
Like you, like all of us.

Are you afraid?
Afraid for life, that drips into the abyss, or that grants us what we're afraid to lose.

What is hardest in every chaos?
Confronting those who are like us.

Have you traveled?
I carry a door I can't see. When someone knocks, it wakes me, even if I lay down to
sleep out in the open. There is always a slight delay. Fear is no emotion, it's reality.
And I'm in the same place wherever I am, because I'm incapable of forgetting.

Where are you headed?
When I started out, I found myself at the end of the road, and my steps took flight.

POETRY

PEKKA KYTÖMÄKI

Pekka Kytömäki is a Finnish poet and translator living in Tampere, Finland. His first collection of poems (*Ei talvikunnossapitoa*, 'No upkeep in winter') was published by *Sanasato* in 2015. The collection went on to win the Tampere City Literary Award (2016). The judges called it 'a pure diamond'. A second collection (*Valo pilkkoo pimeää*, 'The light divides the darkness') has just been published.

DONALD ADAMSON

Donald Adamson is a Scottish poet and translator, dividing time between Dalbeattie (Scotland) and Tampere (Finland). His awards include the Radio Clyde/Glasgow University Poetry Prize, 1985, and first prize in the Herald Millennium Competition, 1999. He has also been a prizewinner in the McCash Scots Poetry Competition, 2014 and in the Margaret Reid/Tom Howard Competition, 2016. His own collections include *From Coiled Roots* (2014, IDP) and *Glamourie* (2015, IDP). His translations of the Finnish poet Eeva Kilpi were published by Arc Publications in 2014.

UNTITLED

Rajat kiinni!
Tellus sauruksille,
nisäkkäät ulos.

*

Kynän hyydyttyä jatkan
näkymättömällä musteella
viimeisen sivun täyteen.
Loput lausun ääneen
niin hiljaa että
vain tuuli kuulee.

Pekka Kytömäki

Close the Borders!
Earth for the Dinosaurs!
Mammals Out!

*

When my pen dries up I'll continue
with invisible ink
to the very last page.
The rest I'll read aloud
so softly
that only the wind will hear them.

Translated by Donald Adamson



GERDA STEVENSON

Gerda Stevenson, is an award-winning actor/writer/director/singer/songwriter. Her work has been widely staged, broadcast and published throughout Britain and abroad; recipient of writers' bursaries from Scottish Arts Council and Creative Scotland. Her play *FEDERER VERSUS MURRAY* (pub. Salmagundi, USA), toured to New York in 2012; her poetry collection *If This Were Real* was published by Smokestack Books, 2013. Nominated as Scots Singer of the Year, for her album of her own songs, *NIGHT TOUCHES DAY*, 2014. Has written extensively for BBC radio, including a drama about asylum seekers and refugees, to be broadcast 2017; currently completing her second poetry collection.

www.gerdastevenson.co.uk

MIXED MESSAGES

He was biding in London at the time, all the way
from the Pentland Hills, where he'd grown up -
never a thought of police and bombs
among drystane dykes, the nine Scots pines
at Crooked Jock on the ridge above the burn
marching like giants at his shoulder as he'd skip
down the brae to the shop for his Ma,
to get messages – milk, bread and links, and whiles
a sweetie, if she'd a shine on her face that day.


And now he was in The Big Smoke, houseboy
for a lady whose Chelsea bedroom was filled
with potted hyacinths – one of his jobs to water them,
a heady-scented azure haze that made him dwaum.
He liked to sneak in when she was out, imagine
himself as Tam Lin the Elfin Knight, locked
in the charmed glen, waiting for a sign
from Fair Janet to break the spell.

Sirens were yammering that day, time of the IRA,
blue lights flashing, folk in a stooshie
to get out the road and home,
when a bobby lands a hand on his shoulder, thwak!
“Where you going, mate?” “B-b- back to the flat,”
he habbers, feeling, for no reason he can nail,
like a right glaikit sumph. “And what’s in your bag?”
“Messages,” he says, the innocent items dunt-
dunting his shoogling knees. “Just messages.”

