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Library in English



WRITERS' WORKSHOP NEWSMAG

Newsletter & Magazine

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Editorial

This is my first editorial as Writer's Workshop Leader. It is about two and a half years since I joined the Workshop after completing my studies with the UK-based Open University, and since then I have met writers from all walks of life, each one with a different story to tell.

Our group comprises a wide range of authors, from experienced published ones to those like myself, hoping to be published one day, as well as others who write for their own pleasure.

During the course of 2010, we look forward to featuring the winning entries from our Writers' Competition, contributions from members past and present, and news from Off the Shelf, Geneva's English language bookshop.

At this point in time, we are struggling with the adverse weather conditions, and I wonder if this can be an inspirational topic for one of our optional assignments. Perhaps we could have *How I braved the ice, snow, and slush to come to the Workshop meeting*, or *What happened after a Road Hog splattered me with muddy slush from head to foot*, or *How I kept from coming a cropper because my small street has become an ice-rink*, or even, on a rather nasty note, *How I watched others coming a cropper behind the net curtains of the balcony window*. That last one is not really very nice – personally I prefer taking the heroic stance of *braving the elements*. It may be a hackneyed cliché, but always a safe bet as an essay topic.

On a more serious note, let me wish all members a very fruitful writing year, and we look forward to sharing their endeavours in the *Newsmag*.

Rose Yarom, Writers' Workshop Leader, February 2010

Writers Forum:



Here follows the story that won the first prize in last year's Competition.

Lady MacBethad's Epilogue by Dinah Lee Küng

The captain warns me, Highness! The Channel drowns many at night. Does he realize, danger's all I've ever known? I, Gruoch, granddaughter of Kenneth the III, and he, grandson to Malcolm the First, I am - even now distressed - a kingly daughter, double-fold. My mettle can outwatch every sailor on this frozen deck, face down chill winds 'til sun brings morning to the French shore.

There, perhaps, I'll forget my odious father's lust, the short-lived sweetness of beloved Gille, the screams of King Duncan - he deserved to die - and the madness spread by my last lord, MacBethad, Thane of Glamis.

MacBethad, meaning son of life? Perhaps, but he could *father* nothing.

I have one son. Dead to others, I seek him now in haste. My veil weighs heavy in this wet sea air. Look how the storm whips my mantle tight around my ankles! Gone are my most royal robes and Arabia's perfumes - my tunic stinks with sweat from nights in secret flight. This buckle of a queen droops, coldly, on my empty belly, like a frozen claw.

Am I safe from him, at last? Turning 'round, I can no longer see the Alban shore, lost in all that darkness soaked in gore. Looking down at Duncan's face, death sprawled o'er his mouth agape, I thought I saw my father's face, so often spent on me in sinful rape. Oh, evil man to take me in my mother's place. I watched her walk in dreams and saw her smile, her dead hand reaching towards me, counselling patience, prayer... and guile.

Then came Gille Coemgáin mac Maíl Brigti, skilled in arms, and with a voice in song that won my heart. He seized me happily from Boite's incestuous loins, to teach this maid of fourteen in homespun cloak still dragging 'round her toes, how to laugh in church-blessed love.

Oh, happy day our son was born! I gave him suck and Gille called me Madonna with Babe! He bent and rubbed the babe with war-ragged beard,

'til chafed boy giggled. With manly arms, Gille raised our son up, high, higher, towards the bell tower, and cried, "Our prince!" Ah, so many many, many happy days of fur-lined luxury on silken pillows, the dying embers in the great room fire as quiet as - well, I had no more night visitors - no sleepwalking Mothers nor night-stalking Fathers - to disturb my wifely slumbers. Only my loving lord.

So why, why Gille, did you heed King's command to leave the band of comrades, venture forth? Diseased King Duncan, too cowardly to lead, trembling 'neath his crown's gold fillets, panicked in his tent. He baited, tricked you, love, to trust your wiles and ferret out the Norwegians' secret route. It was a trap sick Duncan well avoided, oh, yes, using Gille as his loyal spy - no - royal dupe, to do his risking for him.

And Gille Coemgáin returned to me from that betrayal, manned by a grateful king with praise and jewels... but unmanned by cruel Norwegian swords. No herbs, no posset, no witch's secret smuggled balm could heal my Gille's vicious wounds. Home, safe but, alas! as useless as a virgin maid, voided of all a husband's potency! His love lay limp and strangled off, deep-sharded, scarred-up bits where husband's pride best stands.

