

PENNING

GIFTING



JUNE 2022

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

We hope to announce a date soon for online readings from Gifting/Norwhal.

Liz Niven

Moirra McPartlin

Samina Chaudhry

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our new edition of PENning. We've loved reading through submissions for 'Gifting/Nhorwa'. There were so many interpretations of the theme which was chosen by our last guest editor. And the theme for our next magazine is 'Making', chosen by our current guest editor, Ruth Aylett, to whom we're most grateful for her insightful involvement in the selection process.

The choice of the present tense of Gifting and Making seem to lend an immediacy to the theme in a way that Gift or Make would not. A sense of an ongoing activity suits the occupation of writing most appropriately.

A further thanks to our featured international writer, Lyuba Yakimchuk, is necessary. That she so kindly responded to our requests, in the face of her country's remarkable circumstances, is a tribute to her dedication and professionalism. And also to her recognition of the importance of PEN continuing to provide a platform for voices and views in a democratic way.

Finally, thanks to the Writers-in-exile committee, Moira McPartlin and Samina Chaudry who dedicated their time and skills to making the magazine happen.

Liz Niven

Convener

Writers-in-exile

Scottish PEN

FOREWORD

In a world where it sometimes seems money is the measure of everything, Gifting is a revolutionary act. We Gift because we are all human, because we know life's ups and downs, because each of us might be there one day. As war and destruction ravage Ukraine, Yemen, Palestine and other countries that never make it onto the front page, it is all the more important we restate the human requirement to give and to share. Life produces its own gifts of love, knowledge and beauty, but also their shadows: grief, ugliness and pain. From these come our sense of wonder but also our need to keep going, to support each other, to give each other the strength we need to confront the dark side of life as well as its brightness.

This issue of Penning presents eight-fold gifts around the theme of 'Gifting'. Poets have spread their nets widely, from the bitterness of war, to the simple gift of joy.

There are sunflower seeds from Ukrainian women, intricately-patterned gloves made by a Russian friend.

A man seeks the gift of love in a world where god is dead, lonely women listen for feet on the doorstep. News of a world elsewhere is the gift of an old friend visiting.

There's the Scots Gift of the Gab, and Teacher Zhou spots what her money won't buy.

The poets too are spread wide: from Edinburgh to Finland, their origins ranging from Vietnam and China to Renfrew.

Read and enjoy!

– RUTH AYLETT (Guest editor)



Ruth Aylett grew up in London but gradually moved northwards, having lived in Sheffield, Manchester, and now Edinburgh. She has a degree in Mathematical Economics from the London School of Economics but rapidly moved into computing and has spent her working life as an academic researching and teaching Artificial Intelligence and Robotics. Apart from substantial academic publications, she has authored two popular science books, the most recent, written with a colleague and published last year: *Living with Robots – What Every Anxious Human Needs To Know*.

A now widely-published poet, her interests in Science and Technology are often reflected in her poetry and she has several times appeared at readings with a robot. She is also a life-long feminist and political activist, and draws on this experience among others in her two poetry pamphlets in 2021 – *Pretty in Pink* (4Word) and *Queen of Infinite Space* (Maytree). She produces film poems and a novel, *Equinox*, written with Greg Michaelson, is due out in spring 2023 with Stairwell.

For more, visit macs.hw.ac.uk/~ruth/writing.html

FEATURED WRITER

LYUBA YAKIMCHUK

Lyuba Yakimchuk is a poet, screenwriter, playwright, born 1985 in Pervomaisk Luhanska oblast, Ukraine. She lived in Kyiv, but because of the Russian massive invasion had to evacuate with her son to Vienna.

She is the author of several full-length poetry collections, including *Apricots of Donbas*. *Apricots of the Donbas* received the International Poetic Award of the Kovalev Foundation (NYC, USA). This book was listed in the Top 10 books about the war — *Forbes* magazine's rating in Ukraine. In 2015 Kyiv's *New Time* magazine listed Yakimchuk among the one hundred most influential people in the arts in Ukraine.

She has also authored two film scripts and two plays. Her new play *Wall* was produced at the Ivan Franko National Academic Drama Theatre, the largest and the oldest Ukrainian theatre.