And that was it – milk, bread and a string of pork links
nabbed; and him locked up for a night in the clink.

Gerda Stevenson

A.C. CLARKE



A C Clarke is a poet living in Glasgow and a member of Scottish PEN. She is interested in outsiders and obscure historical figures. Her fourth collection, *In The Margin* (Cinnamon Press), came out last year and a pamphlet in Gaelic, Scots and English, *Owersettin*, in collaboration with Sheila Templeton and Maggie Rabatski, was published by Tapsalteerie this year. Her collection about the medieval visionary Margery Kempe will be published by Oversteps Books next year.

BRIAN JOHNSTONE

Brian Johnstone is a poet, writer and performer whose work has appeared throughout Scotland, elsewhere in the UK, in North America and across Europe. He has published six collections, most recently *Dry Stone Work* (Arc, 2014). His poems have been translated into over a dozen languages. In 2015 his work was selected to appear on the Poetry Archive website. His memoir *Double Exposure* is due out from Saraband in 2017. A founder and former Director of StAnza: Scotland's International Poetry Festival, he has appeared at various poetry festivals, from Macedonia to Nicaragua, and at numerous venues across the UK.

<http://brianjohnstonepoet.co.uk/>





It's June, Midsummer Day
and rain is hammering the taxi window.
The park's green as a bog.

A pair of magpies scavenge
in the verges – two for joy?
Today I meant to send you

birthday wishes. I think of that, then turn
to watch the townscape slipping past,
read the signs. The hospital

towers with the certainty
of a cathedral. It has its chapel,
and its charnel. When I come back,

I find a message from you.
Small trees are flinging themselves this way and that
in rainswept gardens.

I sit, thinking; press Reply. My hands
feel their way over the keyboard
blind as moles.

LETTER TO MY BROTHER

A.C. Clarke



MARKINGS

The shit reminds them
they are here

as trespassers. The wood
a good will lease;

the garden, by extension,
just on loan. Droppings

left in long grass,
moss banks, beds tell tales

of visits in the gloaming,
of foraging for food.

The grubbed up patch
below the beech,

a badger's scrape;
the tufts of lichen

teased up from the path,
all nesting stuff.

A silent argument
of ownership,

a cacophony of marks.
And theirs, their steps,

the cultivated ground,
just doesn't count for shit.

Brian Johnstone

SAMIZDAT

Starved of the like by dictat
before their arrest, irony comes

with the library cart
making the rounds of the cells

with what they had craved
in samizdat: multiples

typed through a carbon sheet,
passed over in trams, left

on a prearranged bench out
in a park: books they had sought

up to the end of their liberty,
here now in this cell block,

in the bleakness of concrete,
by the dim of a single bulb:


the volumes marked as unfit,
safe to be read since no-one

will make it back to a past
they know has already been lost.

Brian Johnstone



SHORT STORIES



LYNSEY CALDERWOOD

Lynsey Calderwood is a Scottish writer living in England who likes to tell stories about quirky, diverse characters who live on the fringes of society.

Her autobiography *Cracked: Recovering After Traumatic Brain Injury* was published in 2002 and she graduated with distinction from Glasgow University's Creative Writing MPhil in 2004.

Over the past fifteen years, her short fiction has appeared in many magazines and anthologies including *Mslexia*,

The Edinburgh Review and *The Scotsman Orange*.

She was the writer-in-residence at Polmont Young Offender's Institution from March 2012-May 2014, and in April 2016 she won an Escalator Award from the Norwich Writing Centre.

More recently, she was the community librarian for Outhouse East's LGBT centre in Colchester.

She occasionally tweets as @beanloveblogger



ANTI-SOCIAL

Ah hate social media. Ah don't dae facebook an ah don't dae blogginn an am no wan ae these twits that go aroon hash taggin whit they had fur thir bliddy breakfast.

