



EDINBURGH:
SINGING
THE CITY

Poems
for Edinburgh
and its Citizens

CHRISTINE
DE LUCA

Edinburgh Makar
2014-2017

SALTIRE SERIES NO. 13

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Christine De Luca

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Introduction

Edinburgh's poet laureate or 'makar' is a title that reaches deep into our country's history. The use of the word makar dates back to the fifteenth century as a literal translation of the Greek term ποιητής (poiētēs) 'maker; poet'. It is an old Scots word used to reinforce the notion of the poet as an experienced and versatile worker in the craft of writing. Over the centuries, Edinburgh has been home to its fair share of wordsmiths and the city proudly nurtures this tradition.

Created by the City of Edinburgh Council in 2002 as an honorary role, the Edinburgh Makar post supported the city's bid to become the world's first UNESCO City of Literature, and the Makar has become an intrinsic part of the city's literary status and creative activity. By using poetry to delve into the very heart of our city—through exploring its secrets and listening to its stories—the Makar has the potential to bring the city to life through poetry. In promoting literature in partnership with literary organisations, taking part in a variety of civic duties, and representing the diversity of Edinburgh life, the Makar is viewed as the dedicated ambassador for the written and spoken word in our City of Literature.

The first Edinburgh poet to receive the title was Stewart Conn (2002-2005), followed by Valerie Gillis (2005-2008), Ron Butlin (2008-2014), and then Christine De Luca who has held the post since 2014.

Since taking up the role, Christine De Luca has impressed all with her commitment to championing poetry and literature within the city. A prolific and established prizewinning poet, whose works have been translated into many languages, she interacts with the city in a very personable, energetic and relatable way.

Over the years she has presented and read at award ceremonies, been involved with translating poems, bringing Edinburgh's statues to life in verse, promoting poetry projects for schools, working with the press and much more besides. As part of her

work as Makar, in 2016, she launched her online anthology of poems, *Edinburgh Unsung*. These poems were the result of time spent at Scottish Gas Networks and Seafield Waste Water Treatment Works, getting to know and giving voice to the less well-known aspects of the city's workforce.

This collection presents a rich seam of poetry, allowing the reader a glimpse into the varied life of an Edinburgh Makar. The poems speak of the city, its many aspects and attributes, its people and its places. The poems also speak of Christine De Luca, of her warmth, humour and craft. Edinburgh has been blessed with an outstanding Makar.

Foreword

When I became Edinburgh Makar in 2014 I had no clear idea of how the role might develop. I knew I was expected to be an ambassador for poetry in the city and to respond to the occasional commission for a poem. Previous Makars—Stewart Conn, Valerie Gillies and Ron Butlin—had set the bar high and I admit I was somewhat unsure of what I could bring to the task entrusted to me for three years. However, with the expert guidance of Council staff and the support of Councillors on the Culture and Sport committee, I started to find my feet. More encouragement and interest came from the UNESCO City of Literature Trust and The Scottish Poetry Library as well as The Saltire Society and Scottish PEN. Although writing poems is largely a solitary endeavour I have never felt unsupported.

Some poems have been written in response to a commission or a request but most have come from a personal engagement with the city: its fabric, art, its history and functions; and some of the citizens who have made Edinburgh what it is today. The poems are undeniably civic in focus, generally upbeat and appreciative. However, there is the occasional exception! I have attempted to group the poems so that their purpose is clear.

Highlights of my Makarship have been accompanying the Lord Provost, Donald Wilson, to Kraków and to Florence, both cities twinned with Edinburgh. Two projects also stand out for me as particularly worthwhile: one was the *Tweet your Street* project with primary school pupils in which the children were encouraged to write very short poems about their own street which could then be displayed on a computer-based map; the second was a collaboration with 23 other local poets to create poems in praise of those whose work in the public sphere often goes unnoticed or unappreciated. The resulting *Edinburgh Unsung* is an online anthology. Both are accessible at www.edinburghmakar.org.uk

Some of these poems are already available on websites (the James Clark Maxwell Foundation website, Sceptical Scot website,

the MapaScotland website as well as the Makars' website); some have featured in the press: *Scotland on Sunday*, *The Scotsman*, *Evening News* and the *Scottish Sun*; some in magazines: *Colinton Magazine* Dec 2015, *Leither*, Issue 115, *Historic Leith Guide*, 2017, *Green Shoots* (Edinburgh Public Libraries 2005); anthologies: *The Evergreen: A New Season in the North* (The Word Bank 2014), *Umbrellas of Edinburgh* (Freight Books, 2016); and two from my previous collections *Voes & Sounds* (The Shetland Library 1995), and *Parallel Worlds* (Luath Press 2005). Thanks are due to all these editors and publishers.

Finally, I should like to thank the Saltire Society and the City of Edinburgh Council for making this publication possible, Stewart Conn for his support and helpful comments on the manuscript, and my son, Daniel, for volunteering to create a website for the Edinburgh Makar. I hope it may be of use to future Makars.

—Christine De Luca

EDINBURGH: EARLY IMPRESSIONS

Edinburgh Volte-Face

City of seven hills
rivalling Rome: you are
the big sister of all cities,
forever tut-tutting.

City of venerable skylines;
each morning you un-do yourself
like someone more anxious to save
the wrapping than enjoy the gift.

City of open spaces: for you
no strollers in the forum; merely
a scurry of solicitors, vellum-faced
with long north-facing days,
and little women, worn
from cleaning other people's stairs.

City of the great estates;
you have no outer wall,
but numerous apartheids
charitably maintained.

City of seven hills
rivalling Rome: I hold
your negative to the light,
and see your true topography.

(first published in *Voes & Sounds*, The Shetland Library, 1995)

EDINBURGH: CITY OF FAMOUS SONS

Enlightening Edinburgh

City of William Adam, James Craig;
men with more than a visual aesthetic

City of mathematicians and medics,
enlightening society, igniting ideas

City of disputing and discoursing:
Hume's philosophy, jurisprudence

City of artists and galleries
Raeburn, Ramsay, Nasmyth

City of Dunbar and Fergusson,
home to makars: to Scott and Stevenson

All of them blue-printing our future;
habits of mind, bold envisioning.



Statue of David Hume in The Royal Mile, by Alexander Stoddart

I'm Contemplating Your Statue, Mr Hume

trying to make a judgment
of Æsthetic Beauty. Are you content
with its classic casting, its heroic patina?
You seem a little underdressed for *dreich*,
verdigrised past your *oxters*.

Would you rather
have emerged, muscled as that youthful David,
from virile marble, stone chips flying?
We look up to you, fine moral conscience
plinthed, legal eye a blink away
from court and parliament
from hard habitats of Rule and Reason.
What would you make of our enlightenment?
Would you find the same closed minds
in clergy, domini, the city's literati?

Do you ever, clandestinely,
shin down, gather your toga about you,
nip across the dark street to Adam Smith
for a chinwag; check out his ethics
of rational self-interest? Or,

just maybe, if it's fair,
the pair of you take Greyfriars Bobby
for his evening toddle, checking
the state of his worn-down nose against
your tourist-burnished toe? Or,

do you stroll a little further
for a chat with Robert Fergusson? I know
he likes good company, eye contact;
see how jaunty he is, how he mixes
with the locals, earns their devotion.

Forgive me being forward, David,
but it would be good to saunter with you
through the Old Town's literary quarter
have a natter about Human Nature,
blether about notions of Beauty.



