

The LitSoc LitMag

Issue 1

Jan 2021

New Beginnings

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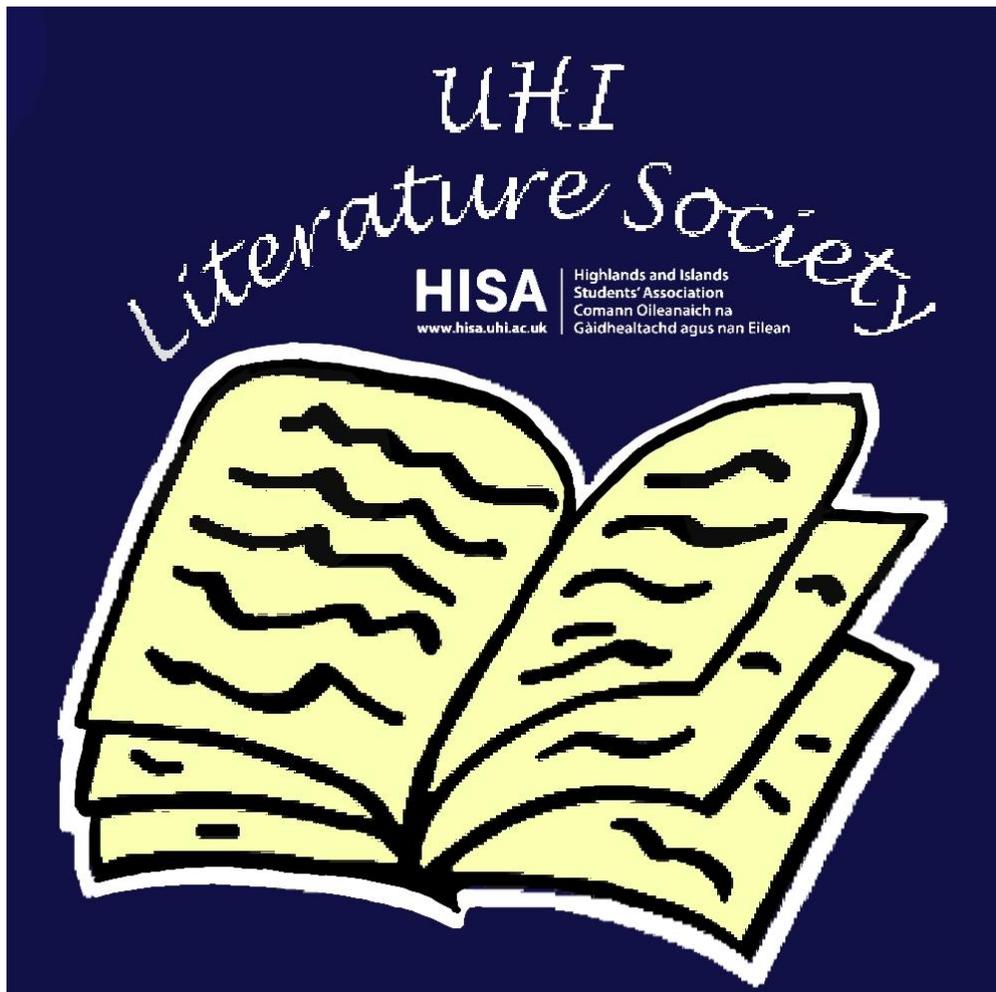
Issue 1 – Jan 2021

New Beginnings

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We would like to thank Susan Aitken, Gabrielle Barnby, Jane Bury, Alicen Geddes, Martin Hardie, Jamie McCarry, Scott McGowan, Barbara Piseroni, Megan Powell, Kimberley Rose and Sophie Wink for their contributions to this issue. All contributors retain copyright to their work.



Edited, typeset and designed by Susan Aitken & Jamie McCarry.

A message from The University of the Highlands and Islands' Literature Society President

When I became President of The University of the Highlands and Islands' Literature Society in May 2020, I never did imagine that by the end of term I'd be seeing us publish a literary magazine. My pride in the society for this achievement is indescribable. '900 years of time and space and I've never met anyone who wasn't important' is said by the Doctor in *Doctor Who*, a man given the role of the President of the Earth. While the extent my own presidency is nowhere near as vast, I do often feel as though I have been given the world. I regard every member of the society as valuable to the team and keep this quote in mind while fulfilling my role, whether I'm talking to a society member who isn't sure they're confident enough to submit to this magazine, or speaking to an author who doesn't feel well known enough or accomplished enough to share their insights with us.