Aw ma pals are pure obsessed wi it, an yi cannae huv a conversation wi any ae them withoot them reachin fur thir mobile phone tae reply tae aw thir different beeps an pings; an if yi ask me it's actually quite anti-social. Harpreet's the worst culprit though: every time ah speak tae her she's either tweetin or she's blogginn, or if she's no blogginn she's readin sumdy else's blog or sendin them an instant message.

Ah got an email fae Harpreet the day. Her new email address is: a bumble bee ate my maths jotter at over the rainbow dot com. Ah huvnae seen her since first year since she moved away tae Penrith, but we phone an text an email each other aw the time, an she keeps sendin me aw these links tae her blue-tube video diary, which is maistly jist her tellin jokes aboot her life as a Scottish-Asian Sikh livin in England.

This mornin's video wis different fae usual though:

She'd named it THE REAL SLIM SURI.

At first ah thought it wis jist her clownin aroon dressed up in a baseball top wi loadsa bling an a turban on her heid, but then the music come on an she startet daein her own version ae *Cleanin Out Ma Closet*:

Have yi ever been hated or discriminated against?

Ah have, ah get ma accent mimicked daily an jokes made at ma expense

Girls an boys wi their bigoted minds talkin bull

Sikh's a dirty word for the motherfuckin' kids at ma school

What's this commotion says the teacher as ma tears are explodin

Temper's flarin inside me but ah blow her off an say nothin

Cause nothin ever happens tae the bullies an the racists

'Cept a crappy tellin off an a slap on the wrist ...

*

Harpreet's rap has gone viral. Evrubdy at school wis talkin aboot it this mornin includin the teachers, an even ma sister knows the full spiel aff by

fae the stairs – aw the wans that knew Harpreet fae first year includin Charlene an Kelly Marie – aw crowdet roon the library computer watchin it at interval an we couldnae believe how brilliant it wis: it wis right in time wi the beat an she'd even pit the lyrics underneath in both English an Punjabi, an it really hit home tae me how it must feel tae be part ae a minority group. A lot a folk had left comments an gied it thumbs up; we tried tae but it took too long an then the bell went an Miss Thin chased us.

*

Ma da's decidet that he's gettin us a computer oota PC world. It's fur me an Midget Features tae share. He seems tae think this'll help her tae settle doon an dae her school work – ah don't think so somehow though, cause aw Karen's interestet in is chattin tae her pals an chattin up random boys, an probly she'd be wan ae these idiots that gets mixed up wi a paedo. Ah didnae say that tae ma da though, obviously, cause ah'm no exactly gaunnae knock back the chance ae a PC.

We've never had a computer at home. It's gaunnae be so cool when we get it. Ah'll be able tae email Harpreet anytime ah want noo

an watch her videos as many times as ah want wi oot Miss Skinny Pins daein her nosey. Ma da rocks fur gettin us a PC. Go ma da. Ah'm pure pleased.

*

Karen got an official puni the day cause when her class wur in the library her an Carrie Anne Walker got caught tryin tae post a message on the Trinity high school webpage that said, FUCK THE POPE. We don't know why she did it (it disnae really make any sense seein as ma ma's side ae the family are aw catholic) but Miss Thin says thir lucky the polis didnae get involved cause sendin malicious messages tae folk is a criminal offence. Ma ma an da wur pure ragin, an ma ma went on an on at some length aboot that fitba player that wis in the Paisley Express recently that got done fur callin another fitba player a fenian bastart on twitter.

Aw Karen could say in her defence wis, It wis jist a joke. Personally, ah think it wis aw blawn ootae proportion an thir wis lot worst things she coulda been daein, but ma parents didnae see it that way; so that's her banned noo fae usin the new computer an it's no even been delivert yet.