Statue of Adam Smith in The Royal Mile, by Alexander Stoddart

The Invisible Hand

You must have had a natty tailor—that coat:
cuffed, collared and buttoned to perfection.
Your draped cloak softens it, protects from winds
of close and wynd. Those buckles must have cost
a bob or two as well, and your full wig.

Where you stand you can
almost see Kirkcaldy: cornerstone of character where
you learned the basics, built on them brilliantly;
where you saw men paid in nails, their work
a cannie commodity for barter.

That gaze hides much:
a soft heart, perhaps a nervous disposition.
More than likely you soldiered on with just
your widowed mother: there seems a touch
of melancholy in your stance.

But you were wedded
to debate, enlightenment; thrust your learning
through the engine of your diverse faculties, built
sound new theories—PolEcon we called it in the 60s.
You reasoned that hoards of gold, alone,
are no true gauge
of a nation's wealth; that Productivity and GDP
can measure Systems. Your *Wealth of Nations*,
those cogent pages of free market Capitalism, set out
the links: competition, self-interest, prosperity.

But you were also grounded
in Philosophy; wrote of Beauty, Order, Harmony;
of Good and Evil; knew the underpinnings of morality,
of faith. Your writing was plinthed on the invisible hand,
the hand that seeks the greatest good for all.

That base has gone now.
Would you be shocked? Would you be writing
a new treatise, re-defining Capitalism for this
Global era? You look east, well above our heads;
your vision still clear as a bell.

(first published in *Scotland on Sunday*)



Statue of James Clerk Maxwell (1831-1879), Scottish mathematical physicist, in George Street, by Alexander Stoddart

The Man Who Changed Everything

This statue is fitting for a modest Scotsman
whose learning lay lightly on his shoulders;
who looked up through nature to describe
the hidden numbers holding it together;
predicted and proved the less than obvious:
unseen worlds, force fields, the planets.
His was the plinth on which Einstein built.

The bronze of Maxwell is quiet and reflective;
neo-classical, unshowy. One of his Tobys has
pride of place; the dog privy to his master's
ruminating about vision, physiology of sight,
but wise enough to see that his was different.
Perhaps he was a canine expert on Saturn's rings;
the one that salivated at the thought that light

is an electro-magnetic wave; that barked loudly
when the fourth equation brought it all together.
His owner's gentle eye and ample beard are caught,
the slight academic stoop, the romantic heart.
Clay is a hard taskmaster, the sculptor said,
but you'd never guess. And you'd never think
Maxwell was the man who changed everything.

The Boy in the Man

Leaving sick-bed behind and nursie's stiff smiles
and wearisome streets, the grime of the day,
you swung in that green that is Colinton Dell
over pool, over river; saw that life should be play.

*Back and fore, swinging high over Colinton Dell,
dreams to be dreamed and stories to tell.*

Your desire was for yardarms, oceans, adventure;
or a dog at your heels, the sun high above.
You studied the law, but never surrendered
the longing to wander, discover unknowns.

*Back and fore, swinging high over Colinton Dell,
dreams to be dreamed and stories to tell.*

A lighthouse could stir the romance of a story
not desire to design it, its lens to ignite.
You walked out of that life, its status, ambitions
to lie under the stars on the hills of the night.

*Back and fore, swinging high over Colinton Dell,
dreams to be dreamed and stories to tell.*

Your happiest years were in luscious Samoa
where they loved you and called you a Teller of Tales;
Tusitala—you died there, honoured and treasured,
your body 'at home' but your soul under sail.

*Back and fore, swinging high over Colinton Dell
Dreams to be dreamed and stories to tell.*

Now your statue transforms base clay to rich bronze,
as your pen did in yarns and novels and rhymes.
Every detail is crafted with flair and with talent,
the boy in the man, but a moment in time.

*Back and fore, swinging high over Colinton Dell
Dreams to be dreamed and stories to tell.*



Statue of Robert Louis Stevenson by Alan Herriot, at Colinton Kirk



Statue of the poet Robert Fergusson, by David Annand at Canongate Kirk

I' Dy Stride

Prunk in bronze, du's stendin doon
da Canongaet, cott tails flaagin.
Naeboady wid jalouse a Bedlam endin.

In your stride

*poised, you, striding
flapping loosely
suspect*

Touries daander up ta dee, pose
for der pictir. Du sood hae a page
in Facebook. Maybe du dis.

*tourists, you
should
do*

Ee lass cups dy shin ithin her haands
while her laad snaps her; anidder een
claps dy cheek; dey sheeks wi dee,

*one, your chin
boyfriend, another
strokes, your, they blether*

der wirds catcht on camera.
Anidder wife, for her album, harks
i dy lug; hit's on her mobile, nae doot

*their, caught
whispers
in your ear*

half-gaets roond da wirld bi noo.
A man tries to place his feet
in exactly dy step; tooms up, snap,

half-way, now

thumbs

snap again. Some lean fornenst dee,
pit a airm around dee. A bairn plunks
her saaft toy, her peerie dug, i da crook

against

little

o dy airm. Click. Hit's laek as if du's
faider, lover, pal. Ee halliget lass louns
apö dy back. Wir faert shö'll rive dy cott,

*father, wild girl leaps
on, frightened, rip*

boofel dee. But du's mair bördly
as du luiks. Stend on, man. Wir still
staandin apö dy shooders, dy wirds.

pummel, strapping

(first published in *The Evergreen: A New Season in the North*)

Picture credit: Kim Traynor



Statue of John Knox by John Hutchison, 1896.

John Knox Returns

Nae doot hit dusna budder dee, but hit's
a peety dat da graveyard o da High Kirk
—whaar famously du preached—
is jöst a car park; an, laek King Richard,
der nae richt steyn ta mark dy layer.

doubt, bother you

you

there's, your

If du wis here daday, du'd be weel wint
wi what du caa'd da *Munstrous Regiment*
o Weemen. Heth! Der rinnin aathin noo:
da kirk, da country! Du'd maybe shaa
da wye again in scölin bairns. An I reckon

today, well acquainted

called

(mild oath) They're, everything

show

way, educating children

du'd reesel up ithin da Kirk; likkly stert
anidder Reformation, for theology can sturken.
Some still bigg nairrow chapels, coont angels
dancin apö da tap o preens an pick oot
passages o scripture ta suit der prejudice.

stir/rummage

another, congeal

build

pins

their

Du'd be rantin aboot refugees, seekin
wyes ta hoose da haemless, feed da fantin;
aksin da Rabbi an da Imam in for tae,
tweetin da Pope, dancin at da Méla an
haein a peerie hooch on Hogmanay.

starving

asking, to tea

little exclamation of joy (dancing)

An fae dy fine-laek hoose prunk i da Netherbow
du'd hail hen-pairties stotterin doon da Mile,
aa bare trams an tattoos; shooer a blissin
whan dey'd blaa dee droothie smoorikins.
Dey'd tak a selfie wi dee if du lat dem.

from, handsome, proud

tottering

all, thighs, shower

they'd blow, drunken kisses

allowed them

Sae step doon aff yun plint, man, come dee wys
an trim yun muckle baerd, change dy eemage.
I hear du laid in a barrel o da best Burgundy
for dy wake: can du spare a gless?
Hit's time ta share a tippie tae da future!

that plinth, come in

that ample beard

(Published in anthology *Umbrellas of Edinburgh*, Freight 2016)



Sculpture by Eduardo Paolozzi, Modern 2, Scottish National Galleries

Meeting Vulcan

You are daunting, Vulcan, towering above me.
Art shows magnificence well within your grasp
as with your gammy leg and platform heels
you stride the shining hall, hammer in hand.
We could do with you in goal for Scotland:
4 six-footers barely have your reach, your metal.

