

# PENNING


## DIARY



## DECEMBER 2021

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PENning is compiled by the Writers  
in-Exile Committee of Scottish PEN.  
Submissions are selected anonymously.

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## 34 PEN NEWS



Welcome to the 'Diary' edition of PENning magazine. We hope you enjoy the many forms and contents that this theme has stimulated. Our next edition will be on the theme of Nhorwa, which means gifting. As always, this has been suggested by our guest editor – in this case Tawona Sitole, and we're very grateful to him for his inspiring and erudite input to the editing process. We look forward to writers' contributions on this topic and it seems an apt counterbalance to our world's 'unsettled foundations' as Tawona comments in his guest foreword below.

It is our intention to host another online reading of work from the current PENning. The previous readings were very well supported and it's a great opportunity to hear our writers read their work, giving us the added bonus of their voices to enhance the written word. Look out for further details soon. Tawona will kindly join us for the readings.

We're also delighted to include a PEN newsletter with the magazine, an ideal opportunity to read and engage with current PEN activities and issues.

*Liz Niven*

*Convener, Writers in Exile Committee*



# FOREWORD

It is the persistence of time that ushers the turn of seasons, the regeneration of the earth, and so too the germination of seeds and the ripening of age. As the assured river of time flows by, experiences and their associated thoughts and emotions transform into memory. A written account of what is seen, heard, and felt attempts to hold this memory. This collection of poetry and prose is an exploration of how the diary does not settle in one form. Intimacy and privacy is illustrated in 'Fall', while 'Shorthanded Sailing Renga' is a rich blend of voices, rather than a solitary effort. The basics of human

interaction, family and food come together in 'How Much Pasta for us Two?' and 'Pomegranates with Salt'. Pieces like 'Washing Day, Shetland' and 'Hestur' invite us to consider, as our ancestors have done, that nature itself is full of voices and is a medium for storing memories. Unfolding in prose, 'Any Human Touch' takes us to another time, as if a reprieve from this one we are in, but also an affirmation of the things that remain. The puzzlement of understanding our world has been sharpened by the current pandemic, and these writers offer us a chance to take our minds







for a walk and let our imaginations exercise. And we need our imaginations more than ever as we stagger on unsettled foundations of the world we have gotten used to. Something urgent, troubling and almost uncontrollable is happening to us as a humanity - something epic. This volume is so timely and enriching as we grapple with this memory we are in the middle of making.

## **TAWONA SITHOLÈ**

Better known as Ganyamatope (my ancestral family name) my heritage inspires me to make connections with other people through creativity. I am a poet, mbira musician and playwright, and short story author. A storyteller and musician, I am co-founder of Seeds of Thought, a non-funded arts group. I am currently UNESCO artist-in-residence at the University of Glasgow, with research and teaching roles in the school of education and medical school. I am research associate with Mideq global migration hub. Other educational roles are with Glasgow School of Art, University of the West of Scotland, University of Stirling and Newcastle University, and Scottish book Trust. What I value most in my work are the experiences and many wonderful people I get to meet.





# CHIRIKURE CHIRIKURE

The poet and performer Chirikure Chirikure was born in Gutu, Zimbabwe, in 1962. He is a graduate of the University of Zimbabwe and an honorary fellow of the University of Iowa, USA. He worked as an editor at a major publishing house in Harare. He also worked as a programme officer for an international development organisation. In 2011, he moved to Berlin, under the DAAD artists in residency programme. He returned to Zimbabwe in 2014, where he is engaged in literary and cultural programmes. He is the director of LitFest Harare, an international literature festival.

Chirikure has published four collections of his poetry and has contributed poems and articles in numerous publications. He has also written children's books and educational materials. He has recorded albums and videos of his poetry with music. He has also written lyrics for a number of musicians. He performs his poetry solo and also with musical accompaniment. He is also an occasional stage and film actor.