The man I view as most important throughout my time with the Literature Society is Dr Ian Blyth, Programme Leader for Literature at The University of the Highlands and Islands. Ian has empowered us as much within the Literature Society as he has in our academic endeavours and has played an integral role in the development of the society. Whether he's answering our many questions on how we might even begin to make this publication or discussing how many birds *are* in *The Twelve Days of Christmas*, Ian never fails to help us on our way to regaining our positive outlooks. We could not have made this magazine without his insights and so I find myself happily indebted to Ian for his assistance and encouragement with the magazine and the society as a whole.

My thanks also extend to our other lecturers; Anne Frater, Mandy Haggith, Lesley Mickel, Paul Shanks, Steph Smart and Kyle Smith for their positive engagements with the society. Each of our lecturers have a very unique relationship with us and we are always grateful for their wisdom and involvement – especially when this well-humoured and raises our spirits during such trying times. Without the backing of the University of the Highlands and Islands and the Highlands and Islands Student's

Association (HISA), this publication would be impossible. Therefore, my gratitude extends further to all those who have allowed us to come together to make this magazine, with particular thanks to Pauline Krawehl at HISA for her constant enthusiasm.

This has been an exciting term for us in the Literature Society with our membership growing to nearly five times the size it was in May. We have had talks from Lin Anderson, Gabrielle Barnby, Helen Forbes, Seonaid Francis, Mandy Haggith, Katherine Hunt, Emma J Myatt and Ian Rankin, all of whom have shared valuable advice with us and inspired a number of us to pursue our career goals and grow in confidence as writers.

Of course, the society could not run without our committee. Therefore, Susan Aitken, Emily Gray, Elisavet Kollia, Emilie Massard and Francesca Rezzesi deserve thanks for all of their hard work this term to ensure that the society runs smoothly and delivers the best possible experience for our members. I would also like to extend a special thank you to Sarah Ellis, our former Events VP, who secured a large number of our talks and provided the theme for this magazine among many other accomplishments without which our society would not be as successful as it currently is.

Finally, I would like to thank the society members themselves for making the society a fantastically supportive community where we can all support each other while working towards our individual goals and sharing our love of literature. Thank you all for your positive feedback and encouragement throughout my presidency so far. It has been a joy to watch the society grow and evolve and I cannot wait to see what comes next!

I hope you all enjoy the very first issue of *The LitSoc LitMag*,

Jamie McCarry

UHI Literature Society President

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‘New Beginnings’ Writing Competition

Writing Competition Results

Harvest-time by Jamie McCarry Winner

For Susan Aitken whose artwork in this magazine inspired this almost as much as she inspires me every day.

When leaves fall

And soil's upturned,

When dust settles

And new things come to light,

It's you I turn to

To make sense of the fresh reality.

Alone,

Things can be hard to grasp.

But with two minds,

Two pairs of hands,

It's easier to handle.

When the crop turns sour,

We'll grab our spades,

Dig

And start again.

We'll work out

Our new normal

Together.

Asperger's by Scott McGowan Highly Commended

There was a boy, who at our school,
He was home taught but transferred through.
We were all told, to treat him right.
Though smart in ways, he weren't that bright.

There was one day, he had a fit.
Above his head, in tight a grip,
He raised a chair and screamed in pain.
We all thought he would pop a vein.

But there was one boy in our class,
Who crept up to him, as in Mass,
He raised his hand, reverently,
A pencil held, for all to see.

'A trick I have,' he said to him,
'You'll like it, pal. I'll bet a limb.'
The new boy paused and gave a nod.
His face went calm and slightly awed.

My friend he raised the pencil high,
And checked it had the new boy's eye.
Then he held it, in fore and thumb,

And shook it till we heard a hum.

As we all watched, the new boy too,

The pencil bent and went askew.

We eyed those boys, whom we now saw,

Held teethsom grins, wide of jaw.

This trick we saw, it calmed him down.

He lowered the chair without a frown.

Now every time, he has a fit,

Our friend steps up and does his trick.

Lost and Found by Martin Hardie Highly Commended

Like a found thing

I'm a novelty.

Cherished only momentarily,
forgotten much more regularly.

I often feel intimidated by her,

I sit silently and squirm.

Desperately longing for attention
knowing she doesn't really care.

I tell myself I'll leave

One day.

Make a break for it

One day.

Love makes fools of us all

Before,

During,

and after.

Jane Bury

Moving On

Your walls of comfort have turned cold

our warm welcome, no longer wanted

Your memories have been taken

Our marks have been left

Your scent is distinctly your own

Your garden sprawls, unkempt, unloved

Your numerous rooms, no more tumbling cupboards

The toys, books and giggles have gone.

Your history added to

Your deeds passed on

Your inner life someone else's secret now,

Our lives have moved on.

Your door closes behind us.