You were top-drawer: son of Juno and Jupiter,
the royalty of gods. But in her regal eyes
you didn't make the bonnie baby grade.
There's something vulnerable still lurking
that brings out the mother in me. I want to
shine your steel, make you gleam and sparkle.

You could be the patron saint of blacksmiths
as you were first to find the skills and secrets
of the craft. Or perhaps for single mothers,
in praise of Thetis who rescued you from
your abandonment, and brought you up;
never noticed you were ugly or deformed.

Or maybe you should be the patron saint
of all those judged too flawed; of those whose
inner strength and spirit is what truly counts.
Stride on, half-man and half-machine, under
those majestic heavens. The more I look at you
the more I see a beauty in your fabled strength.

EDINBURGH: INAUGURAL UNESCO CITY
OF LITERATURE

In Thrall to Books

If we're lucky, books invade our homes,
from fundament to flight of fancy.
They sag our shelves. If one mislaid,
we mourn its absence, are flummoxed
like the woman in the parable, her lost coin.
Could books become a human right?

Imagine a global wheest igniting
in the east, a mingle of old wisdom and
new dreams; a murmuration of words,
whispering westwards at the windows
of the world, tenderising war zones,
enthraling us, engendering peace.

A City in Love

Built on books, Edinburgh spells
paper, publishing. Esparto grass bales
came under sail from the silty banks
of the Nile; and the Esk turned
its ten mills, mulched and rolled
fibre and filament to finest vellum.

Editors still work into the night,
sift through impatient manuscripts;
type-setters tease out the form
proof-checkers nit-pick, then
printing, folding, binding.
All those words to get right.

A capital city, Heart of Midlothian,
where you mingle with Scott and
Fergusson, admire Muriel Spark,
rub shoulders with Harry Potter,
shadow Rebus, Jekyll's alter ego.
Yes, a city in love with literature.

Through the Traffic of Tongues

A poem to celebrate the 10th anniversary of Edinburgh's designation as UNESCO's first City of Literature

Ten years we've had of trafficking,
keeping *borders open through words*,
through discerning conversation,

hospitality of books. Seven citadels
of literature, all fostered from a dream;
seven hills and heavens, cities of possibilities.

Edinburgh: first to light up with literature,
spelled out its heritage and hopes. That night
in Paris, a consummation, a delight.

We passed the flame to Melbourne:
ancient meeting place of sign and symbol,
built on gold, a rush of writing, a wealth.

Then Iowa City told the world
it had *made the sentence behave*
and misbehave, recast our myths.

Dublin next with its Book of Kells,
four Nobel literary laureates
and a daft Bloomsday every June.

Reykjavik was standing in the wings,
holding its ancient tongue; weighing
Edda and Saga, its poetic forms.

But Julian of Norwich was stirring in her grave.
We still welcome the solace of her words
telling us that all shall indeed be well.

Kraków, the seventh hill, the seventh dream:
its word hoards, bulging libraries, bookshops;
the deep lines on its literary face.

All outward-looking places, all generous,
all built on the topography of words.
Open the book, read, translate, pass on the gift.

This poem, including the title, includes snippets—italicised—from poems by Edinburgh's three previous Makars; Stewart Conn ('Emissaries'), Valerie Gillies ('To Edinburgh') and Ron Butlin ('Reclaiming St Andrew's Square'). Also a quote from the Iowa City of Literature website.

Virtual Statue in the Canongate

for Robyn Marsack, Director of the Scottish Poetry Library
2000—2016, on her retiral

A chum for Robert Fergusson? Now there's
a thought. He'd be so thrilled to share that space
with you; to dance, arms linked, to Crichton's Close,
return that book of poems to the shelves. But where's
the sculptor who could catch your grace
that serious intent, lightness of touch,
your wit, unshowy artistry, your passion;
capture the vivacity in your lucid face?
Your *land of the long white cloud* enchants,
melts Scottish *haar*, reveals a clarity, *sea mist*
a fresh perspective on ourselves, that
couples us together, bids us dance
to many metres. No words express the lyric
you embody; no marble, no bronze suffice.

The Writers' Museum

Re-opened after refurbishment, 22nd January, 2016

With her tower-house, the comely Elizabeth, Dowager
Countess of Stair, brought elegance to this Close.
Whose carriages lingered here? Who ducked their heads
under her grandpa's stern lintel, his generous mantel?
And who added initials, roses and thistles to the ceiling?
Perhaps that came later with the romantic turret,
dramatic balcony, the fine handiwork to cherish
of plasterers, carpenters, workers in glass?

Our three great writers never met her, but must
have taken short-cuts through the Close, weaving
between Old and New Towns, between business
and pleasure. Burns' mind was churning with
the thought of Fergusson, his unmarked grave
at the Canongate Kirk. You can see the receipt
for the headstone he ordered. It cost him dearly—
£5 10s.—and years of saving, of dedication.

How many words might Scott have penned
with quills lifted from that elegant inkstand? Perhaps
it was kept in his Chambers, just for documents?
How many times did he fill that inkpot and, dog-tired,
snuff out that candle? Good to know it was gifted
to his clerk, Carmichael, who, once their evening work
was done, took his fiddle down and found a tune to bring
his master's poetry alive. A story more real in artefact.

And Stevenson, did he ferret round this Close; see it lapse
and fester as he wrote of the darker side of human nature,
of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde? And what did Deacon Brodie
—upright Councillor by day, robber by night—keep
in that grizzly cabinet, the one he made so skilfully?
Lewis, the boy at home in Heriot Row, saw it daily
and surely in his mind's eye ever after. It stands doucely
now—with mindings of Samoa—looked after for us all.

It took Geddes to save this gem from demolition, persuade the Earl of Rosebery to buy it, restore and gift it to the city: it would be fit to honour those three writers who had lately graced it. We step out into Makars' Court, where new paving stones reverberate with words, pay homage to our literary glory. The old house is in good-keeping now, lovingly refurbished, and that wide, timeworn, studded door still bids us welcome.



Act of Solidarity

for David Robinson, Literary Editor of the *Scotsman*,
on his retiral—25 February 2015

What can we say to mark this moment, David,
this long enthusiasm for all things literary,
all bookish things? It's time the light was shone
on you, the bushel lifted off your special alchemy.

Some say that you personify avuncularity,
meaning it as compliment. You disarm us,
put us all at ease, light up the company;
always gentlemanly, always charming.

Others say you're comfy in your skin. And
let's not forget hilarity—it's in your genes too,
that sunny self-mocking, that eeh bah gum, lad.
But you're a good un: our steadfast go-between

seeking that book that's un-put-down-able;
the book you'll wish won't end, the brilliant gem,
the book you'll lend but wish returned;
the book you tell yourself you'll read again;

the book you'll recommend. We'd love to know
what's on your list to browse now, David.
And you will read and no doubt write and
keep the faith in different guises: experiment,

surprise us with a new beginning.
We wish you all that multiplies
the things that you would wish yourself:
low winter sun, a clear blue sky,

dogs walked with friends, late breakfast,
papers, and trolleyloads of books surpassing
expectation. We wish you days like this,
more happy days like this.