He was now worse off between his legs than a lad of ten - no use to any wife.

He wailed and promised he could heal, but nay! The cuts turned grey with festering pus, and with the daily degradation of his private parts, black turned his soul, his temper yet as foul. He raged at me in bitter hate, that I remained a woman whole. He beat me, railed and howled, and scorned that wife I stayed - and not some cloistered nun in holy vows!

I wept to know I had no life with him that once I loved so much, and fleeing home to my enfeebled father, bade my nurse and child do follow me.

Nurse came but said, Madame, Gille has locked up your son, he will no more let you know your child than let you have your life, should you return. Fled to parts unknown in shame, he abandoned castle, lands and name. All was lost, lost thanks to our cowardly King.

Years passed while my revenge, aimed at Duncan's aging throne, took deeper root, and like an unseen spore beneath the leaves of endless winter, awaited warmer weather for revenge.

I reached two score. My red-haired cousin came to us from Moray, that jut of land that buffers us from slaughtering northern knives. MacBethad macFindlaich, Duncan's "dux," and Thane of Glamis. Grandson of Second Malcolm, second cousin to my grandfather, making both MacBethad and

myself descendants of the Great First Malcolm. Our marriage was a welcome one - full politic and not unpleasant to my lonely arms.

I found him more a man than lost Gille would be e'er again, and yet - not quite a man - though he fought for king as hard. And he survived, not wounded, nay, MacBethad was Thane of Cawdor now, and as he wrote straight from the blood-drenched field, our future King?

Duncan followed, offering me a diamond for my pains. A diamond of apology? Hard diamonds could not soften me. My season for revenge had come! Gods of vengeance unsexed me then, filled me head to toe with direst cruelty. They thickened up my blood and blocked all passage of remorse. I drugged the guards and urged MacBethad now to screw his courage tight as lute-string to the sticking place, murder Duncan to be so much more the man.

Indeed, he was, at least that night. My woman's will MacBethad took in manly part. Though once the deed was done, the daggers dangled from his greedy hands, as dazed mind took in finally where my urging led. I laid the daggers on the guards. Who would have thought the old man had so much blood in him? But only just enough to cleanse my bitter hate.

For power only, MacBethad killed the King I hated, while my revenge was righteous, longer seated, and much better-sated.

"What, in our house?" I cried, an innocent flower of the deed.

"Too cruel anywhere." I heard Gille speak! For there, in company with my guilty lord, there stood, to my astonished eyes, my Gille, now disguised as loyal "Banquo."

But even with the new-draped thrones, our nobles bowed and peasants awed, something in our reign was flawed. Banquo brought a youth, one "Fleance" ...name unknown to me. How could this be? Page or apprentice? Adopted sprite? Nurse caught my hem and said, Lady, Queen, there is your mite, your boy, your Lulach mac Gille Coemgáin! He knows you not! Raised as a common bairn, he told me home's a muddy farm, and keeps a token from that farmer's wife wrapped round his hairless arm.

Back in the hall, to lords and all, this Banquo claimed he enjoyed with us a most indissoluble tie, forever knit. How I took hope - from those brief words, some peace might come, perhaps that very night?

Yet, even speaking thus, re-baptized Banquo would not meet my eyes in full, nor leave me stay one instant with the boy. I sought to claim myself his mother, if mother I still was, but found them both were gone. This Banquo raced away, had said he'd ride to fill up all the hours that stretched 'til supper.

Well, there would be time. Wounds that could be healed, would claim their ruddy health again, son and mother laughing as one. If not this night - then tomorrow, or tomorrow after that. Nought yet was had, and much indeed was spent, but if I prayed, perhaps these cursed spirits would relent.

I watched and waited, checked the meal. The hours passed, the meats were cooked, 'til I was called to raise the toast, but faith, I could not find my voice. Then, strangest thing of all, my lord cried out our guests did indeed return. But only he could look but on a stool and make out Banquo at our board.

All our nobles stared, alarmed. And while his men heard guilt betray its regicide, MacBethad feared most Banquo's ghost. I saw only a husband poisoned deep with jealousy.

Perhaps he could not bear the sight of Gille in the hall with me? Did he imagine ties untoward? Fie, I was loyal to my lord, that is... 'til I o'erheard his chilling words to Seyton, hellish one - who reported bludgeoning Banquo! And my son?

Henceforth, I could not comfort kingly bed again, nor suffer an assassin's kiss. Duncan died his coward's death, but Gille and youth should both have lived.