Your windows dusted with goodbye

lifeless quiet rooms

Our minds made up, we move on

Alicen Geddes

Content warning: This poem contains word choice which could be upsetting.

Seashore Faerie

Submerged.

Somnambulant.

A seashore spectre,

A corpse,

But not quite.

A solitary light,

Dim,

Not bright.

A throttle of seaweed,

Catching the neck.

A necklace of bladderwrack

Snatching the throat.

Life being pulled, by death.

Brushing her toes,

Over the seabed,

Scraping the skin

Over shingle and shells.

In a loch

Not far away.
In the murk,
She is pulled
Along the watery path,
The
Death
Drag.
Her black, billowing dress,
Flowing
And
Fluttering,
Further
And Faster,
From the shy tide
That had beckoned her in.

Death held her...
But not quite.
Still a pulse,
But not pulsating.
Still a heart,
But no beat,
Of memory...
For the heart is
Ripped out.

A gaping hole,
Torn flesh
Wafting like a sea anemone.

On...

The...

Death...

Drag...

Her rose-coloured hair
Flowing
In tendrils about her face.

Her eyes,
A gaze of wounds.
She sees nothing,
Except a feeling,
Of being touched.
They sea inward.
Eyes searching for
A rippling emotion,
To flit her fingers
In what liquid was left.

Limbs surrendering,
Limp and loose,

Lingering.

No longer supported

By the sub-stratum.

Now shingle,

Silt,

Sand.

All along

An apparition,

She had known

Deep down.

The corpse waits...

But never released.

The Drag,

Drops.

Even death eludes her.

Unable to pinch out

That dim

Light.

A bleary blur,

Like a smog blot,

Over sunlight.

Death coughed her up.

Expelled,

Like sputum.

Washed up

In a tangle of fisherman's rope.

Sticky salt

Upon her lips.

No more

A seashore spectre.

Her wounds of eyes

Not dim,

But a glimmer.

Her fingers fumble

To conceal the gape,

Of

The

Rape

Of

Her

Heart.

The sentient staggered,

Limped laggard,

Upon the beach, like a bird

With a broken wing.

Like angels they came,

Lovingly repaired
Her heart-place,
With wool
And white feathers,
Of moss and method,
Wrapping the fleshy cavern
Like a faerie dwelling.

The
Gape
Gone.

A
Feather nest,
In place of her heart.
No beat of memory to offer
Anyone else.

At least she knew
That she could live
Without a heart
Because...
He did.

Martin Hardy

Fit Like?

Yer Da's bought a Fitbit
he's trying his best
He's looked out his trainers
and bought a new string vest

He looks like Rab C
when he's out for a jog
Battling through the pies
and the hangover fog

He's been told to gie up the drink
by quote - 'the woman doctor'
So now he's joined the gym
and bought a rake of flavoured water

He's proclaimed it 'a new start'
without the need for a drink
but he's no quite sure
if his patter's now gonna stink

I saw him last night on the town
sober as a judge - no lies
he had an orange and lemonade
and a heid full of sighs

He's relied on the drink
ever since day one
To lubricate his patter
and enhance the pub fun

Without a cheeky drink
he's looking awffy glum
At least if he had a pint
he'd be smiling as kingdom come

My Love is like a Red, Red Rash

Shall I compare thee to a munchie box?
Thou art more coveted and bursting with delights
You have everything a besozzled man could desire
but you'll seldom gie him the shites

You are the first swig of Irn-Bru in the morning
You are the first fag of the night
You are the Friday night to my Monday squirming
A drunken sausage supper 'til the very last bite

You put the Ten in Tennent's
you're what made the Sangria sing
You put the hot in my hot sauce
that soaks my vapid chicken wings

If you were in a bottle i'd swig you
and pay the barman for every single nip
You're exotic like a coke and Malibu
and fancy, like a cheeky crinkle cut chip

Monday comes and I'm left bereft
pining for my favourite vice
Sitting at work a victim of theft
longing for my fool's paradise

Jamie McCarry

Am Gonnae be a Sistor?

Am gonnae be a sistor?

Whit d'ye mean 'a sistor'?

If am tae be a sistor,

There's gonnae be a wain

And wher' there's wains there's greetin'

Tae keep me up when av git school

A grotty stinky mess

Whae's gonnae spew and drool

Whit d'ye mean 'a sistor'?

Am no dain that!

Nae time tae coorie in

Wi' Mammy an' wi' Da!

Am no bein' a sistor

It's ma idea eh Hell

I tell, ye it's no fur me

Ye c'n tak it right awa'

Ah dinnae want a sistor

Ah want ma pennies back!

So What Happens Now?