EDINBURGH: CAPITAL CITY, CULTURAL
& FESTIVAL CITY, TWINNED CITY

Still Building the Best

The Saltire Society @ 80

We celebrate our past, and build our future
Haud high oor aichty years, an big for days to come
*Gheibh na làithean a dh'fhalbh ar spèis—an fheadhainn
ri teachd ar smuais**

Eight decades of inspiration and celebration
and yes, occasional provocation: the Saltire
draws us in *fae aa the airts*, and all persuasions.

Let's not forget our history—or rewrite it—
what we've accomplished: a distinctive culture,
and not a shortbread tin with stag in sight.

A school in every parish? Think Literary Awards
The Enlightenment? Think Saltoun Award
Sub-standard homes? Think Housing Design Awards

The stunning Kelpies? Think Civil Engineering Awards
That 'glass ceiling'? Think Outstanding Women Award
Lagging behind? Think Inspiring Scotland Awards

That blend of art and design; intellect and creativity,
lasses an lads o pairts, communities together;
discourse and deliberation, fuel of productivity.

The Saltire has us reaching for the best; still steers us,
keeps us informed, enthused and culturally alert.
So, for its eightieth birthday, let's raise three cheers!

**days gone merit our respect—the ones to come our vigour/pith*
with thanks to Martin MacIntyre (Martainn Mac an t-Saoir)

Still Bringing Down Barriers

Liberty, Language and Literature: Scottish PEN @ Ninety

How long to learn the subtleties of Language,
even our own, our mumbled best; how easy
to misinterpret, barely get the gist.
And harder still to reach out to another,
find words to bridge the gaps. When tongues are tied
by politics and fear, we snip the cords
to let their words flow free; our task—to spread
the unheard, unread stories of the silenced.

We understand ourselves and other cultures
mirrored in narratives of humankind:
losses, loves, despairs and degradations.
Those who build a Literature can shape
a tongue; explore potential, map ahead.
They take down barriers, create new crossings,
translate at frontiers, empower where freedom's curbed,
where truth or painful history is suppressed.

But words—spoken and written, our food for mind
and heart—can only flourish when Liberty's respected
and we can share our thoughts with one another.
PEN has played a crucial part, fought hard
for ninety years for writers, journalists,
and now for bloggers. It will go on no doubt
throughout this third millennium: poems
will still be scratched on soap and memorised,
stories still smuggled out. We're not going away.

Edinburgh Gifts

What could we paint upon a scroll for you
to carry home, unroll a memory of Edinburgh?

A snatch of cold spring *haar*, brittle with blossom;
Arthur's Seat—haunches in gorse, eye on Berwick Law?

sea mist

A summer *dander* through our sweep of square and circle;
or the Meadows in a Maidan haze from barbecues?

aimless stroll

An autumn townscape spired west on gold to purple;
students flocking to familiar roosts in tenements?

Or a smudge of winter folded up, a crisp view from
its seventh hill; from Blackford to Ben Lomond?

You can have them all, yes, and our monuments,
golf courses, burns, our firth, our view north to Fife.

Take a melody, a poem, a play; take all our festivals
a *mind*ing of our galleries, museums; a bus, a tram!

gift as memory

See us, head down against a whipping wind, umbrellas
inside out, *drookit*, dodging puddles, and how we lift

soaked through

our eyes to hills, to light, to visitors. Come back
and see us! Bring the sun and new ideas.

(A poem for the City of Edinburgh Council to use as a small gift)

A Drama in Time

Edinburgh 2050

Look back four decades: who would have thought we'd change so much or be so digital-dependent? Look ahead four decades and make a wish-list for our planners to raise their game, ignite imagination.

Think of our city in 2050: bigger and more diverse; an interplay of hopes and dreams and possibilities. Still skylines to delight, still grace and open space, but good homes, good health built-in for everyone.

Can we keep the citizen central to the plan, the heart: a living, breathing city; not just a backdrop or vista or playground for the wealthy or the tourist? A place where decision-makers are incorruptible and honest.

We'll need wise choices to be easy choices for how we work, play, move around, connect with nature; how we shop, and share and interact. Will algorithms still play second fiddle to intuition, wonder, instinct?

We'll need solutions from material science; from environmentalists, technologists and architects. And what's after 10g? The use-by date on skills and knowledge ever shortens—we'll need a city

that tutors us from nursery to nursing home. And let's make the city's culture more contagious, enchanting all our citizens, while reaching out across the world with stunning offerings.

Let's banish *laissez-faire* and set aside that mantra, the one that says *it's aye been*; make space for newness, even the exotic. Let's get the structure right, conserve the best, so others can transform it for their future.

The title of the poem comes from the visionary Sir Patrick Geddes, writing in relation to urban planning. (Quoted by Cowan, R (1998), *The people and the process*, in *Introducing Urban Design: Interventions and Responses*, edited by Greed, C., Roberts, M., Longman)

Soil, Sea and Soul

A poem to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the twinning of Florence and Edinburgh, and 2015 as the Year of Food

Florence and Edinburgh, fraternal twins:
we share DNA—good bone structure.
Our museums and galleries regale us
with our stories, our inheritance.

Both have nourished artists and poets:
our Café Royal, your Caffè Giubbe Rosse.
Today, let's think of food as umbilical;
and not just paintings of it by the famous.

Our cuisine is sturdy and warming.
We're still experimenting with *al fresco*.
We huddle in pavement cafés in mufflers,
shift round to dodge a cloud obsessively.

Your food is proud Toscano, rich but
simple; full of colour, bite and flavour.
You seek a table on the shady side,
under the tree or sunny canopy.

For this family feast you bring
unsalted bread, the best prosciutto,
Chianti. We bring mussels and scallops
plus a portion of black pudding.

You bring white beans, nutty in garlic,
a first pressing of oil; so Florentine.
And minestrone, some pasta, gnocchi.
We bring Cullen Skink in our best tureen.

Perhaps you'll try our beef-steak?
We'll taste your boar or venison
raised on the Tuscan hills; a side-dish
of peppers, tomatoes, aubergine.

Will you have the cheeses now or later?
We have a ripe Dunlop and Dunsyre Blue
with thick oatcakes. We'll save
your Pecorino and pickles, enticing jewels,

till you bring the coffee: hot, strong and short.
But not before we share a bowl of berries
bursting with colour from our frugal summer:
memories of picking, gathering; of merriment.

To finish, can we tempt you to a nip of whisky?
There's a whole history there of flavour.
Perhaps a tasting would suggest a favourite.
Let's sit down together now, as family; savour

connection over half a century. We've grown distinct
and different, but friends. So, recharge the glasses!
In mutual gratitude for homely larders
let's raise a gracious toast to both our cities!

Balestruccio

Florence & Edinburgh—twinned for 50 years

Your Italian name is more apt, more avian,
house martin, than your Scottish one.
There's nothing domestic in how you fork
under the Ponte Vecchio, unzip northern skies
with dare-devil choreography. You dip

and flit as you swoop, your beak
an airy shovel, a greedy fly scoop.
On the ground, you're a gutter groveler,
a digger—white rump flashing—
a mason, moulding that mud-cake of a nest.

Honey-mooning, we spent as many hours
absorbed in your intimacy as in our own;
your chummy bower under the eaves, chicks
with voracious chirrup guiding you home.
How you darted, constantly on call.

We are your graceless understudies;
can only watch you slip through slits,
swift, silent racer, too fast for the eye.
Perhaps you will bear our greetings
to one another, our virtual *note d'amore*.