# SCARRED EARTH

When the merrymaking is over  
And everyone retreats to bed  
The bonfire is sadly abandoned  
Slowly burning down to ambers  
Lamely glowing in the winter night  
Until it sadly dies in its loneliness

What will be visible at sunrise  
Is the scarred, scorched earth  
And memories of the merriment  
Etched in everyone's hangover

Drinks will gradually wash away the hangover  
While the earth tearfully curses for eternity

# YOU CAN HOLD MY HAND

*(To all perished illegal migrants)*

You can hold my firm hand tightly  
As we climb this steep mountain  
But if I so happen to slip and tumble  
You are likely to go down as well  
Both of us crumbling down the slope

The mountain will hold our fate  
Deciding whether both of us  
Or just one – You or myself  
Is spared in reasonable shape  
To narrate our ambitious story

Sad and scary as it might be  
No other option is available  
But to climb this deadly slope:  
For, beyond this mammoth hurdle  
Lush, green pastures are beckoning



# MUSIC IN ME

*(For the gracious women in my life)*

The lullabies that you sang, dear mother,  
As you rocked me on your warm back,  
Are continuously flowing in my veins.  
The rhythms are the blood of my life.

The joyous songs that we sang, dear sister,  
As we danced in the moonlight in the village,  
Are permanently, brightly, shining in my soul.  
The rhythms are the light of my life.

The inspiring melodies that we sang, dear aunt,  
As we ploughed the fields in the early mornings,  
Are forever throbbing in my hands, legs and back.  
The rhythms are the backbone of my life.

The love songs that we crooned, dear sweetheart,  
As we dreamt of our future, snuggling and hugging,  
Are safely tucked in the deepest chamber of my heart.  
The rhythms are the heartbeat of my life.

The spirited slogans that we chanted, dear chimbwido,  
As we fired ourselves up in the liberation struggle,  
Are always massaging the scars on my body and limbs.  
The rhythms are the solid, bold tattoos of my life.

My dear mother, sister, aunt, sweetheart and chimbwido  
When I happen to ask for one night of singing and dancing  
Please don't turn down my request, no matter the reason  
For you are the custodians of the rhythms of this life of mine

(\*\*Chimbwido – young female war collaborator in the  
Zimbabwean Chimurenga struggle for independence)

# THE SONG THAT I SING

The song that I sing  
in joy and happiness  
Is the same song that I sing  
in sorrow and sadness

My dear, all that I simply do is  
change the tempo and pitch  
For the words and rhythms are  
inspired to flow in all gradients

So when you hear me intone  
don't just rush to commiserate  
Or to join with joyous harmonies  
before you read the tempo and pitch

# SINCERE APOLOGIES

(For all political leaders)

My most sincere apologies children  
For my stubborn, thick headedness  
Insisting on my reading of the map  
Despite your gentle protestations

For sure, we are at a dead end  
And it will take us so very long  
To work our way back on track  
That is, if we can extricate ourselves

I won't blame this on any evil spirits  
For, curses are different from stupidity  
I won't blame this on my forbearers  
For, they were endowed with wisdom

Let's dust our emotions and egos  
Read our bearings with forgiveness  
Chart our path from this dark hole  
And smile our way forward gingerly



# YOUR SHOULDER

I leaned on your shoulder in good faith  
With no intention to wipe my tears on it  
Or to hide my face from my own reality  
But simply to get the strength I needed

And here you are, huffing and fuming  
Over your crumbled and soiled attire  
As if my tears are such a strong stain  
That soap and water can't wash away

Please pass me your expensive attire  
And I will wash, iron and perfume it  
While my steaming tears slowly dry  
As I flex my eyes to face reality firmly

# I SALUTE YOU MY BROTHER

I salute you my brother:  
You packed and left in dignity  
When the company folded up  
Despite the long years, no compensation

I salute you my brother:  
You sold all that you had acquired  
Moved out of the leafy suburbs  
And joined us back in the townships

I salute you my brother:  
You discarded all your diplomas  
And joined us, the vending brigade  
Sharing crude drinks at end of day

I will reserve my biggest salute  
For when you will unpack intimately  
The tragedy of our national economy  
For, you have the diplomas and experience



# THESE WOUNDS

Wounds on my body and limbs  
Wounds on my heart and soul  
Wounds of different shapes and sizes

Some of the wounds are now permanent scars  
While others are just healed on the surface  
And others are still open and slowly rotting

Time moves, it's decades now since the struggle  
The struggle to rescue ourselves and our future  
A struggle we were prepared to pay high prices

These wounds are not the very ultimate price  
But they are an indelible badge of honour  
Which I trust you will record for posterity

It will be up to those who come after you  
To read that narrative with heart and soul  
For, it's a permanent foundation for their future

**Scottish PEN would like to thank Chirikure  
Chirikure for sharing such a generous selection of  
his poetry for this edition.**



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# FICTION

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# SANDRA IRELAND

Sandra Ireland is based in Carnoustie, Angus. She is the author of four psychological thrillers, including her current book *Sight Unseen* (Polygon). Her poetry has appeared in various publications, such as *New Writing Scotland*, *Seagate III* and *'Furies'*, published by *For Book's Sake*. She won the Scottish Association of Writers' Dorothy Dunbar Rose Bowl for Poetry in 2017 and 2018. She is currently an associate creative writing tutor at the University of Dundee, facilitates workshops and courses on a freelance basis, and has a special interest in writing for wellbeing and folklore.