Her poems have been translating into twenty languages, including English, German, French, Chinese, Polish,

Russian, Swedish, Hebrew, Lithuanian, Greek, Estonian, Bulgarian, Slovenian, Slovak, Belarusian, Romanian, Hungarian, Georgian, Azerbaijani and Serbian.

Yakimchuk has received a number of awards, including the International Slavic Poetic Award, the Bohdan-Ihor Antonych Prize and Smoloskyp Prize, three of Ukraine's most prestigious awards for young poets.

Lyuba performed in a musical and poetic duet with a double-bass player Mark Tokar (Lviv, Ukraine) and a vocalist Olesya Zdorovetska (Dublin, UK). As a vocalist, she performed in *Fokstroty* project by Serhiy Zhadan and Yuri Gurzhy. Her poetry is also performed by a singer Mariana Sadovska (Germany) in project «2014».

In 2022 she performed her poem «Prayer» in project *Free* by John Legend during Grammy Awards.



**I HAVE A
CRISIS FOR
YOU**



you lit up a cigarette
but it wouldn't burn
it was summer
and girls would **light up** from any passer-by
but I didn't **light up** from you anymore
—our love's gone missing, I explain to a friend
it vanished in one of the wars
we waged /weɪdʒd/ in our kitchen
—change the word 'war' to 'crisis,' he suggests
because a crisis is something everyone has from time to time
remember the Second World Crisis?
correspondingly, also the First World
Civil Crisis—to each his own
I forgot about the Cold Crisis
it seems they also came in twos
also the Uprising Crisis
it sounds so good—
the Uprising Crisis of 1648–1657 fifty
write it down in the textbooks
a crisis that liberates
releases forever
my great-grandfather fell in the Second World Crisis
possibly by the hand of my other great-grandfather
or his machine gun
or his battle tank
but it is unclear
how they conducted this crisis with each other
perhaps it was the crisis itself that killed them,
like a /pleɪg/
for nobody is to blame for the crisis

it is /ɪnˈɛksərəbl/ like death
and when our own domestic war
turns into crisis
does it get better?
does it hurt less?
do birds come back to us from the south
or maybe, we **come out** to meet them?
why is our language like that—
we lack words to describe our feelings
only crisis and love are left
as /ˈæntənɪms/
but if love is bound to be so complicated
with these blazes and smolderings
like blood and pain
(and blood is not like periods
but some new feeling of mine)
(and pain is yours)
if love is made up
of two different feelings
then soon love will also be called crisis
I have a crisis for you, darling
let's get married
it'll be easier for us both
we've got a crisis
we'd better **split up**

Translated from the Ukrainian by Svetlana Lavochnikina, published in poetry collection
Apricots of Donbas (2021, USA)



POETRY

TRACY PATRICK

Tracy Patrick lives and writes in Renfrewshire. Her novel, *Blushing is for Sinners* (Clochoderick), was commended by the Saltire First Book of the Year judges 2019. Her poetry collection, *Portrait*, is published Seahorse Publications, 2022. Her website is tracypatrick.org

Gerry Stewart is a poet, creative writing tutor and editor based in Finland. Her poetry collection *Post-Holiday Blues* was published by Flambard Press, UK. *Totems* is to be published by Hedgehog Poetry Press in 2022. Her writing blog can be found at thistlewren.blogspot.fi and [@grimalkingerry](https://twitter.com/grimalkingerry) on Twitter.

GERRY STEWART



TRAVELLER

Tracy Patrick

There were days he was all fire,
when his tongue demanded the promise
of permanence, a love made of stone
that he could smuggle in his pocket
across borders, or hide in a pillowcase
during dawn raids, a heart-shaped
talisman
that would protect him when questioned
or stay silent like a pair of watchful eyes.
He made his request in poetry
scribbled backwards so that I had to hold
it
to the mirror – other times it was in food
served in small bowls like offerings
and there were occasions when he
made it
with a fist battering on the door
in the dead of night, or in pieces of gravel
chucked at my window like words.