I miss you

I know

You left so suddenly

I held on as long as I could

I saw you that day.

Did you know?

No.

I came to visit you

Oh.

I was there when it happened

I'm sorry

I know

I held your sister's hand

Good

It was the right thing to do

Yes

So what happens now?

You keep going without me

How?

I don't know

You always used to know things

I did.

Thank you.

I didn't do anything

You never knew you did it

Oh

But it meant a lot

I see

I guess that's it then

Sorry I can't come back

Me too

You'll be fine

You have each other

But we don't have you.

No.

I'll never forget you.

You're allowed to forget me sometimes

Just don't forget yourself

Okay.

Okay.

Scott McGowan

Of the Thirteen-Year-Old Venezuelan Boy, Carlos

There was a boy from Venezuela,

Carlos was his name.

There wasn't all that much to eat;

It was Maduro, to blame.

His mum and dad, they had a think.

They wanted to protect him.

They made the choice to leave their home.

Their faces, then, were grim.

They made their way to Trinidad,

And there, Tobago, too.

It was a strange and foreign land.

The only chance, they knew.

They didn't know what to expect.

Not like home, at all.

The food, the land and island life,

Made them feel so small.

With no one there who knew them,

They struggled all the day,

To make enough to live a life,

And not let tensions fray.

A time did come when life was good.

Human grace was seen.

The UN helped, with Living water,

This boy of just thirteen.

Now, our Carlos lives a happy life.

He's confident and strong.

In Trinidad and Tobago,

They live a life that's long.

On one last note, I'll tell you, now,

The island rulers affirmed,

To make a census of all there,

Their status now confirmed.

So, Trinidad and Tobago,

Is now their home-from-home.

They are settled, loved and happy.

No more, a need to roam.

The Cruise

Peter, for years, saved to go on a cruise.

He decided on old Saint-Tropez.

He got on the boat,

Prayed, *'Keep it afloat,*

Let the whole trip be happy and gay.'

The boat, as it happened, was not all that good.

It sunk on the very first night.

Our Peter did cry,

'Please, don't let me die,

And let me be redeemed from my plight.'

He managed to swim to an unknown dry land,

Deprived of all that he'd brought.

Though he didn't know then,

A party of ten,

Would soon serve him in a large cooking pot.

Babi Piseroni

Flower

A flower picked up
From a wild field,
Nourish it,
Keep it warm,
Don't let her die.

Try hard,
Nothing seems easy;
Someone is screaming,
You give up.

The flower left in the corner,
Dry and withering,
Asking for comfort,
Asking for understanding,
But you're busy.

The flower is dead,
But her seeds are there,
They flew with the wind
Into foreign fields

The flower is strong,
The flower is vibrant.

Megan Powell

Christmas Kiss

Every year at Christmas it was the same, people running around the shops like headless chickens desperately trying to find that perfect gift for a loved one. It didn't matter if they couldn't afford it, they would still go out and buy it anyway. For me I didn't bother with all the pretty bows, colourful wrappings or decorations. There was no point seeing as I had nobody to share this festive season with. However, last Christmas season changed all of that.

It was a very early, dark, wet and miserable Wednesday, but it was not any ordinary Wednesday as it was Christmas. The one day where kids were waking up to presents under the tree excited to have been visited by the "jolly fat man". All the lights were on the houses and twinkling down the street where I lived, except mine.

To get away from all the garishly cutesy jolliness I decided to escape as early as I could and headed down to the river with my collie dog, Blueskia. The farther down the river we walked, the easier it became to breathe and release all the pent-up anger and disgust over the now corporately bloated holiday that turned ordinary folk into raging gluttonous beasts let loose once a year every year.

The darkness began to ebb, slowly transforming the dark ominous clouds to multitudes or varying shades of grey. Most would have seen the change merely as one depressing change of black wetness to lighter form dreary dampness. To me it was beautiful, to see the slowly moving clouds rolling and flowing like waves in the sky, ever changing and fluid. They never stayed the same colour for long, always swirling around mixing dark tones with lighter shades.

While admiring the nature around me a striking youngish looking Alsatian came bounding around the bend and up to me with its lead dragging on the ground behind it. Blueskia, being the playful pup that she is, became very excited and started to jump around with the Alsatian barking, yiping and sniffing. Even though this time of year was always the loneliest for me, seeing the two dogs bound around each other with

blissful happiness brought a smile to my lips. Through the crushing weight of darkness and pain that tightly strapped itself around my heart everyday was briefly eased with such an inviting sight of pure joy and happiness being experienced by these two wonderous pups.