# ANY HUMAN TOUCH

*Sandra Ireland*

***Februarii, 17, anno D. 1584***

How speedily your world can change. There have been whispers of the plague this long while but it is like hearing news of London Town, or Queen Bess, or a wolf sighting in the wood. I know such things to be real, but so remote from life here in our village that I cannot bring myself to care about it. And I am sixteen, and much more interested in the peddler's trinkets and the boys in the market square. I am sure it is the sort of sickness that prevails in other countries and big cities. What would it want with us, in rural Perthshire?

Still, it is strange. The men of the village have taken to standing around in little knots and accosting every tinker or drover who passes through for news. Even my father, who is afraid of nothing, is scared. Today, he came home with a tale about the next village, of how a family of ten had all been stricken with the sickness.

I am not afraid. Instead, I continue to let my mind fly away, stuffed with dreams of wedding lace and sparkly jewellery and fine sweetmeats. I had lately met a young man called Duncan. My parents know his family and approve of him, so they indulge my preoccupation. His father is a miller. You'll never be short of a square meal, my mother says.

***Februarii, 18 ,anno D. 1584***

My little sister disapproves of my love choice. I think she is afraid she will lose me. We are very close. Don't fret, I said to her. You shall visit me at the mill house and eat the finest bread. We laughed over that, and she made me practice my slicing technique with the big knife my mother takes to the coarse loaves we usually eat.

Even with my thoughts elsewhere, I cannot escape the thread of fear that is tightening around our village. Suspicion is growing daily like canker on an apple. Last night, a fight broke out in the alehouse. I heard this from Goodie Fraser when I went for water. A stranger, seeking a bed for the night, was found to have symptoms of the sickness and was beaten and thrown out onto the street.

***Februarii, 20 ,anno D. 1584***

My mother has just returned from a laying-out. Old Goodie Fraser has gone to her reward. She would have gone anyway, my mother says, she has been ailing for years.

They are saying that it's only the old and feeble who come down with the sickness, but I am not convinced.

***Februarii, 23 ,anno D. 1584***

Two of our neighbours have the plague. Their cottages have been sealed off to prevent the spread. Keep your distance, my father warns. Don't touch anyone. Perhaps he's right. On the morrow I will creep out and leave a food parcel at their doors. Even though Father wants us to stay home, I went with Bella to the cunning woman to buy herbs in little pouches. If you breathe in the mixture, it will



ward off the plague, but there are so many rumours and false tales flying about it is impossible to know the truth. I have not seen Duncan for a couple of weeks. I am lonely, and all my plans are in disarray. I pray that our suffering will be short, and the sickness will fade away.

***Februarii, 24, anno D. 1584***

One of the few carters allowed into the village- and only tolerated because he brings food and is considered essential- has delivered a note from the mill. I am so excited my hands are trembling, but my father insists on reading it to me, even though -unusually for a girl- I know my letters well enough to keep this diary. We sat around the fire in the kitchen- Mother, Bella, Father and myself, as if we had some secret knowledge to share.

My dear Mary. The Mill is Quarantined. We are all in good health and my Father wishes us to remain so. I will not be able to see you, my love, until this is over. It will be over soon. Have hope. Stay home. Stay Safe. Your loving Friend, Duncan.

My father folded the paper. Something unfamiliar glistened at the corner of his eye. I realised it was a tear, turned to ruby by the flames. I had never seen my big strong father weep before. He dashed away the evidence with the heel of his hand. Promise me, Mary, he said. If anything happens, you will go to Duncan's family and take your sister. I nodded, too scared to say yes, lest my very agreement might make it come true. Nothing is going to happen. Not to us.

***March 2, anno D. 1584***

My father has taken to his bed. He says he is weary. My mother is nursing him, and she won't let us into the sick room, however much we plead. He must stay isolated, she says, for the good of us all.