Other days he was all water.
In the moonlight he'd come to my bed
and tremble like a reflection,
his whole body weeping like there was
something
he had to extinguish
and no amount of promises would do.
The only cure was God, he said
as it always is for those
who have nothing in this world
but faith.
God is dead, I told him.
He's been dead for years

APPEAL

Tracy Patrick

after the war
there will be lonely women
with forgetful faces
and old eyes
living in strange cities
women who do not try
to hide from the rain whose
wet embrace is
the closest thing to love
women who sleepwalk
in the daytime
carrying buckets of suds
who listen for feet
on the doorstep then
call the children in
to look at them like they
are not their own
women who chew on bitten nails

and abandon god
for booze and cigarettes
women who wish for dreams
as hollow as craters
yet who do not care
to spend the night in company
nor do they wait eagerly for morning
what is to wait for
they already know
that nothing belongs to them
they cover their mouths
like babushkas in ancient souks
and glance over their shoulders
at the future
passing

THE GIFT IN YOUR RETURN

Gerry Stewart



is breaking the strictures
of our routines,
pushing us to explore
beyond the cardinal points
of our home's compass.

'Closed for the off-season'
means we pursue novel distractions,
unusual, tiny museums,
treks to the frozen woods or beaches,
fire up the dusty sauna.

And we talk, six months
of unshared notions
pour forth in relief.
Red wine before the hearth
and tales of creaking rhubarb
becomes hilarious.

You convey rare souvenirs
of the life we've left behind,
new gossip, old stories.

Hardest of all,
your regular visits remind us
of those who do not come.



NGAN NGUYEN

Ngan Nguyen, a Vietnamese-born author who is based in Edinburgh, has published 10 books in fiction and nonfiction in Vietnamese. She holds a Master's degree in Creative Writing at the University of Aberdeen. Ngan received the 2021 Mentoring Awards for Writers from the Wigtown Book Festival and the 2022 mentorship organised by the University of Glasgow to get children's authors into schools. Her poem and short stories were published by DVAN (America), and NorthWords Now and Causeway (Scotland). She is currently looking for an agent for her first collection of short stories in English about Vietnamese at home and abroad.

Dilys Rose lives in Edinburgh, and is a novelist, short story writer and poet. She has published eight books of fiction and four of poetry, most recently the short story collection, *Sea Fret* (Scotland Street Press, 2022) and a poetry pamphlet, *Stone the Crows* (Mariscat Press), in 2020. She is currently an RLF fellow at Glasgow University.

DILYS ROSE

ELAINE WEBSTER

Elaine worked in education and outreach roles before she retired. She is interested in languages, including Scots. She currently does voluntary work for charities and is on the board of TRACS (traditional arts and culture Scotland).



IN THE SUNFLOWER FIELD

Ngan Nguyen

Mama, in the sunflower field
There is a man in his twenties
A smile brightens his face
Transform himself into the earth
to let sunflowers reach for the light of truth, independence and freedom.
That man fell in his homeland Ukraine
With the strong faith of a nation
With the love of the bride walking into the cathedral yesterday and the seed of a
free citizen has already sprouted.

Mama, in the very same sunflower field
There is a soldier lying lonely
A distorted smile on his young face
They can deprive him of his freedom of choice
But no one can control his free thinking.
Gun in hand, he aimed at the clouds
Let the bullet tear the enemy in the shape of Putin's face
Instead of pinning it to the hearts of people who must stand up to defend their
freedom and their Fatherland.
He screamed with laughter 'What is freedom?'
He fell to the strangely cold land
amongst thousands of his unknown comrades, whose
mothers had cried 'Oh, my son! What have those politicians lied to you?'
lovers had looked at them with their indifferent eyes
younger brothers had turned their back to them, muttering 'Humiliating for my brother.'
That Russian soldier had accepted the sunflower seeds from the Ukrainian woman
Where he lies down
A sunflower field grows
Giving humans another chance to redeem their blunder.

Mama, do you know the whole land of Ukraine is sunflower fields?





JOY

Dilys Rose

after Nicolás Guillén's *El gran zoo*

Small, excitable, wide-eyed.

Glossy coat, a crinkly golden fleece.

Always, but especially on dark days, it is lit from within.

Readily adaptable to most terrains.

Commonly found in places favoured by the young.

Prey to envy, greed, cussedness and bad faith.

Prefers airy expanses.

Reproduces by the simple process of giving itself away.

Strength: an inexhaustible magnanimity.