A woman's cry of pure frustration came rolling over from around the bend with a figure closely following it. As she ran closer it was apparent. She had fallen or, judging by the muddy streaks on the front of her jacket and jeans, she had been dragged somewhat. Slowing down to what looked like an uncomfortable jog as she closed the distance between us, she frustratedly barked;

"Crystal! Come back here! Bad dog!"

"It's alright, I don't think she will be running off, she seems to have found a playmate in my dog."

She had slowed now to what seemed like a painful walk, slightly limping on her right side. As she came closer, I couldn't hide the crooked smile. The sight of the muddy mess she was in was truly one for the books. Not only was she covered in dirt and wet mud all the way down her front but the twigs and leaves in her hair added the comic factor to this otherwise unpleasant experience. What instantly came to mind was the image of a mud monster. She looked down at herself then towards me and all of a sudden let out a transfixing laugh that sounded like Christmas bells. I was so caught up in that moment that I found myself start to not only smile, but feel this bubble of laughter escape my throat, deep and husky. I stopped suddenly in surprise at my response, I had not laughed in so long that I had forgotten what my laugh sounded like. For a brief moment I stood staring in awe as this woman's laughter enveloped around me, without realising it I had begun to laugh alongside her, it was so infectious and yet also so familiar.

It was a few moments before we were able to reign in the random giggles that escaped, she cocked her head to one side with a questioning frown on her face. I touched my own face, thinking something was stuck to it.

"What? Is there something on my face?"

"No, you look so familiar but I..."

Her face lit up as a wide smile spread across her face, she shuffled closer until we were mere inches from each other, how could I have not seen it before!? Looking

down, I shakily moved my hand to her cheek and wiped away the mud. Her smile appeared once more on her face as she leaned into my palm, looking up at me. I suddenly saw her incredibly blue eyes which caught the sunlight that peeked through the clouds just at the right time. They seemed to magically sparkle just as the sunlight hit them. I had seen these eyes and that smile before, so long ago and now only seemed like yesterday. Barley above a whisper;

“Sara? It’s you!”

Tears fell freely from her face as she pulled herself up into my embrace, wrapping her arms around my neck she pulled my face down to hers and kissed me deeply. Sara had been my first and only love, there had never been anyone but her, as it turned out it seemed I was her one and only as well.

The Great Bookish Bake Off

Susan Aitken

Frankenstein's Monster Rocky Road

Inspiration

Frankenstein's Monster Rocky Road is a collection of random things that somehow work together to make a tray bake, just as Frankenstein's Monster was created. The novel depicts the monster learning how to go about the world with little guidance which applies well here as this is a good place to start when beginning to bake!

Ingredients

- 200 grams dark chocolate
- 200 grams milk chocolate
- 175 grams soft butter
- 4 tablespoons golden syrup
- 200 grams amaretti biscuits
- 150 grams mini marshmallows
- Any additional ingredients like glace cherries, nuts, dried fruits, extra chocolate. This can be changed any time you make this, making it perfect for using up any leftovers!
- 100 grams white chocolate
- 100 grams milk chocolate
- 400ml double cream
- Green food colouring



Method

1. Break the chocolate into pieces and melt on a medium heat with the butter and syrup.
2. Crush the amaretti biscuits, making sure there's a good mixture of sizes.
3. Add the biscuits, marshmallows and any add-ins you'd like.
4. Scoop into cupcake cases (or a lined baking tin) and place into the fridge for around 2 hours.

To decorate

1. For the ganache, using a microwave or a double boiler, heat 200ml of cream for every 100g of chocolate, being careful not to burn the chocolate. Stir continuously until melted.
2. Repeat for the white chocolate ganache and add green food colouring. Then place into a piping bag/freezer bag. Smooth the bag out and place into the fridge until it thickens slightly.
3. Pipe a thin layer of green onto the bottom half to create the face and let set. Add the milk chocolate for the hair and bolts.

Dracula Cupcakes

Inspiration

We all know the story, *Dracula*, is quite dark which is what makes the chocolate cake base of this so apt. However, there's always more to the story which is why this cupcake is filled with strawberry jam which also fits the vampiric theme. The cake requires minimal decoration. This adds to how the story of Dracula is often seen in black and white.