***March 6, anno D. 1584***

My father's end was a pitiful affair. In deep shock, we pressed herbs to our noses and watched helplessly from the threshold as our hale and hearty father transformed into a stiff, lifeless wax doll, grey face on the pillow, a raised skeletal knee beneath the sheet. At the end, he was denied the comfort of a sympathetic smile or a tender hand. The men who came to take his body wore scarves around their faces and sent us from the house until it was fumigated.

***March 10, anno D. 1584***

At first light, we trudged with our mother to the top of the knoll behind our cottage. She needed some air, she said, and from here you could see the view across the glen and the hills beyond and the big sky. It looked just the same as it always did, but we were so horribly changed. My mother took a great breath and flexed her fingers in the cool breeze. She looked down at her hands in some surprise. Isn't it warm, she said, for the time of year? It was not warm. I was shivering under my shawl. I looked at her and noticed her skin had a waxy glimmer similar to my father. It was then that I knew.

***March 16 ,anno D. 1584***

Committing my thoughts to this journal has always been such a comfort to the soul, but it pains me so to write these words. My mother has passed away. Today, we did not even wait for the men in their scarves. Pack your things, I said to my sister. We have to Quarantine. I wasn't even sure of the meaning of the word but I would find Duncan and he would help us. We took with us all the possessions we could carry and some parcels of food, a loaf of bread, oatmeal and some apples and peas my mother had stored in a jute sack. Bella was weeping, but I was dry-eyed. Weakness would not see us through this.



I took my sister by the hand and pulled her through the village. It was a ghost town. Not even a dog out on the street and every second house sealed with a cross. My whole life had withered, but a great surge rose in me. Determination, spirit- call it what you will. I vowed to Bella that we would survive. We still had each other, and we would beat this vile curse. The only thing that threatened to make me lose my composure was when I thought about the things that used to matter to me, such empty things. I longed for some of that time back. I would have spent more of it enjoying the warmth of hearth and home and family, and less time buying ribbons I didn't need and daydreaming about a future that was not to be.

We reached the mill, but the great waterwheel is silent and still. There is no one to bring their corn to be ground, or to work in the fields or to gossip idly as the millstones turn. Duncan came to the door, but would not let us in. Stay a safe distance, he said, lest you have the sickness. I told him what had befallen us and that we were trying to outrun the disease. His face told me that he did not think such a thing was possible. Keep walking, he said, until you come to a stone shed beside the road. It belongs to the mill. You can stay there, until...He paused. We all know there could be no end to that sentence. Go there, he said. I will bring you food. I'll make sure you are safe.

I longed to throw my arms around him, but nobody can stand to be touched in this strange new world.

### ***March 17, anno D. 1584***

Duncan has brought us clean water in a pail and some cheese and bannocks, leaving them on a tree stump some distance away. Bella is not as strong as me.

She cries and frets and makes me promise I will never leave her. I repeat my father's words; if anything happens to me, go back to the mill. Duncan will look after you.

***April 23, anno D. 1584***

The days of isolation have turned have into weeks. We are unrecognisable, as rough as witches but with a steely resolve. We will survive. Bella says, I'm so proud of you, sister. I'm so proud of us! We have beaten this thing. Her words make me feel all warm inside.

Today has been a good day, a hopeful day. Just now, Duncan appeared with food, I blew him a kiss across the distance between us. Perhaps one day soon he will tell us that the plague has gone, that the survivors are emerging from their homes and the mill will reopen. One day soon, perhaps life will return to normal.

Duncan smiled at me, as if he too, feels that. I have a gift for you, he says. I bought it at the market many moons ago, before all this happened... He was holding something in his cupped hands. My heart leapt. At my elbow, Bella murmured, perhaps it's jewellery! And I thought, maybe it's a ring, a betrothal ring!

Duncan edged closer. I could see he didn't want to leave his precious gift on the tree stump. He wanted to hand it to me in person. Right back at the start of this dark time, people had insisted you could catch the plague from things as well as people- blankets and shawls and knives and spoons and cups. Jewellery. But that was a long time ago, and how did we know it was even true? There were so many rumours back then.

Duncan held out the gift. It was a beautiful pendant, the emerald stone glinting in the sunlight, bright as the mill pond. We were now so close, I could see the rise



and fall of his breath beneath his shirt. I fancied I could detect his heart beating, just for me. I stretched out my hand. I could feel the heat of him. I hadn't been this close to another human, apart from my sister, for such a long time. The need to touch him was an irresistible force.