Weakness: an utter trust in others.

Greatest fear: to be unable to reproduce.

Note: highly infectious, even to those of a wretched disposition.

GIFT OF THE GAB

Elaine Webster



Biddies spick tae me,
pit-oot-the-hoosers
draa deep on Woodbine.
I jist shak ma waashin.

Fowk oot the back,
lang-wickend skivers
jinkin bairns in jammies
watchin the wether shift.

Peggin up, pechin
sair airms ower-raxin,
news roarin an ragin
sheets blawin atween.



Mummle on like tele,
thon een he gied me,
nae uiss tae naebdy
jist full o lees.

I rake for his letters
pressed wi ma hankies
his wirds wir gey wechtie,
at's why they jilt him.

biddies: people

jilt: jailed

jinkin: avoiding

ower-raxin: reaching too far

lee:lie

mummle:mumble

pechin: grasping for breath

uiss: use

wechtie:important

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.

GERDA STEVENSON

Gerda Stevenson, award-winning writer/actor/director/singer-songwriter. Her poetry, drama and prose are widely published, staged and broadcast. Her play *FEDERER VERSUS MURRAY* toured to New York (published there by *Salmagundi*); nominated as *MG ALBA* Scots Singer of the Year for her album, *NIGHT TOUCHES DAY*. Poetry: *IF THIS WERE REAL* (Smokestack Books), and

QUINES: Poems in Tribute to Women of Scotland (Luath Press), both also published in Rome by *Edizioni Ensemble* in Italian translations; *INSIDE & OUT – the ART of Christian Small* (Scotland Street Press); *EDINBURGH*, with landscape photographer Allan Wright (Allan Wright Photographic); collection of short stories, *LETTING GO* (Luath Press).





YELLOW CROAKERS

Xinyi Jiang

Wipe the tears that displease the God of Year
on a sheet of candyfloss, gritted by clinkers / chicken
feet / pig heads, that glistens in the moonlight, count
the crunches under the rag soles / frostbitten toes
until a cracker pierces my eardrums, let the Siberian gust
dry my face, blow the sulphur / soot / stench of pan-fried
mackerels, rationed & half-rotten, into my dry throat / hot
lungs, hold tight the net bag that keeps
slipping from my mittens. Up

& down the hill, turn into the gate
unguarded by Old Wang, find the dirt path
behind the ghostly rings / blocked privies, skip over
the black ice / brown slush / hidden holes, squint
like a bat, knock, 3 times, wait for Teacher Zhou, solid
as a temple Jin Gang, eyes murky & beady,
like the frozen croakers', to spot what
her money won't buy, this little red guard will achieve,
I'm old enough to understand.

RUSSIAN GLOVES

Gerda Stevenson



I happened to be wearing them
that Sunday morning, news of Ukraine
bleeding from the radio as I left the house
to join neighbours at our local attraction –
the red coffee van, a new heart beat
drawing us together – a constant trickle
for an hour or so along the village arteries – life
after the virus, opening up, the aroma
of freshly ground beans teasing our nostrils
in the frosted air;

and there, in the car park, our ankles fringed
by snowdrops – white lanterns expanding
in the sun – my gloves are admired
for their intricate pattern, Fair Isle style,
with a Tatar touch, egg-shell blue, yellow
and green, 'Spring colours to lift our spirits,'
someone says, and I remind her
of the Russian woman who lived for a while
over the hill, became my friend,
and made them for me, deft fingers
flicking wool between needles' click,
those supple, expert hands I know so well,
and often think of, in everything they do;

then a man says it – casts a tiny grenade
into the morning: 'So they'll be for the bin,
won't they!' and a small cloud of hatred hangs
in the soured air

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



Scottish PEN's Writers for Peace and Dove Tales are presenting a joint event, *The Age of Impunity*, at 6.30pm on Tuesday 28th June on zoom.

Russia attacks Ukraine, Azerbaijan attacks Armenian Nagorno Karabakh, yet there is no punishment for the aggressors. Is justice for sale for the price of Europe's gas?

Special guest Alexis Krikorian of Armenian non-profit, Hyestart, will be talking about the concept of *Toxic Neutrality*, the title of his forthcoming book.

dovetalesscotland.co.uk/events

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Poetry

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