Ingredients

- 225g softened butter
- 225g sugar (if your drinking chocolate has sugar in it, reduce this slightly)
- 225g self-raising flour
- 4 large eggs
- 4 tablespoons cocoa power
- 4 tablespoons drinking chocolate
- 600g icing sugar
- 300g softened butter
- Red jam of your choice



Method

1. Preheat your oven to 180°C
2. Cream the butter and sugar together, ideally using an electric mixer. Beat until it lightens in colour.
3. Add the eggs one by one.
4. Slowly add the flour in batches, mixing in between.
5. Add in the cocoa power and drinking chocolate.
6. This mix makes 24 cupcakes or 2 8 inch sponges so spoon into whatever tins needed for your bake.
7. Bake for 20-25 minutes

To decorate

1. Whisk the butter until it is light and fluffy.
2. Slowly add in the icing sugar until the buttercream is smooth and spreadable
3. Using a knife or an apple corer, remove the centre of each cupcake – being careful not to reach the base – and cut the majority of the core off to make a lid.
4. Spoon in around a teaspoon of jam to each.
5. Cover in buttercream, making the top as flat as possible
6. Use the end of a clean paintbrush/pencil/chopstick to add two small holes close together in the icing.
7. Fill a piping bag or freezer bag with a small amount of jam and pipe it into each small hole to give the effect of fang marks.

Susan Aitken & Jamie McCarry

Heaney Chocolate Cake

Inspiration

This cake depicts the stances Heaney takes with regards to frogs in 'Death of a Naturalist', originally enjoying playing with frogspawn and watching tadpoles, then, later in life, finding himself repulsed by them. Of course, leftover cake mix can go into making 'Digging' cupcakes, after another poem in the Heaney's first collection, *Death of a Naturalist*.

Ingredients

- 225g softened butter
- 225g sugar (if your drinking chocolate has sugar in it, reduce this slightly)
- 225g self-raising flour
- 4 large eggs
- 4 tablespoons cocoa power
- 4 tablespoons drinking chocolate



Method

1. Preheat your oven to 180°C
2. Cream the butter and sugar together, ideally using an electric mixer. Beat until it lightens in colour.
3. Add the eggs one by one.
4. Slowly add the flour in batches, mixing in between.
5. Add in the cocoa power and drinking chocolate.
6. This mix makes 24 cupcakes or 2 8 inch sponges so spoon into whatever tins needed for your bake.
7. Bake for 20-25 minutes

To decorate Digging Cupcakes

- 100 grams milk chocolate
 - 200ml double cream
 - Grated chocolate or crushed Twirl
 - Black fondant
 - Long metallic candles
1. Melt the chocolate and cream together, stirring continuously.
 2. Spoon into a piping bag or freezer bag and place in the fridge until thickened.
 3. Pipe a low swirl onto each cupcake.
 4. Sprinkle chocolate on top
 5. Create spades with black fondant on either end of a candle and place into the cake.

To decorate Death of a Naturalist Cake

- Green, black and blue food colouring or coloured fondant
 - KitKats and dark chocolate for the cuff
 - Optional – premade sugar flowers
1. Marble a small amount of blue and black fondant together and roll it out to cover half of the top of the cake.
 2. Cover the other half with plain blue fondant.
 3. Combine black and green fondant to make frogs with enough left over for lily pads which should be darker.
 4. Make the same lily pads in plain green for the lighter side.
 5. Roll small balls with tails out of black fondant to make tadpoles for the lighter side.
 6. Add the lily pads, tadpoles and frogs to each side.

7. Cut the KitKats and dark chocolate to suit the height of the cake and place them around the side. You may want to use some buttercream or melted chocolate to help things stick.

Jamie McCarry

Brownies Brownies

Inspiration

Juliana Hortatia Ewing wrote *The Brownies and other tales* in the 1860s, depicting a wise owl helping two young children locate some brownies (of the faerie variety).

Robert Baden-Powell later adapted this story and adopted the name for a section of Girlguiding, the Brownie-Guides, who definitely love chocolate brownies. Let's be real, everyone loves brownies of some variety!

Ingredients

- 1/2 cup vegetable oil
- 1 1/4 cups granulated sugar
- 3/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup natural cocoa powder
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 2 large eggs
- 2 tablespoons water
- 1/2 cup chocolate chips or chopped chocolate
- Icing sugar to decorate



Method

1. Preheat your oven to 180°C
2. Add dry ingredients to a bowl and mix well.
3. Add wet ingredients and stir until fully combined.
4. Pour into a lined baking in and bake for 25 minutes.
5. Once cooled, create a basic stencil and place on top. Dust with icing sugar to decorate.