Behind me, Bella said, take care, sister. Remember what they used to say. I don't think you should touch it.

That was then, I replied. This is now. A whole new world.

As my fingers grazed the pendant, I felt the brush of his skin against mine, I looked into his face. His skin held that peculiar moist pallor I'd come to dread, and in the corner of his eye was a single tear.

***April 25, anno ...***



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**POETRY**

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Ruth Aylett teaches/researches computing in Edinburgh and her poetry is published widely in magazines/anthologies. Joint author of Handfast (Mother's Milk, 2016); her pamphlet, Pretty in Pink (4Word) was published January 2021. [macs.hw.ac.uk/~ruth/writing.html](http://macs.hw.ac.uk/~ruth/writing.html).

## RUTH AYLETT

## XINYI JIANG

Xinyi Jiang was born in China's Qingdao and studied in Nanjing and Shanghai. She taught in Fudan University before moving to the UK. She had lived in England and Wales before settling in Scotland. Xinyi discovered poetry when studying with the University of Dundee and had poems published in Dundee Writes, New Writing Dundee, PENning, and Gutter.

Ross Walker is a Scottish poet and teacher currently living in northern Italy. He writes in English, Scots, Italian and (a little) Piemontese – the local dialect of Northwest Italy. He writes about the passage of time and people in nature.

## ROSS WALKER

## DAVID HUNTER

Davie is from Falkirk in Scotland and is an MLitt in Creative Writing at the University of Glasgow. As a poet and a writer, his work tries to capture our interaction with our environment through distinctive and original references to science and nature.



Kája Kubičková is a Czech student at the University of Edinburgh. While English is not her first language, she is in love with English literature, hence her decision to study here. She is currently studying biology, but her main passion is poetry and prose.

# KAROLÍNA KULIČKOVÁ

# FIDAN MEIKLE

Fidan is a writer, a linguist, and a teacher based in Scotland. Originally from Azerbaijan, she writes both poetry and prose for children and adults in English, Azerbaijani and Russian. Fidan's favourite book of the decade is "The Buddha in the Attic" by Julie Otsuka. Her reliable friend is coffee, which she drinks too much of, which usually results in her uniting with the keyboard over another scheme in the middle of the night.

Mandy Haggith lives in Assynt, northwest Scotland, and teaches Literature and Creative Writing at the University of the Highlands and Islands. Her books include four poetry collections (letting light in, Castings, A-B-Tree, Why the Sky is Far Away), a poetry anthology (Into the Forest), a non-fiction book (Paper Trails) and five novels: The Last Bear, Bear Witness and a novel trilogy set in the Iron Age, The Walrus Mutterer, The Amber Seeker and The Lyre Dancers.  
[mandyhaggith.net](http://mandyhaggith.net)

# MANDY HAGGITH

# DEAR DIARY

*Ruth Aylett*

- is it true that everything  
happens for a reason?  
So why the unreason of hate  
that drowns fleeing parents  
with their children?

- is it true that only the fool  
says in his heart 'there is no God'?  
So why no parting of the waves  
for waterlogged boats  
over-laden with human cargo?

- is it true that all that is needed  
for evil to triumph  
is that good people do nothing  
but shout at the evening news,  
shedding useless tears?

Dear diary  
is it true that you have no answers  
and we have to construct them ourselves,  
together?

# DIARY

*Xinyi Jiang*

The day I saw it wide-open  
in your neat hands, how  
you drew on your fag,  
uncrossed your legs, stood up,  
dropped it like a rag,  
walked away as if you never saw me,  
went through the pages about  
a padlock to my drawers,  
a door between the two rooms,  
a screen at the corner,  
a lid on the pail,  
the cow shed where you were re  
educated, reformed,  
the black ink and weasel  
brush for your big character posters,  
diaries in the camphor trunks that turned you a quasi  
counter revolutionist,  
your mother's Guanyin  
when the bombs dropped beneath the yellow sun,  
your father, pierced open  
by a Japanese soldier's bayonet  
on his way home.





# WASHING DAY, SHETLAND

*Ross Walker*

November morning, the wind-howled north.  
Steel grey sky, bruised with dormant storms.  
A landscape painted in low tones,  
Damp-green mosses, dulled purple kail,  
Lichen-thinned soil grips solitary rocks  
Drained sunlight drips into dark clouds.