Green Shoots

In honour of the work done by the Marie Curie Cancer Care charity and the related photographic exhibition, 'Remaining Human'; also in acknowledgement of the twinning of Edinburgh and Kraków.

Daffodil bulbs wrapped in their tissue-paper lifelessness look incapable of healthy growth, of green shoots. Folded, and layered into wintered earth along the Vistula, across

the green lungs of Edinburgh they bear Spring flowers, a yellow dance of mirth. These are markings of rebirth, symbols which boldly state we have planted *Fields of Hope*;

that we may have graced less than lovely places, but we are resolutely *Remaining Human*. Every bulb holds its history of past Springs, its heady present, its promise of future.

We join hands across a continent in honour of each other, and of the Polish woman with Scottish-sounding name whose single-mindedness was seminal in this perpetual well-being.

(published in *Green Shoots*, Edinburgh Public Libraries; subsequently in *Parallel Worlds*, Luath Press 2005)

Free movement

Sculpture by Eduardo Paolozzi, Royal National Museum of Scotland

1 *A Generous Land*

We have settled a generous land. Grain is thick
and heavy: bread will bake on a hot stone. It is time
for feasting. Mussels will fall open, seal-meat sizzle.

Let the children wear the bone and tooth necklaces,
play with our ancestors' tools. Who needs them
now we have mastered the art of metal-working?

Our bronze bracelets are prized masterpieces;
our buckles intricately made; our gold rings
so pure their soft twists glint in moonlight.

2 *Wider Horizons*

Our feet are weary but we raise a hand in peace.
We have walked to far horizons, to where
your people meet our people. We wish to trade.

Feel how weighty our goods are—can you lift them?
You want that gold collar? It is indeed fine. We will
exchange it for that jet necklace and bronze bangle.

We have barley and salt pork to offer too.
What will you tender for them? We have
our eye on your linen and nettle fabrics.

3 *Them and Us*

We come in power, dressed in our best jewellery
to impress you. We follow our leader, our ruler,
his hand on the orb. He has chosen to pin

the silver brooch next to his heart. They say
it was made in Ireland, inlaid with red glass and gold.
It will pass through many hands on its way to Orkney.

You will not find finer gold or silver bracelets
though you trade the length and breadth of this land.
See the elegance of our hair ornaments and rings.

4 *In Touch with the Gods*

We come in awe, bearing goods fit for a grave:
amber necklace, gold toe ring, old bracelet of bone.
We have a staff to steady our faltering feet.

This is our final, our inner journey. We step down
into an unknown. We will leave our treasures behind.
We are in touch with the gods, hoping they will bear us

gently to the other side. We will not look back.
Now others will lead the tribe: work and trade,
keep our traditions; make wondrous new things.



Behind the Scenes

Bedlam Theatre

The good doctor fretted over Fergusson, determined
none should suffer in a Poor House or a Mad House.
A good diet would build them up: porridge, broth
and mutton meals; and plenty exercise of course.
It took 40 years to assuage that poet's death, to found
the hospital for those whose mental health was fragile;
and 30 more before those Bedlam doors were closed.
Just as inmates left for Morningside, a striking kirk
ship-shaped that Bristo corner, too late to be of help.
No psalm will greet you now, no elder shake your hand
at the red door; a fellow student may welcome you, ask
your mission, whether acting, lighting, sound. Step inside!
Learn the ropes here, join the illustrious band of Bedlamites.
Lose and find yourself; work a different kind of healing.

Note: Robert Fergusson, poet, died in the Bedlam in 1774. Dr Duncan
who tended him resolved to fund a hospital which would look after
the mentally ill.

(in *Umbrellas of Edinburgh*, Freight 2016)

Figures of the Festival Fringe

Forget the statues with their features finely chiselled;
turn the corner and there's Yoda, levitating, or a
hooded Hobbit, bending the laws of physics.

A white-painted man in an even whiter suit
and hat is still checking out his spot, his patch.
He sidles past, tries to camouflage his cigarette.

Another is striding along, chewing gum.
He's devilishly red from head to foot; his bowler,
briefcase and smile all seem incongruous.

A young woman, up a close, lifts her arms
to let her buddy spray-paint her oxters.
Verdigrised, we'll maybe grease her palm.

Smiling teeth gritted, a crinolined doll rotates.
Nearby a piper is giving 'Highland Cathedral' laldy.
Her tune is clockworky and no one's donating.

A gent waits for his son on George IV Bridge.
He's George III, painted gold from top to toe,
even his fancy wig. His mobile is not a prop.

A man sits on the pavement, a cup for cash.
His is seasoned stillness. He is just himself.
We look away as we wander past.

Gents

Up an alley and heedlessly blighting it,
an unholy trinity pissing; broad daylight.

Cartier-Bresson, master of the instant,
would have bagged beauty from their infamy,

snapped their shamelessness, sensed
perspective in pose, geometry in stance:

his three graces of Slater's Steps perhaps.
He would have focused on their glances,

concentration; and the woman, flabbergasted;
he would have caught them all off guard.

If they had heard his accusing shutter
and looked up, he might have muttered

'Mon Dieu! C'est un nouveau *Gardez l'eau!*
Sourire, s'il vous plait, messieurs!'

Spirit of '47

70 years of the Festival city, i.m. of Rudolf Bing, Harry Harvey Wood
of the British Council and Lord Provost Sir John Falconer

They were visionaries in '47, special people with dreams
of dry bones dancing out of desolation, of creativity revived.
Europe was in lament; so many lives lost. And its art stolen,
its orchestras fragmented. Austerity was utility homes,
rationed food, little fuel. It was survival that mattered.

These seers knew that politics can fail but stories connect,
that the spirit needs elixirs—music, art and dance;
surprise part of the enchantment; that we should expect
to be shocked as well as thrilled. Some would tut-tut,
but yes, Edinburgh would take the risk. Sir Thomas Beecham
wouldn't come, but the Queen graced the Royal box and
Kathleen Ferrier sang Mahler. Each obstacle was resolved:
water and alcohol in short supply—afternoon tea, darling?
Ring the Fire Brigade! Pull a few strings—whisky galore!

The sun shone, audiences filled theatres,
cafés buzzed, the critics were ecstatic.
Bruno Walter conducted his Viennese orchestra:
Haydn, Schubert, Mozart, a waltz by Strauss.

It's the full spectrum of cultures now: from classical
to contemporary to avant-garde; and all the various fringes,
spin-offs—they still bring the best from every corner
of the world, from continents in flux, people on the move
joining forces with us to make a new songbook, a new identity.

Refugees, migrants narrate experience in their own voice;
soldiers—former adversaries—peel layers off with honesty,
strip down to the minefield of memory. Through them
we empathise, feel spirits rise again. We relearn the power
of words, of naming: Malvinas, Argentina. Whose story is it?
Whose culture, class or creed? Whose song? Art is the still

the impartial witness, bridge-builder, connecting spark ...
... Too soon, we're disbanding, glad to go out with a bang: rockets
shimmer like grand chandeliers mirrored in the Assembly Rooms.

So much has changed in 70 years, yet much remains
the same. In days like these it seems we still need
cultural exchange, still long for transformation;
still crave a space and time for celebration.

EDINBURGH: BUSINESS AND COMMERCIAL CITY

A Month on the Mile

(An extract of a poem written with Ingrid Murray,
for the Royal Mile Business Association)

Castlehill

On day 1, explore Edinburgh Castle sitting proud:
find the modest crown of a far from quiet country,
our National War Memorial, our Roll of Honour.