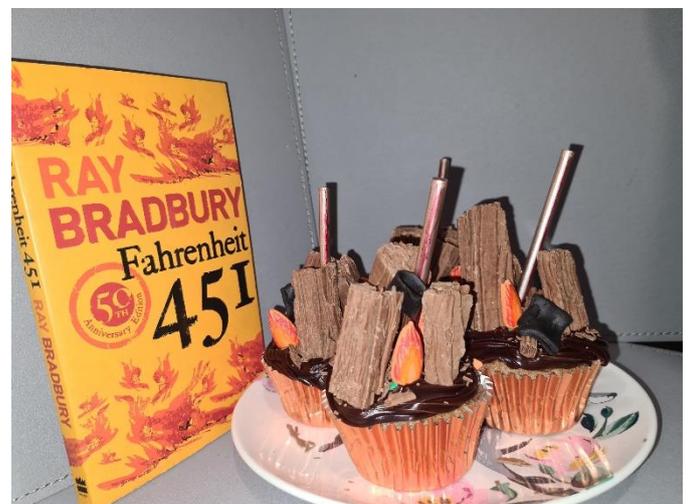
Fahrenheit 451 Cupcakes

Inspiration

Fahrenheit 451 is just one of those books I'll never get tired of reading. It's a great book for an evening in that always reminds me to appreciate the little things in life a lot more. This bake uses decorated, upturned, sugarpaste carrots for flames, candles as thermometers, fondant icing for the burned books, and flakes to make it look that little bit more like the bonfires I love.

Ingredients

- 225g softened butter
- 225g sugar (if your drinking chocolate has sugar in it, reduce this slightly)
- 225g self-raising flour
- 4 large eggs
- 4 tablespoons cocoa power
- 4 tablespoons drinking chocolate
- 400ml double cream
- 200g milk chocolate
- Twirls (one for each cupcake)
- Fondant
- Red, yellow and black food colouring or coloured fondant



Method

1. Preheat your oven to 180°C
2. Cream the butter and sugar together, ideally using an electric mixer. Beat until it lightens in colour.
3. Add the eggs one by one.
4. Slowly add the flour in batches, mixing in between.
5. Add in the cocoa power and drinking chocolate.
6. This mix makes 24 cupcakes or two 8-inch sponges so spoon into whatever tins needed for your bake.

7. Bake for 20-25 minutes

To decorate

1. Make chocolate ganache by melting the chocolate and cream together in a microwave or a double boiler, stirring continuously.
2. Once cooled slightly, pour into a piping bag or freezer bag and place into the fridge until it thickens.
3. While you wait, make fondant flames and books.
4. Pipe a low swirl of ganache onto each cupcake.
5. Break each Twirl into 3rds and position them in a triangle, angling them so they meet at the top.
6. Add in the fondant decorations once they have hardened.

Non-fiction

Gabrielle Barnby

Protecting Creativity: UHI Literature Society Talk - November 30th

There are fundamental issues that every creative needs to address about their supporting their processes and having happy, successful, productive lives.

The path to where I am now has been anything but linear and my creative processes have changed significantly since I began writing. I'm going to discuss these changes and how to support creativity. There are some short exercises at the end of this article that I hope readers will find interesting and enjoyable.

Background

My background is in science. I have a Phd in molecular genetics of autism. Sometimes I think I have a ghost that is continuing this career and is a laboratory boss somewhere by now. We all have ghosts of other lives. It's best to let them get on with it and focus on what's happening right now in the moment.

I cannot remember beginning to read, but beginning to write happened when I was 30. I had just moved to New Zealand with two young children, leaving my job so my husband could retrain. I was adrift from everything I had ever known. I had written travel diaries before, but here I was, disconnected from so much. I found my inner desire was to write. So I began. Alone. This was a moment of great courage and determination. I recognised my artist self. I dreamed big. Too big. But I got started.

Only more than a decade later do I see how much I plundered my own resources without proper support. Much of what I have learned about nurturing creativity would have helped me a great deal.

Where am I now?

I have two books published with Thunderpoint, another with Neverton Press. I have self-published a commemorative poem booklet. I plan to self-publish more, perhaps a series of poetry books.

Is this beginning to look like a career? Certainly there is a trail behind me of writing and of creative events. More importantly than all these achievements my relationship with my creative self has changed significantly over the past two years.

I feel more supported, more able to care for my artists self, less alone, less 'grasping' and single-mindedly determined, but still keen to do the legwork. I am more open.

What is the point of being creative?

Let's think about the big question. What is the point of being creative?

What's the point of defying everything that is socially validating, such as having money and position. (The financial rewards for writing are poor, very poor, embarrassingly poor.) What's the point of defying the logic of the odds.

You will know yourself better. I know myself better, and I seek to know myself even better. It is fundamentally good to be creative and open to greater creativity. It takes courage to be non-linear and to believe that creativity will be supported. *Everyone's creativity requires support.* The first sensible thing I did to support my creativity was to join a writing in group. Six months pregnant with a fourth child I walked out into the night and joined a writing group near my then home in Surrey. I found a place where I felt I belonged.

When I relocated to Orkney, again knowing no one, with four children I again went out into the night and joined a writing group in Stromness, hoping again to find a place where I felt I belonged.