*

Harpreet's video has been



up less than a fortnight an it's got four-hunner- an-twelve likes an forty- wan comments, an nineteen ae the comments are fae folk she says she doesnae even know. Ah wis talkin tae her on the web cam at the weekend an she wis pure pleased aboot how it's aw gaun cause aw these strangers huv been sayin tae her online that she's a pure inspiration an they wish they had the guts tae dae whit she did; an noo she wants tae make another music video – an East meets West version ae The Billy Boys song.

Ah dunno aboot that, ah tolt her, Ah think that's takin it a bit far. It'll be so funny, she said, Ah could wear an orange sash round ma head an a Rangers football top an put on a really strong Glaswegian accent. Ah said tae her, Ah jist don't think it's

a good idea.

Ah don't know whit it wis – ah wis right behind her on the bigotry front cause ah'd seen the way folk at school used tae treat her, callin her a black bitch an Punjab an aw the rest ae it, an ah think she wis dead brave tae speak oot aboot it – but the idea ae her makin a video that took the piss oota white Scottish proddies (no matter how stupit an narra mindet ah thought they wur as an organisation) jist didnae sit right wi me.

Later ah wis walkin tae the shops tae get milk fur ma ma, an ah wis still thinkin aboot it aw, thinkin aboot how maybe ah wis secretly a racist anaw on some level, when Charlene an Kelly Marie come runnin up wavin thir mobile

phones. Huv yi seen it, shoutet Charlene. Seen whit, ah said. Yir wacky paki pal, said Kelly Marie, She's fuckin done it this time. Who you callin a paki, ah said tae her. Ah fuckin hate folk usin that word especially when it's obvious thir jist usin it as a blanket insult fur evrubdy that's no white. Check it oot, said Kelly Marie; then she shoved her I-phone right in ma face.

Harpreet's new video had over a hundred comments an less than ten percent ae them wur complimentary. Ah logged onto her blue-tube page after ah got home an ah read the full fourteen pages ae abuse anen ah endet up wishin ah hadnae.

*

Harpreet's cancelled her blue-tube account. Ah tried tae talk her intae resurrectin it because maist ae her videos wur really funny an clever an ah widnae know hauf the things aboot sikh humour if ah hadnae watched them, but she widnae listen. She says she's never gaun on the internet again except tae email me.

Ah tolt ma ma aboot it an she said, Maybe that's the best idea hen, an then she banned ME fae gaun online fur three whole weeks cause apparently she'd received a phone call fae BT sayin we'd reached oor monthly data allowance.

Lynsey Calderwood



PHOTOS FROM FLICKR UNDER VARIOUS CREATIVE COMMONS LICENSES

“Message board.” by MIKI Yoshihito

Attribution 2.0 Generic (CC BY 2.0)

“Super Ceiling Fan Action Shot” by downing.amanda

Attribution-NoDerivs 2.0 Generic (CC BY-ND 2.0)

“In a place now called ISIS” by Cristian Iohan Ștefănescu

Attribution 2.0 Generic (CC BY 2.0)

“skiff” by joel

Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 Generic (CC BY-SA 2.0)

“Raindrops of February” by Guy Renard

Attribution 2.0 Generic (CC BY 2.0)

“Dairy Crest 2” by Karen

Attribution 2.0 Generic (CC BY 2.0)

“Magpie” by Catherine Singleton

Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 Generic (CC BY-SA 2.0)

“I’ve got the modern blues for you, honey” by Dovydas Čiomėnas

Attribution 2.0 Generic (CC BY 2.0)

“prison” by changTing

Attribution 2.0 Generic (CC BY 2.0)

“Rangers Fans in the Queue” by Tom Brogan

Attribution-NoDerivs 2.0 Generic (CC BY-ND 2.0)

“Ibrox Stadium” by Tom Brogan

Attribution-NoDerivs 2.0 Generic (CC BY-ND 2.0)

“watching me watching you” by jasleen_kaur

Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 Generic (CC BY-SA 2.0)