On day 2, try Castlehill. Look north beyond the Forth
and, more Obscurely, tilt your eye across a whole city.
Open a back door on the Kirk; wrinkle books from a close.

On day 3, look south. Ah, a whimsy of fine whiskies.
Boswell imbibed here, dined well, hobbled over cobbles.
At the Hub you can queue for a different kind of bliss.

Lawnmarket

On day 4, cross the Upper Bow, look north.
Tweed and dashing tartan; a caricature of us in
'See You Jimmy' hats and 'gingerbread' moustaches.

Here, Hume and Geddes consort with the Free Kirk
and there, a touch of former glory: Gladstone's Land,
Makars' Court. Rub shoulders with Deacon Brodie.

On day 5, look south. Kilts and cashmere, a nip or two.
Monarchs and nobles made this place their own.
James VI threw banquets in Riddell's Court—a jewel.

On day 6, look north, Hume outside the High Court,
secrets in Mary King's Close, slithers of skylines.
And, what a treat, neat shops: worth lingering.

On day 7, look south. It all happened here.
Pass the ghosts of gawpers, gossipers
around gallows and wellhead—fortitude and fear.

An old parliament, kirk, court and council
—a heady mix, centre of the city. Spit
on the Heart of Midlothian, but only if you must...

Raising the Blue Blanket

Edinburgh's Riding of the Marches

It's quite a spectacle these days: all those horses clattering
up the Royal Mile; pipes and flags and banners waving.

No need now to check the corners of our common land,
inspect our borders. But good to keep alive the memory

of earlier times: swathes of young men who fell at Flodden;
their long spears didn't save them. 'Safe oot' but not safe in.

And of the men who formed the Trades and Guilds, built
the city. Led by baillies, they rode out to mark boundaries:

the Barber-Surgeons with their razors and their lances,
the Goldsmiths—assaying, marking quality;

the Incorporation of Hammermen—you wouldn't mess
with armourers and sword-makers! Horse-shoes and harness

were also their domain. Wrights and Masons—all
the building trades; even Upholsterers were there.

And Skinners, Furriers, Hatmakers: curing, tanning,
stitching, fashioning; attesting all their skills.

The Tailors must have cut a dash: a long apprenticeship
before they joined their Guild. Baxters guaranteed the flour,

Fleshers had to demonstrate a grizzly competence,
the Cordiners, their shoes. Websters, Bonnetmakers

and Dyers are still around and Candlemakers have
once more lit their flame, been recognised again.

In the past, Guilds had their Council Deacons;
and with their Chaplains, Charters, Seals of Cause,

Coats of Arms and banners it was a heady mix.
See *them* riding out and you'd be impressed!

They still take pride in their vocation, hone their skills.
Their boundaries are only what they set themselves.

They ride out recessions, harness new ideas,
mark out new territories of trade, intimidate no one.

So we, in good heart, salute them at the Mercat Cross.
Let's raise again the old Blue Blanket and a glass!

Leith Swing

*O cam ye east or cam ye west
Or bring ye news to me, man?
Or were ye at the Port of Leith
And did the landing see, man?*

Step off the ship, sailor, whaler, there's
bed and board, a Home from home,
a jug of beer, perhaps a letter.
Your next berth is waiting.

Masts are thick in the river mouth.
Step on a smack to Kirkcaldy daily.
Tuesdays or Fridays - a swift packet
to London; Saturday to Dundee or Perth.

There are docks for deep sea trade
to any port from here, and stevedores
aplenty. Let the street names be your chart:
Baltic, Elbe, Cadiz, Portland, Madeira.

Roll that barrel to the wine bond, cart
gunpowder safely, stack the timber;
bring the hemp and tallow ashore.
Our whisky is casked and ready.

Smugglers have snuck in, but mariners
have prospered: sat their tickets, built
homes in Trinity. They've levied dues,
sent pilots out, raised flags to warn of shallows.

Step into the Corn Exchange. Watch
how you nod at the auctioneer or you'll sail
with a poor cargo; and the last laugh will go
to the row of cherubs on the wall frieze.

Leith Bank has gone, the Exchange, the Council
in their Chambers, the grand Assembly Rooms.

Burns and Victoria have seen much come and go:
the railway torn up; the Swing Bridge stilled,

trams dismantled—Leith Walk a waiting boulevard.
Churches have shut one door but opened others
to recent Leithers: to Muslim, Hindu, Sikh.
Hibernian is still the team, Persevere the motto,

humour the life-blood. And now, regenerated,
entrepreneurs once more are facing outwards,
warehouses are reclaimed and des res rising
like the tide. Leith is reborn and reassembled.

*O cam ye east or cam ye west
Or bring ye news to me, man?
Or were ye at the Port of Leith
And did the landing see, man?*

EDINBURGH UNSUNG: THE CITY'S VITAL SERVICES

Strictly Street Dancing

for Edinburgh's Waste & Cleansing Department

Bins lurk in starlit chill.
Fifteen tonners rev,
beams sweep tarmac.
Rotas are ticked,
men leap aboard,
double gloved, high vis'd.

There's a mix of new Scots and
Edinburgh-through-and-through Scots:
crews with two loaders, and a driver
skilled to reverse up cul de sacs,
wind past parked cars,
leave side-mirrors intact.

They watch out for each other,
know the drill to make it flow:
grab two bins, birl them, make a pair,
nudge them to the cradle, check and
trundle them back, grab two more...
it's a Dashing White Sergeant

it's a repertoire, with rhythm
and precision, a get up and go.
Bins dance in sequence too:
handstands, a wobble, balance, then
down to waiting hands, while
the hopper compacts and gobbles.

Stop, start, stop, start. Keep your cool
with drivers in a hurry. A gap: a minute
of banter, snatch of song, drive on.
They know their route by heart:
each cobbled street, each judder, jolt,
each turning place, each missing bin.

And a cheery wave to the child who,
like the boy awaiting the lamp-lighter,
watches at her window:
their momentary attention
their brightness
their beaming smiles.

Gardylloo

The Seafield Waste Water Treatment Works

There's no *MV Gardylloo* now, gently relieving herself of Edinburgh's sewage in the Firth of Forth, that day trip for hardy birders. She's more than been replaced: six digesters which, from the sea, blend into Arthur's Seat. Seagulls are winging in from the firth, taking a dip

in the settlement tanks. From the metal stairs above you can see beyond the catchment, across Inchkeith to the Lomonds, beyond Almond and Esk. It's said sunrise is stunning if you're on summer night-shift. Never locked up and left, yet hardly a soul to be seen.

What seems like a space-station of engines, pipework, pumps gets on with the daily business. Seven screens in the control-room keep up a flow of information: that outlet, this sluice, that consistency, this flow rate, that temperature, this sewer, that wind direction;

it's all monitored, someone always on the bridge. It's hard to believe that the waste from almost a million of us flows as sweetly as it does up the massive Archimedes screw, passes through ever finer screens, makes something clean and degradable from all the

paper clutter, removes the occasional shopping trolley. Then it rests as grit to be pumped out settles in the sump. Seagulls relax, make a long pearl necklace of a pipe, keep a cold eye on pigeons that flap about the skips, nicking pickings from that sifted grit waiting to be recycled.