Shell-crunched sea pounds the ashen sand,  
Howking out ever sinking footholds,  
Grasping at scree with slipping hands.  
A curious seal, silver-lit in the morning dirge,  
Dives back below in a sudden flash,  
Seeking the comforts of the deep.

A puddled morning, yet splashed with bright.  
Snapping clothes lines play strained music.  
Surf white shirt pulls to swoop and soar,  
Yellow skirt, a butterfly flapping frantic wings,  
Bright blue socks sing of hidden sky,  
A lip red scarf kisses the dimness.

Amidst the infinite dark, the ice-flecked groan,  
A song in colour, a promise of arriving light.



# HESTUR

*David Hunter*

In a cobalt room,  
north from Egilsstaðir,  
all the clocks have stopped.

Ice salt shards blow  
off the Greenland Sea,  
the slow dying breath  
of Vatnajökull  
and the lunar river mark  
the foolishness of time.

From the window,  
I see the Jökla flood  
a pallid swill pouring  
past the foss  
past the hús  
no one is here  
but the silence  
connected.  
Superfast fibres  
of horse hair -  
chestnut, blonde,  
black and grey  
a palette brought  
in longboats. Now mixed  
with sulphurous yellow  
and blues of the bláber  
picked at by ravens.

My stutt wee hestur,  
how your legs carry you  
as if four were eight,  
the bite of a rascal.

Now, as I watch you  
lie down to foal beneath  
Ejyafjallajökull,  
you look like that island  
that lies to the west of Streymoy  
and bears your name.  
I ask:

*Who first saddled the Irish horse?*

*Who rode the red dun fjordhorse as their war mount?*

*Who found Vinland?*

Then I whisper,

*Why, your people did.*



# FALL

*Karolína Kuličková*

I wake up to somebody  
watching me sleep,  
with eyes fully open and  
seeing.

“Nothing. It’s just you.”

I tried it. I did, I swear.  
I stayed up  
(and so long, too, until my eyes  
stopped adjusting to the darkness and  
I even had birdsong  
to serenade me).  
And I watched.

But where you saw stars,  
I only saw freckles.

Your breath fascinated me,  
but morbidly, scientifically -  
not the poetry of watching your lover  
live.

Most of all, it felt too intimate, like  
peering into a neighbour’s living room,  
like  
seeing empty liquor bottles  
in a teacher’s cabinet,  
like dissecting a cadaver you once knew.

Honestly,  
I wish I’d just fallen asleep.



# POMEGRANATES WITH SALT

*Fidan Meikle*

"You're looking thin," you say. My bony shoulders are identical to yours.  
'Things never change,' I think. "You're well?"  
You nod, you think: 'unseen, unheard...'

You hug me tight; I sense the scent, that's etched into your skin.  
Rose water's sweet and musky smell, and just like that, I am fifteen,  
resenting everything you are, eager for so much more,  
thin lines across my skinny arms, slamming my bedroom door...

We're in the car, driving away, the world humming behind.  
I'm clutching with both hands my bag, you're clutching at my hand.

The house looks the very same, only a little dimmed,  
But time has made its biggest claim, we've both been missing Him...

You set the table for us two, you've cooked a real treat.  
"How's work?" you ask out of the blue. "Ok," I say. "I'm single still."

Red pomegranates in the vase, you cut one up for me.  
Red juices sprinkle on your face, I salt the crimson seeds.  
"Just like your father liked," you say. 'I know,' I think, "Is it?" I ask.  
I read the anguish on your face; it's slipping through your mask...

I walk the rooms in which we raised, both our dreams and fears,  
I walk the rooms and catch your gaze, you wish you'd gone with Him...  
He had the keys, he had the clues, all left unmatched behind...  
But you and I would rather choose be broken and detached, untwined...

We see the sights, we shop, we walk, you cook the stuff I like,  
We drink the teas and talk the talk, both always watching time....

To you I am your very end, to me you are the start.  
I've moved away, I want away, you want it all rewind...

I watch you put your jacket on; you're shorter now, I'm sure.  
What will you do when I am gone? You pause after you lock the door.  
You look at me and take deep breath, I understand it too,  
behind this door, there's nothing left for either me or you...

We're in the car, driving away, the world humming behind.  
I'm clutching with both hands my bag, you're clutching at my hand.

