



# CROSSING BORDERS



A SCOTTISH SAMPLER



MLA 2008, San Francisco  
Session #649: Monday 29 December, 5:15–6:30PM (Hilton)  
“Crossing Borders: Four Scottish Poets in Conversation.”  
• Gerry Cambridge • David Kinloch •  
• Alan Riach • Fiona Wilson •




### Gerry Cambridge

“Obsession” was published in **Last Things First** (ASLS, 1995); “The Drunken Lyricist” was published in **The Shell House** (Scottish Cultural Press, 1995).


### David Kinloch

“The Hunt” and “Jacob and the Angel” were both published in **Un Tour d’Ecosse** (Carcenet, 2001).

### Alan Riach




“The Blues” was published in **This Folding Map** (Auckland University Press, 1991); “Two Paintings by Jack Yeats” was published in **Bucket of Frogs** (ASLS, 2008).



### Fiona Wilson

“Magpie” was published in **Bucket of Frogs** (ASLS, 2008); “What is Difference?” was published in **Painted, spoken** Number 7 (2004) and was selected for **Best Scottish Poems 2005**.

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Gerry Cambridge  
OBSESSION

*The AA Book of British Birds*. I'd got the Latin names of each of them by heart at fifteen, and showing off would start reciting. And I was proud knowing what *nidifugous*, *nidiculous*, meant, in all weathers tramping Cunninghamhead, delighted when I saw verified, a dead heron's pectinated claw one evening as I searched for eggs and feathers.

Oh neo-Wordsworth! Nidiculous youth!  
Each May I could have told you where a hundred nests were.  
I knew where every summer migrant went.  
*Strix aluco* I repeated, mantra for the truth.

Sue Richardson passed me in a swoon of scent.  
I never found a Latin name for her.



Fiona Wilson  
MAGPIE

On the cut-glass *if* of the day,  
this chancer, then, already in deep,  
head-first among the holly leaves,

and pleasing herself and tricky as a die,  
that tips and birls and drops,  
she lands, lands in sharp relief,

a chatter of berries, red in her beak.







David Kinloch  
THE HUNT

One sleepless night,  
Stargazing by the flagpole in Queen's Park,  
Thugs tried to shaft my neighbour  
With his telescope  
Sure he was a 'poof'.

He joked himself away,  
Regaled us at a Close meeting  
With his close shave,  
While I silently recalled  
An unforgettable park dusk:  
The sound of padding sneakers  
On the paths, the reek of over-  
Ripe laburnum, poppers in a copse



And the sudden, shaking gallop  
Of a mounted cop all caped and  
Kaisered, lightbrigading our intense  
Brief scatter at an incline  
Through the grass, the shrieking

Neigh, the curse and crash,  
Then, through the deep blue  
Twilight, the wracking sobs  
As a figure bent across his ruined  
Horse: at my quiet feet  
The splayed and helpless animals.



Alan Riach  
THE BLUES

The lights are on all over Hamilton.  
The sky is dark, blue  
as a stained-glass window in an unfrequented church  
say, by Chagall, with grand and glorious chinks  
of pinks and purples,  
glittering jewels on those glass-fronted buildings  
where the lifts are all descending  
and the doors are  
being closed.

You're out there somewhere,  
going to a concert in wide company or maybe  
sitting somewhere weaving a carpet  
like a giant tapestry, coloured grey,  
pale brown, weaving the wool  
back in at the edges of the frame, your  
fingers deft as they turn the wool in tight and  
gentle curves.

Or somewhere else.  
What do I do  
except imagine you?  
The river I keep crossing  
keeps going north. The trains  
in the night cross it too.  
Their silver carriages are blue.