Then on it hurtles at thousands of litres per second to settle and separate: sludge ever thickening, ever purifying; and the captured methane, a virtuous cycle powering the process with energy to spare; lorries snatch the digested residue that will nourish next year's crops.

And all this time the effluent has streamed on, aerated so those bugs can get to work to clean it up. In summer the biggest set of UV lights in Europe zaps the nasties that might still lurk, the salmonella. Listen, it has the speed and sparkle of a Highland burn in spate.

SEPA checks we could fill a kettle, dilute a dram at the rushing outlet piped far into the shining Forth. But still we turn on taps, endlessly shower. Design, maintenance, monitoring, improving process: they're never done. For that we should be grateful each time we flush.

(in Edinburgh News 21/3/16 & The Sun)

The Wizard of Morrison Street

SGN—gas network company

Poised over a join in a huge gas pipe, the Wizard of Morrison Street is hunched. He's grinning all those years away—still loves his work, the abundant repartee. He's customised his PPE*; wears a bespoke balaclava under a hard hat. In the haar, gloves keep his own joints supple.

There's something of the surgeon in that deftness; something of the archaeologist in the way he moves, in his dedication, his focus. It's critical work with a saw, a trowel and you're in that 3D world below the street: pipes everywhere; gas—yes, and water, drains, telephone, cable, power.

The iron pipes, joints wound with leaded jute, have heard the footfall of generations. Now, with a risk score, they'll be replaced. Everyone must be consulted, updated with progress, emails. The logistical planning is mind-boggling but they work as a team, take pride in their pursuit.

Safety is their mantra. From Fauldhouse to Dunbar and south to the Borders, our lives are in their hands: 4000 km of pipes, gas streaming more efficiently. If there's a problem, then a bypass is on the cards, a crafty fix till crucial tasks can be performed: dexterity, precision to keep the life-blood flowing.

And it's *people* they serve. Replacing a street main, a 'diviner', with his CAT4, detects where to excavate; tells too of the old lady he met who'd fallen at home and how they pop along just to cheer her up! Maybe in future, as keyhole skills take over, they'll finish quicker. She'll be looking for a friendly chat, but they'll be gone.

That Core & Vac truck can drill and lift the solid tar, suck out the spoil and, with long-handled tools, the joint

is mended. Blink and the surgery's done: the spoil replaced,
the plug re-sealed. But shame if we lost all the play value:
those loops of latent hula-hoops, bright primary colours,
like Playmobil, those neat barriers hurdling down our streets.

*PPE—Personal Protective Equipment

(in *Edinburgh News* 31/5/16)

EDINBURGH: CITY OF OPEN SPACES

Still Being

Heron in the Botanics

I love your oneness with a restless world,
your contentment with a proffered habitat:
embodied concentration, each synapse static,
while I barely linger long enough to focus.

Today you seek the susurrus of stillness:
the Chinese Garden with its seemly pond.
You don't do scruffy chic or informality:
each feather knows its place. Even this

arctic draught can't undo your poise,
your studied nonchalance; the grace in
your reflected image, a hunched perfection,
stuff of metaphor. When, with a coyness,

a moorhen dips her red dab in the pool,
twitches and birls, you still steadfastly
refuse to blink; still gaze into a quandary
of reeds, a contemplation of bamboo.

The ducks spook you. Like me, you move off,
gingering your way as if hidden landmines lay
in your path; each tiptoe hazarding dismay,
each step a testing of tentative truth.

(In *The Evergreen: a New Season in the North*, The Word Bank, 2014)



Light Show at the Botanic

It's November, a feral night
and damply furtive.
Scent of viburnum masks the fox's stink.

The pond is primordial
its soundscape reptilian.
Beams joust, lances tilt.

If we weren't wildly in love already
we would have head-longed
into the moment. Huge flowers drift past.

We are hankering, sublunary creatures
with that marshmallowy moon in our eyes.
Everyone here is Lucy or a lover.

We sway like reeds in the old lily pond.
Out of this zany dark and ice we will carry
longing and the sun in our eyes forever.

(in *GUTTER* Magazine, No 13 Autumn 2015)

Whirlwind

Yesterday, the wind broke the speed limit,
gusting to 80; blamed the jet stream
for its sudden tantrum.

Today it's morose and cold, a bit edgy.
Walking through Holyrood Park,
cars zip past, bellicose.

On Arthur's Seat, rancorous ravens are
all a birl, while on St Leonard's Crag,
that storm has laid tripwires: broken

branches, thrown them to its wolfhound
that ran and sprang, playing catch
with bounding menace.

Passion is spent on the storm. Save it
for calm, sequestered days; for crescendos
of balmy whirlwinds.

EDINBURGH: REVISITED — TODAY'S
CELEBRATED CITIZENS

Out in Front

A poem for Thomas Gilzean, receiving The Edinburgh Award for 2014

At ninety-four, still on parade, you flout the weather,
still fly the flag, fight for causes close to your heart:
children in hospital; the old and vulnerable;
care and rehabilitation of wounded soldiers.

The Royal Mile's your patch and Jenners' corner:
you'll catch us there, beat us into submission, cheerily
shake those cans to a samba beat that's drawing crowds:
a one-man military band. As a Royal Engineer

you've crawled on your belly through desert wadi,
through Burma's grief, through Europe's dereliction
and have the medals, the stars to prove it. No wonder
snow and rain can't stop you; you're still in action.

In your wheelchair you're a sight to gladden hearts:
upright, well turned out; red tartan trews, Glengarry,
white shirt, bow tie, plaid across your shoulder.
Tourists say that you've enriched their journey.

And you engage with all of them: advise a hen party
(keep it 50/50, love—you'll no go wrong); a chat, a joke.
For you're a Sapper and know there's work to do
in reconstruction, support, just keeping going.

You follow in a line of heroes, but you're no footnote
to Rankin or Rowling, no shadow behind Blackadder
or Demarco; you're out there, dogged, at the front, not
in the slipstream of Hoy or Kerr, all worthy winners.

Professor Higgs would shake your hand too, hands
that will take the Loving Cup with joy and grace,
hands that will forever be engraved on Edinburgh.
You've shown the way to make a world of difference.

As Good as it Gets

A poem for Tom Farmer, receiving The Edinburgh Award for 2015

Some are born with silver spoons in their mouths, can
barely breathe for pickle forks, whole canteens of cutlery.
But not this public figure: a modest start, a simple table.

What raises up a man like this? Is there a recipe?
A stout-hearted family? Neighbours looking out for
one another? Steel of an honest day's work? Values

of community, of chapel? But it might have ended there:
a decent Leither busy at his trade. That resolve was born
of personal qualities: a 'pith o' sense, an pride o' worth'.

Leaving school at fifteen must have been a sacrifice, but
an attitude of learning has been second nature. Tom shares
a stack of honorary degrees now, with the best of them.

It's hard to keep track of the citations, the Orders of Church
and State, the medals, honours: the business of benevolence.
This man was the first Scot awarded the Carnegie medal;

only the Rockefellers, Sainsburys and Cadburys got there
before him. He's touched every area of our civic life, always
without fanfare, always for the better. Feet firmly grounded,

he loves the bonnie game, the Hibeese; and sets the tone
of fair play, respectful rivalry; of building opportunity,
self-improvement and support for all, not just the gifted.