You hug me tight. "Thank you," you say.  
'For what?' I think but don't reply.  
"Please eat and look after yourself."  
"I will," I say, "Goodbye."

The clouds are below me now,  
Your scent is still with me,  
There's pomegranate in my bag,  
'His favourite,' I think...



# HOW MUCH PASTA FOR US TWO?

*Fidan Meikle*

I listen to you,  
And I wish for the wisdom of my old and lived and known self,  
the one who not only knows you're unworthy but feels it too.  
The one that can smile through your punches and breathe...  
In and out, in and out, and let go...

You hold my hand and I'm as far from her as I can be...  
Blindfolded, reeling after your voice, tottering through rickety sand...  
Tripping and falling and bruising and aching for more....  
So much, that it's all good... It's all good...

I wish she'd gag me, lift me up and gag me,  
and leave the blindfold, she knows I'm blind without it too...  
She'd help me stand and take some air in,  
in and out... Where are you? Are you far? I want to know, but I can't...  
I'm gagged, I'm mute, I'm blind...

I wish the gag and the blindfold  
Were my only restraints...  
I wish I wanted them off, but I don't...  
I know she'd pity me, and I'd consent to its weight,  
I wish I didn't; I wish I cared, but I don't...



Where are you? Are you far?  
You are far... You've always been...  
You hold me tight, blood dribbling from the corner of my mouth...  
She doesn't sink into your heartbeat, but I do.  
It's ok, it's all good... Dinner soon and we'll eat...  
It's all good...

You get a beer and sit to watch some football,  
I'll make some tea, no matter what I always do.  
I stand over a pan with boiling water, my face bubbling in it...  
How much pasta do I put in for us two?  
I bet even she doesn't know...  
It's all good... It's all good... It's all good....





# SHORTHANDLED SAILING RENGA

*Mandy Haggith*

the engine goes off  
listen to the living water

waves sing their own song  
the boat adds her wash  
of sound-colour

with the tide in  
all the rocks are hidden

a big blue fishing boat  
steams out between the islands  
kicking up a spray

the heathery rubha  
has a misty tinge of mauve

my purple sailing jacket  
still carries green stains  
of anti-fouling

if I were a bird  
I would be a gannet

cormorant crosses the loch  
flying close to the water  
showing how easy it is

a breeze in my ear  
on the windward side

exposed bladderwracks  
bask in salty sealight  
for a while

what is a bee doing  
all the way out here?

he passes the beacon  
to port and praises  
our little boat

guano has painted the cliff  
below nest sites – rock art

suddenly, here,  
the sea smells more like sea  
than it did before

wind and tide are in charge  
we just interpret the score

the offshore islands  
wear bronze, black, silver, yellow  
green, white and gold

how powerful the moon must be  
to make the ocean dance

we're doing four knots  
and you're humming  
at the helm

the sea never ceases  
muttering and murmuring

high tide at solstice  
a wave crest at noon  
then down again



# JANUARY

*Mandy Haggith*

rain on dark windows  
tinsel scattering light  
the bonfire's ashes

wind-tossed trees and river  
roaring and cheering

the river  
another tide  
more tears

now the trees are bare  
lichens claim their season

a disgusting day  
huge puddles  
tug at our wheels

while the fire blazes  
even old iron glitters

in the hurricane  
trees frenzy  
some will fall

the coffin is lowered  
yews have uprooted themselves

horizontal trees  
the earth  
accepting what is given

after the hurricane  
feebleness

a fierce east breeze  
lighter than a word  
stiletto deadly

the day is short  
but the year is long

the sun rises  
between Suilven and Cul Mòr -  
this war-torn world

the land-slipped slope has regrown  
nature heals all scars

at the cinema  
I cry when people are kind  
to Paddington Bear

back home to porridge  
wet paths, warm stove

can our many voices  
form a symphony  
rather than cacophony?

walking alone  
I'm joined by all life

white world  
snow  
snowing again



# PEN NEWS

This new section of PENning magazine provides readers with a brief overview of recent work undertaken by Scottish PEN and other PEN centres around the world. To find out more about our work, and to join us in membership, visit [scottishpen.org](https://scottishpen.org)