Sleepless hours overtook my lord, his madness layered over sense. I shunned his side and took to bed, and neither my old nurse nor doctor could drag me hence. MacBethad had turned a hound who loved the scent of blood. And I knew all. The Thane of Fife had a wife, - MacBethad killed her, too, though she knew nought. One way or another, he'd not rest still he'd stopped up all witness of his deeds... and I was next.

Then my old nurse, who years before had bathed my violated daughter's thighs, had seen my joyous days of giving suck, had wished me health as new-wed Queen - that same old dame now stole next to my bedclothes, whispering:

"Highness! Hush! Be not melancholy! I rush to tell my deserving girl, Gille's lost madonna, MacBethad's dearest chuck, that twisted jealousy has not won. That very Fleance - with face so like your own when young, whose cheeks unwhiskered flushed with youthful hope —that Fleance *lives*, protected by the dukes in France."

Oh, twisted hags, were your words right? I dissembled, planned my flight. I took on MacBethad's sleepless wanderings as my iron cloak until the way was clear. With each night my husband's madness grew? Well, then, curious eyes, so mine did, too.

Nurse called the doctor to her side, and said, Lo! See how she comes! And rubbing unseen blood from off my palms, I made it clear my lord had done mad deeds. Nurse proclaimed, Oh, Heaven knows what she has known! But Nurse knew as well as Heaven all the things endured. How cleverly Nurse played this farce that paved my path to safety from these knives.

The doctor's cure? Ha! Thick-coming fancies, he said, and I must cure myself. Indeed I would and all times, grasped a sealed-up message to my breast, the letter that confirmed Fleance had found rest and safety fast among the Frankish lords.

At last my moment came, as Burnam Wood crept down toward Dunsinane, and Seyton's stealthy eye at last was drawn— away from guarding me - towards deadly dawn. I rose and taking only shawl and mantle, finally braved the dark, blew out that candle I had kept right by my side, both night and day, in case that husband-hound sought out where I lay.

Fly, you rumours, fly! We stumbled fast on padded slippers through heathery night! How they howled behind me in my flight! The Queen, my lord, is dead! Cries echoed through the halls, while Nurse and I had fled to face the Channel's blackened waves and squalls.

The winds are dying... Look, Nurse! There are the dunes! Oh, MacBethad, the very thing you feared was true. You failed .

I hear you, Captain! We disembark at your command!

— While, I, a kingly daughter double-fold, I have *not* failed.

One stolen throne was lost, our desires got without content - but now? Now... if Fleance breathes, most weird predictions may come true! To innocent fruit of love past known, to Gruoch's son will come the future throne.



A dual Swiss-American citizen, Diana-Lee Küng has been a resident of St-Cergue since 1997, and is parent of three teen-agers and spouse of an ICRC retiree. She is also a part-time human-rights activist and full-time Shakespeare enthusiast.

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The second prize in last year's competition follows here:

Like Father, Like Son
By Mary Guerry

Not a day goes by without me missing Nick like hell. He was the greatest pal a bloke could ever have. My heart lurches when I look at this last photograph of us standing back-to-back like ancient duellers. I can see why a lot of people mistook us for brothers instead of friends and contemporaries. There is the same swarthy skin, the same brown eyes and jet black hair set off by the same white tunics and cooks' toques inscribed with our names: Nick and Mick.

We had met and became inseparable in kindergarten, then dawdled our way through school together. Both equally unsuccessful with studies, we left as soon as possible with pretty basic achievements. Cash earned doing odd jobs was shared and mostly spent on booze and babes, also shared, and endlessly discussed over beers.

I don't remember whose idea it was to take over the old corner shop and turn it into an eatery. On reflection, it's possible we got the bright idea at the same time after doing a six-month stint as table-wipers and general sweepers-up in a fast-food joint. I do remember Nick saying, «It's money for jam – they're raking it in!»

That first corner-shop eatery we called *Pick Nick's n'Mick's* and kept it open all times of the day and night. We were soon doing take-aways. Both of us liked cooking and were good at it, too. Nick, with his Russian grandmother, specialised in blinis served with salmon or herring roes, and cinnamon-spiced borsch topped with sour cream. My Nonna came from Naples and taught me how to make fresh pasta topped with *polpetti* and hot tomato or garlic & mushroom sauce. The venture was hugely successful largely thanks to Nick who turned out to be a wiz with the accounts. The long hours were exhausting and the work grindingly monotonous, but overheads were low, profits unbelievable, so we kept at it. We opened up two more *Pick Nick's n'Mick's* always in corner shops sold for a song after they'd gone bust. One was in a better part of town and Nick wheedled the bank into giving us a mortgage; we bought the whole three-storey building and converted the attic into a pad for two where we lived in an indescribable bachelor's mess.