David Kinloch  
JACOB AND THE ANGEL

Ay. Pause. Ah said pause. Och fuck it! Ye're past it. Past it! Rewind! What? Ay. Jist trying. Trying tae get the shot. In focus like. Difficult what with the grainy downslide. But ye've goat tae try. Hit the button. Jeezus! Naw! It wizny him. But somewun, *somehin*. Look ye can see him. Through the spray. Just. Yon Adam's apple. The hollow at the base. Bone coloured skin. Ay aw skin an bone he wiz. Feathery hair. Ah'm the cropped wan. Och fur speed, jimmy! Fur speed! Whit d'*you* think! Hit the button fur chrissake. He pushed *ma* button ah kin tell ye! Pain. Ecstasy. Aw wun in'it? *We* know that! Ay. That's it! Is that a ... Christ! It's a fuckin claw! Ah've been tangoin wi a bear! Naw, mair like a cat! What a bitch! Scream or cum? Below the belt anyway. Below the fuckin belt. God ah wiz goodlookin in them days. Even wi ma gob open! Squirmin. He knew it, jealous bastard. Och look at the slaw-motion tear. Hold yer finger oan it. Constant-like. Ay well. Ah'm jist numb now. It's all over. Has been fur years. Now and again ah rewind. Try tae catch that moment when ah wiz forced tae change, get a life. When ah woke up in hospital they undid the straps and ah coudny remember a thing. No even ma name. But the pain, the fuckin pain! An ache in ma crotch the size ae a country.



Fiona Wilson  
WHAT IS DIFFERENCE?

It  
is a jet-  
black fan from Galicia and it  
opens with a hard lacq-  
uered snap. Look. One side is painted,

a  
sudden start  
of leaves and flowers and filigree,  
intricate pinks and greens,  
worked on a moonless night that never

was.  
Still, what's  
on my mind is not this, but the un-  
marked back, matte silk that shuns  
the eye. In Spain, you inform me,



fans  
are women's  
business. Men walk among the pinks  
and greens but may not think  
to touch or use one. Men wear white

and  
black. Their hands  
are vehement, their habits strict. Men  
strut and act. Men talk. Men's  
eyelashes swoon when they've been kissed.



Alan Riach  
From TWO PAINTINGS BY JACK YEATS  
2. Sailor Boy



The sailor boy steps up upon the quay  
beside the man with the sickly stare and sickle.  
The hour-glass sand is pouring down beside him.  
The monkey on the boy's sack over his shoulder's looking  
at you.  
The parrot in the cage he carries cackles. The rigging  
creaks. The sounds  
of men and women and traffic from the town across the  
harbour chime  
and tinkle in the continuous filaments of water gurgles,  
lapping  
the quay and the tide. The big white clouds blow by.  
Some day, even the blue-bright red-striped sailor boy will  
die.  
But for today, the sunlight, stepping ashore, and above, the  
high old sky!






Gerry Cambridge  
THE DRUNKEN LYRICIST  
*Orkney*

We met that grey dull evening on the east shore.  
Roaring round the bend he came, flat out  
at fifteen miles an hour, and stopped. We had to shout  
till he turned off his engine. *It's going to pour  
it looks like: me. Oa, I'm haardly concerned  
thee night wi weather, man!* he said, flat cap askew.  
Gap-toothed smile. Torched cheeks. Eyes Atlantic blue.  
*Hiv you seen any? Weemun? Whisky burned  
its golden track in him, and he would search.  
's that wun, man?* – the shore's dark speck.  
Not waiting a reply, through the bright wreck  
of that grey evening, he roared off, with a lurch.  
His tractor almost reared on its back tyres.  
Fifteen miles an hour flat out, parched by amber fires.






**Gerry Cambridge** is founder editor of the international poetry journal *The Dark Horse*. His poetry collections include 'Nothing But Heather!' (1999, 2008), *Madame Fi Fi's Farewell* (2003) and *Aves*, a book of prose poems (2007). Also an essayist, photographer, and harmonica player, he has a website at [www.gerrycambridge.com](http://www.gerrycambridge.com).




**David Kinloch** was born in Glasgow. He is the author of *Paris-Forfar* (Polygon, 1994), *Un Tour d'Ecosse* (Carcanet, 2001) and *In My Father's House* (Carcanet, 2005). He was a founder co-editor of the poetry journal *Verse* and currently teaches creative writing and Scottish literature at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow.



**Alan Riach**, Glasgow University's Professor of Scottish Literature, President of the Association for Scottish Literary Studies and general editor of Hugh MacDiarmid's *Collected Works*, is also the author of *Representing Scotland*. His poetry is collected in four books: *Clearances*, *First & Last Songs*, *An Open Return* and *This Folding Map*.

**Fiona Wilson** grew up near Aberdeen and now lives in New York City. Her work has appeared most recently in *New Writing Scotland*, *Markings*, *Poetry Review*, *Painted*, *spoken* and *Pequod*. She is currently completing her first book of poetry.





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