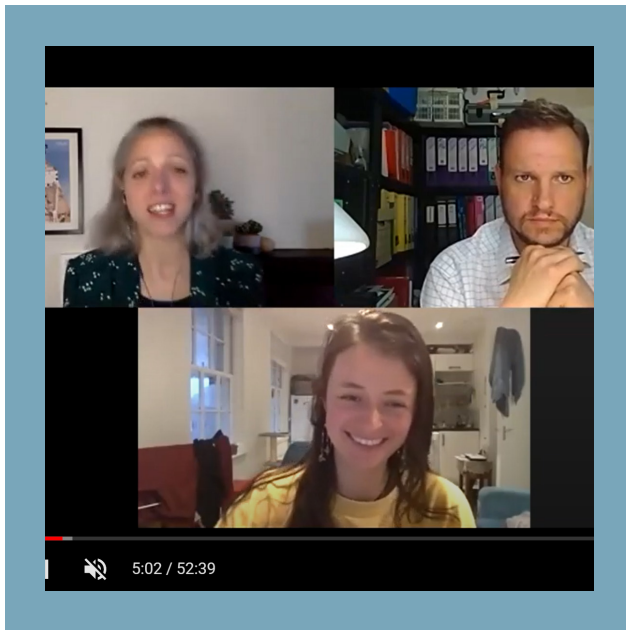
## DEFAMATION LAW REFORM: ACCESS SCOTTISH PEN RESOURCES

Earlier this year, the Scottish Parliament voted to pass the Defamation and Malicious Publications (Scotland) Bill, marking the first reform of

defamation law in Scotland for over 20 years. Scottish PEN has shared a raft of new online resources to help writers, editors and publishers to understand what these changes mean for their work, and their right to free expression.

New resources include a short video (pictured top left), an accessible briefing report, a report on the impact of defamation law on writers in Scotland, links to the Scottish Parliament Justice Committee video evidence sessions, and much more. To access the resources, visit [scottishpen.org/defamation-reform](https://scottishpen.org/defamation-reform). If you have any questions about our defamation reform campaign, email [info@scottishpen.org](mailto:info@scottishpen.org)

**Join Scottish PEN** in membership from just £2.75 per month to support our work and access a range of exclusive benefits. Visit [scottishpen.org.join-us](https://scottishpen.org.join-us) to find out more.



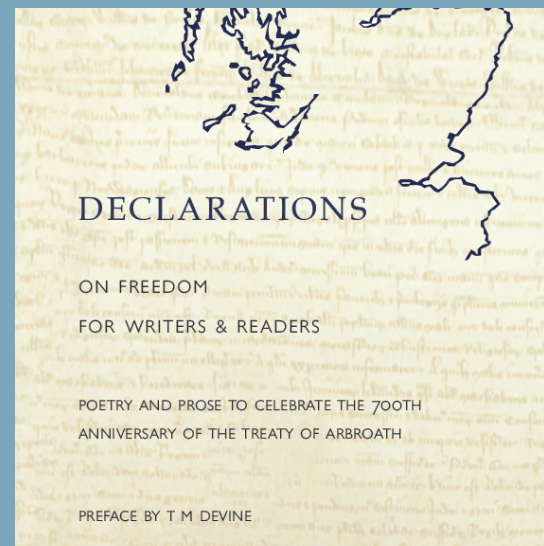
## SCOTTISH PEN YOUTUBE CHANNEL

Visit Scottish PEN's YouTube channel to access recordings of past online events and readings of poetry and short fiction from our members (many of whom have been featured in PENning).

Search 'Scottish PEN' on YouTube.

## DECLARATIONS ANTHOLOGY

'Declaration on Freedom for Writers and Readers' is an anthology of poetry and prose exploring freedom of expression, featuring some of Scotland's leading writers as well as writers from overseas. Purchase a copy now (£9.99) via the Scottish PEN website shop.



## CHANGES AT PEN

The 2021 PEN International Congress saw the election of Turkish Kurdish novelist and human rights lawyer Burhan Sönmez as President. Mexican-American writer Jennifer Clement, the first woman President to lead the organisation, left the post after six years. At Scottish PEN, novelist and short story writer Carl MacDougall stood down as President after five years at our October AGM. Ricky Monahan Brown, author and former Chair of Scottish PEN's Writers At Risk group, was elected as his successor. In addition, two new Trustees were elected by members to join the Scottish PEN Board: Ruth Aylett and Leela Soma.

Learn more at [scottishpen.org/who-we-are](https://scottishpen.org/who-we-are)

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