We must have been blinded by a sort of overwork fatigue, I suppose, and were ripe to fall for Louisa who arrived in answer to our ad for a waitress. After sighing over her curves and goggling at her legs, without even exchanging a glance, we said simultaneously, «When can you start?»

I don't recall who took Louisa out first, but I do remember Nick lending me his red silk shirt when I took her to the cinema. He invited her to a football match, and wore my new leather jacket. I was pissed off when he returned it with lipstick all over the collar.

The evening I intended to put my personal seduction plot into action, a sudden fever had me in bed with 'flu, instead of Louisa. Nick thought it a

huge joke, brought aspirins and a bowl of his revolting borsch, plumped up the pillows and skipped off like a spring lamb to escort Louisa to some high-class joint with menus, and coffee at her place afterwards. It's a fact that she went to bed with Nick first because he gave me a graphic description to which I could only croak a reply, «Pass the kleenex, you sod.»

Louisa's actions and reactions were mulled over in microscopic detail. We exchanged the most intimate confidences and inevitably ended up asking each other, «...and what d'you suppose she meant by that?» Of course I know now – she meant nothing at all. But we were completely besotted.

When Louisa didn't turn up for work three weeks in a row and wouldn't answer her phone, Nick and I were sick with worry. She arrived eventually looking pale, almost plain, and announced to us both that she was pregnant. Once again, we spoke with one voice, «Don't worry luv, that's OK. We'll get married!» Louisa burst into tears. Nick patted her on the back. I blotted her nose with a kitchen paper towel. Louisa gasped, «Yes!» But who was she talking to? And who was the father of her baby?

Who – indeed! For the first time in our lives, Nick and I were faced with a situation where one would be a winner at the other's expense. That same evening after work we sat in the kitchen, me with a bottle of grappa, Nick with his usual vodka. By 2:45 in the morning we reached an awful and utterly drunken conclusion that we'd play Beggar My Neighbour – winner takes all: business, capital, property, Louisa and the baby. The only thing the loser would take was his life.

Nick went and fished out the old Tommy-gun he'd bought on the street and kept under the counter to see off late-night hooligans. Just the thought of blood makes me puke. I said I'd rather inject myself, neat and tidy-like, with a syringe of air straight into a vein. We mutually witnessed wills in favour of each other, took that final photograph, shuffled a double deck and played the cards until 6:15.

Nick stood up when his last card was paid to my Jack, put on his coat, and staggered to the front door. «All the best!» he mumbled. I never saw him alive again.

Did I cheat? Of course I did – I always cheat at cards. Can't see any point in playing if you don't have a little something up your sleeve. But eight years on, it's still the glaring truth that not a single day goes by that I don't bitterly regret not running after Nick. That I didn't tell him to stop being a bloody romantic fool, that it was only a game, and if he really wanted to marry Louisa, he could have her.

Nick used to say, «Sex is like a soufflé – can't be reheated the next day.» My libido certainly deflated when the police came round and told me my partner had shot himself in the woods just outside of town. I was in a daze of disbelief, but Louisa had me at the registry office in seven days anyway, with a special license.

I despise myself for the coward that I am for staying in this loveless trap with a wife who turned out to have the morals of an alley cat, and a grasping hand that'd turn Scrooge green with envy. She even wanted to

change the name of our eateries to *Pick Louisa & Mick*, but I'd have none of that...doesn't even make sense. My only joy, my delight, my consolation was born six months after we married. I chose his name – Nicholas.

Come evenings when the house is quiet and Louisa out as usual partying somewhere, I carry my son upstairs after we've had supper together and tuck him into bed. Nicholas strokes my face with the tenderness of a lover, his breath warm and sweet on my cheek.

One day when he's grown up, he says, he'll be my partner – just like Nick. I give him a kiss and tell him he's the only chap in the world that counts for me. «Like father, like son,» they say, but that doesn't stop me wondering, sometimes, some days...where does he get his flaming red hair from?



An Anglo-Swiss member of the International P.E.N., Mary Guerry is a retired English-language editor and a founder member of the Library in English Writers' Workshop.