But it has not come easy: early starts, long hours piling tyres
on the corner of Buccleuch Place; almost a pavement business,
relentless struggle. But honest graft and Tom was on his way:

Kwik-Fit was born. And who had heard of Customer Service
before the boys in blue swept into song, leapt into our lives?
We could drive in, wait in comfort while they, well-trained,

mended that puncture. 'Maybe a wee shock-absorber, madam?
A wheel alignment to save your tyres from wear?' Then everyone
seemed to want him as their chairman, their board member.

This citizen has lit up many lives with discreet philanthropy.
And not just within our city, our country but across the world.
Mary's Meals mean school-children are fed, are ready to learn.

This open-handedness hallmarks a special life, unalloyed;
his imprint will embellish the precincts of the City Chambers.
We treasure the pure mettle and the big heart of Tom Farmer.

Unrivalled

A poem for Ken Buchanan, receiving The Edinburgh Award for 2016

Edinburgh Castle Esplanade: imagine, centre stage
a brightly lit ring—a far cry from the Sparta Club—
the terraced seats, in their thousands, all taken.
Who will be your worthy opponent? Ortiz? Laguna?

Perhaps a re-match with Durán? Or Navarro? But
they're all seated in the front row, along with legends
from the Hall of Fame: Frazier, Foreman, Patterson.
Ali's seat's reserved: he comes—no belts or medals—

to meet you in your dressing room, recalls a time
at the Garden when you, top of the bill, let him share
your room, but chalked a line across the floor for fun;
this far, no further, chum. All fair and square!

Your dad waits with the towel. A cheer goes up
as Jim Watt leaps into the ring; but it doesn't touch
the whoops that greet you: sleek and smart; a coiled
spring in tartan shorts, name blazoned at your waist.

You're matched for height and reach; and looks.
It's like the old days, you bow three times.
From the first bell it's all go. The pair of you—
born dancers—light on your toes. You, sublime

subtle, and that brilliant left hand always at the ready,
seeking a chance to land a blow. Jim's eye is bloody
but he's tough, agile; gives you a run for your money.
You pile on punches on the inside; land a sudden

jab with that disguised power. Bells come and go.
You dip and swerve, avoid attack, the smack
of leather. Once more you test him to the limit, pour
it in, two hands; the crowd go wild at every thwack.

It's a bruising struggle; but you've got stamina,
concentration, guts. You don't give in though
your ears are ringing. It's glorious, fast and furious
and you're an artist, with a strong finish. Watt knows

you've won every title there is to win, every accolade:
you're in the International Boxing Hall of Fame;
Undisputed World Lightweight Champion; Undefeated
British and European Champion. And acclaimed by

your peers—voted the greatest ever British boxer
for Boxing News. Yet your admiration for him shows;
and when, again, you win, you hug him like a brother,
find it hard to raise your arm and let him go.

Peel off the bandages, Ken, unlace those heavy gloves
so we can see the carpenter's hands, the record-holding
champion's hands; lay them proudly on Edinburgh, on
the City Chambers' Path of Fame, until they're blazoned gold.

EDINBURGH — POSTSCRIPT

Getting to Know You

It was never love at first sight
though my heart skipped a beat:
your fingertips, skyline's stroke;
your crisp couture, the cut,
the allure; just a hint of the roué.
But there was something reserved
resistant—*Namasté*, that divine spark—
your self-assurance; respect perhaps,
that made me keep my distance.

We took our time getting intimate
lowering our defences bit by bit.
I've all but forgotten that coldness,
the standoffishness you cultivated,
a particular view of refinement.
We are still falling for one another.
You've opened your arms; I've opened
my eyes. You're under my skin now.
I defend you against all-comers.

About the Saltire Society

We are:

An apolitical membership organisation open to all

*

An international supporter and patron of the arts and cultural heritage of Scotland

*

A champion of free speech on the issues that matter to the cultural life of every Scot

*

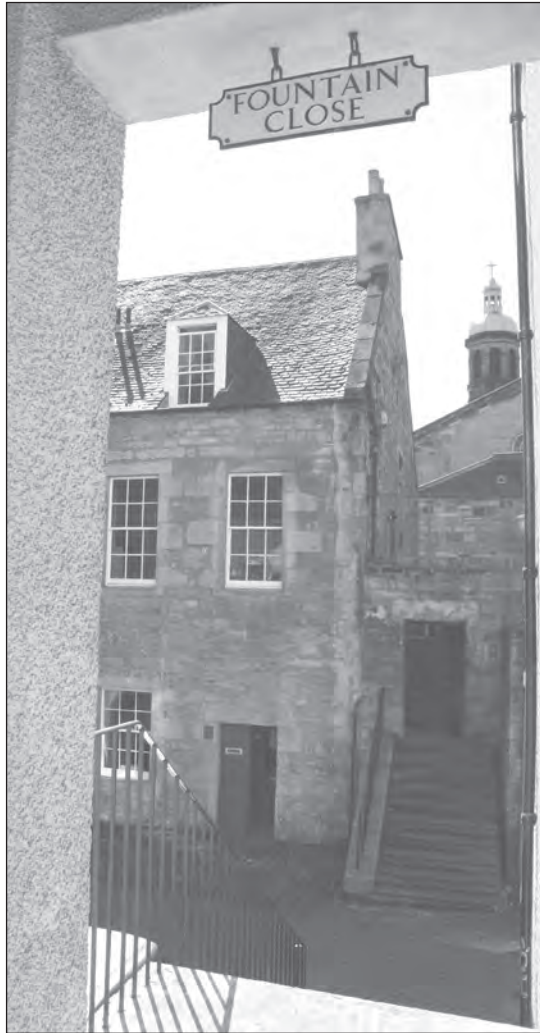
A promoter of the best of what we are culturally, now and in the future

*

A catalyst to ensure new ideas are considered and the best of them are made real.

We believe we have an important and unique role to play as an independent advocate and celebrant of all that is good and important about our cultural lives and achievements.

The Society has played a crucial role over the last 75 years in recognising our cultural achievements. And while times have changed, the need for the independent voice remains.



The headquarters of the Saltire Society, Edinburgh.

A Note on the Author

Christine De Luca has had six collections of poetry in English and Shetlandic published. The Shetland Library brought out the first three in 1995, 1997 and 2002. Two further collections were published in 2005 and 2010 by Luath Press. *Dat Trickster Sun*, published by Mariscat Press in 2014, was shortlisted for the Michael Marks Award for Poetry Pamphlets. Featured in many anthologies, her poems have four times in recent years been selected for the twenty Best Scottish Poems of the Year, an online anthology selected for the Scottish Poetry Library.

De Luca's poetry has been translated into other languages, including a bilingual Selected, *Mondes Parallèles*, (éditions fédérop, 2007) which won the poetry Prix du Livre Insulaire. Trauben published an Italian *Dat Trickster Sun* as *Questo sole furfante* in Italian, 2015. An Icelandic Selected bi-lingual edition will be published in 2017 and a Norwegian one in 2018. She has read at festivals and events in Norway, Finland, Iceland, France, Italy, Canada, Russia and India. In turn she enjoys translating other poets into Shetlandic.

Commissions have led to fruitful collaborations across the arts, most recently with jazz musician Tommy Smith and with traditional fiddler Catriona Macdonald. She has been an active member of Shore Poets in Edinburgh for many years. Her first novel came out in 2011. As one of the founders of Hansel Co-operative Press, established to promote literary and artistic work in Shetland and Orkney, she has written dialect stories for different age groups and is active in encouraging Shetland children to have confidence in their mother tongue.

She was appointed Edinburgh's poet laureate (Makar) for 2014–2017.

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