Trains of thought

By Marlene Jeanrenaud

Snatches of conversations appear in my mind; the picture vivid and in full colour. I hear the different voices, the rise and fall of intonation, a laugh and a sigh. I see what each in the group is wearing, the hand movements, but not enough to identify the person or see what is behind or in front of them. Were we at lunch, at the Club, someone's home or did we just meet up in the street? Why did we gather?

Frustration upon frustration is this absence of faces and places – the who and the where, and finally the why. I am not even sure if the conversations were real. It could have been a dream. Though the topical subject and reality of the event brings doubt to that idea.

The argument of one of those present, that Hillary Clinton would be the best choice as President of the United States is vehemently opposed by another who favours Barack Obama. But it doesn't end there. The third suggestion, that the Democrats should step aside for the Republicans, poured cold water on the conversation. Without warning, thrown into this

melting pot of opinions, was the name of Mugabe. The disputed President of Zimbabwe's photo appeared on the front page of the newspaper lying on the table at which all were sitting.

That is where my recollection of the memory stops and the only face I cannot get out of my mind is that of Robert Mugabe. It is disconcerting that these snatches fade out so abruptly and at such an inconvenient point.

My priorities seem to have changed. Previously, where people were the kingpin to my conversations, the whereabouts the second most important aspect and the individual's opinion the least fundamental as I felt I should allow them the right to voice them. Now, the subject of the discourse is much more crucial than those engaged in it or the environment in which it occurred. I seem to have topic memories, if that is possible. For instance, other snatches of conversations popping up are of global warming resulting in food shortages and the engineered increase in the present artificial oil price.

Does this mean that we need to concentrate more on our discussions? Are issues and current affairs such as the obvious subject of elections in my memory snatch, what we need to pay attention to? I can accept that we need to look beyond the glamour and glitz of the people involved and get down to the truth, if there is a truth. I also agree we should not be seduced or influenced by a personality, but take cognizance of the message they profess. But why does it seem more important now than before?

News, Views, Tips, Letters...

News from Off-the-Shelf.

The latest recommendation is the book "Dark matter" by Juli Zeh.

Published March 2010 by Harvill Secker.

OffTheShelf price 27.90 Frs.

An unusual novel, translated from the German, which has been described as a 'philosophical thriller'. It concerns two men, academically brilliant, one of whom takes up a scientific research post in Geneva while the other devotes himself to raising a family. The scientific careerist travels to visit his friend, whose life choices he cannot understand and even scorns a little. However, when his son disappears during the trip and he is forced to turn to his friend for help, their lives become intertwined and more complicated than they could ever have imagined... A gripping thriller that will hold the attention of anyone interested in philosophy and science, or even just a good read!

Read more: www.offtheshelf.ch/en/search/search.php?detail=1846552087

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Blogs, Cogs, and Comps

By Bill Lloyd

Competitions

One of my favourite competition sites is Global Short Stories: www.globalshortstories.net. Global run a monthly competition which is very worthwhile. As for all competitions, it is useful to read the past winning entries and they can be viewed via the website. They have also recently opened a linked networking blog at www.storyworld.ning.com

Fish Publishing: One Page Story Comp (Flash Fiction)

Story: 300 words (must fit on one page). Fee €12 online: €15 postal. Prizes: €1000; 9 x €50 plus publication. Details: Post to Fish Publishing, Durius, Bantry, Co. Cork, Ireland. www.fishpublishing.com/ Closing date 20 March.

The Bridport Prize 2010 – Poems, Short Stories, Flash Fiction. Separate categories, all with the same closing date 30 June. www.bridportprize.org.uk 1st. Prizes £5000 for short story and poems, flash fiction £1000.

Cogs

Alastair Scott, Leman area resident, award winning writer, poet and photographer www.alscotts.blogspot.com has created a very useful site on potential European markets for writers at <http://www.eurowriter.wordpress.com>.

For plot ideas, check out <http://www.writersdigest.com/WritingPrompts/>

Glimmertrain

Please look at this interesting Internet site.

Glimmer train is a Portland, Oregon-based quarterly magazine with a monthly competition in various categories (submissions on line). Some categories require a \$20.- reading fee, some do not. Winners are published in Glimmer Train Stories.

<http://glimmertrainpress.com>

**Finally**

Do not forget the upcoming play of G.E.D.S. :

Fallen Angels by Noel Coward.

To be shown from 9 to 13 March in the Théâtre de l'Espérance Rue de la Chapelle, Geneva.

Theatre in English 022 341 5190