Support is needed for anyone who is practising creatively in the long term. My advice is to find what is right for you and then practise it consistently. Whether it is walking, or swimming, or writing morning pages or doing another new creative activity. When you think it is not working for you, this is when you need it most. I'm not talking about the habit of writing 1,000 words a day for the work-in-progress - this is secondary. Support comes first, discipline second.

We must care for our inner artist

The well of images needs to be filled - we need stimulation from other activities and experiences. We must make time for reflection and insight, for solitude. We must make time for fun and play, and mistake making.

A mind that is attentive to the moment will be cultivated through all these things, by following a commitment that is embedded in *doing art*. In getting it down. We need to remove tension and be open to insights. Through planning positive activities and building positive relationships we can nurture positive habits.

An artist must seek to be open to attitudinal change, of being teachable and developing discernment. I may want to publish a book a year and be in the top twenty bestseller list. But does the universe want that? What paths are open to me right now? How can my art be of service? How do I value sharing my creative and beautiful insights with only a few?

Advice

Let your creative artist do things that are never to be shown to anyone. Do things which fail, try them again.

For those who worry about emulating their idols - don't. You will have many role models, many phases of exploration. How you blend all your influences together is the definition of your originality. The personality of the artistic self can shift and change, with openness and a close relationship to this self your insights will become more and more authentic.

Stay connected to the community and with other people. Get a job. The artist's garret becomes a desert if we stay too long.

Start tiny. Allow yourself to move on, and allow yourself to go back. Self-publish.

Put your artistic work to the service of others - the universe loves will respond generously.

Be clear about what skills are being of service, when more domestic or organisational skills are becoming overburdened protect yourself. Remember the importance of solitude, of stimulation and of play.

Be attentive to your own leisure time - this can often turn into a tuning out from what our creative self would really like to do. An understanding of how we spend time and money allows us to understand what prevents a closer relationship with our authentic self. Habits become ingrained in ourselves and our personal relationships. Our artist self may be starving and in desperate need of some fun while we guzzle television. We do ourselves no good. We are lost.

We fear giving attention to our artistic self. We have to acknowledge past hurts and failures and coax the creative self back to its feet again before we move on. Self-care is essential to this process and to quieten our doubts so we can *get into the doing*. Write a note saying I'm just going to spend 20 mins on this. That's the promise you can keep. Showing up is a win.

Find your practice and then work with it, allow yourself to evolve, to be joyous and unlimited. Seek help from the torch holders, mentors in your field. Support your artist, be compassionate to yourself. Get into the doing. This has become my aim.

Don't think big, in fact don't even think small. Think tiny.

Exercises

- Draw a square on a piece of paper.
- Inside, using your dominant hand, draw a representation of what your creative self looks like at the moment.

- Draw a second square on a piece of paper.
 - Inside, with your non-dominant hand, draw a representation of what you would like your creative self looks like.
- How does second picture? Bigger? To the edges? Free? Wild? Weird?

What does the the picture look like? Angular? Small? Detached?

It is helpful imagine many small (tiny) stages in-between your current state and your desired state, as if they were part of a flick book. These are the tiny incremental stages that our creative self can make when well supported.

These questions they might also help point you in the direction of your dreams, and how to make a start achieving them.

- If It didn't have to do it perfectly, I'd try....
- Where in your life are you happiest with trial and error?
- Try and recall a sensation of delight has grabbed you. Look for it more often. Notice it, feel the pleasure and let it pass on. Tune in.

Megan Powell

Is the panegyric code in Classical Gaelic poetry a useful framework or a stultifying straitjacket?

Classical Bardic Poets held a strong importance in the courts of clan chieftains and also in Gaelic society. Filidh underwent rigorous study and training for seven years to master their craft which was passed down from father to son, only existing in a few prestigious families. The Filidh's training gave them a high standing in Gaelic society and were held in high esteem as some believed the professional poets were descendants from druids. There was the belief that the bardic poet's words were powerful. The study of the panegyric code was an essential part of their training and was followed by the Filidh as well as vernacular bards. Vernacular poets were the 'song makers' and 'unofficial spokesman' for the masses of the lower social stations of Gaelic society. Though they were not trained classical poets, they were very familiar with the panegyric code and structure of classical verse. Most elegies and eulogies were composed following the panegyric patterns, and the primary function of a bard was to be found in 'clan panegyric'. This was the main focus of the compositions, the survival of the group of 'warrior hunters' from the higher ranks of society. The songs were composed purely for the praise of clan life and its chieftains. The songs followed a special rhetoric of praise and was considered an inheritance by bards and singers. They followed the strict qualities and parameters within panegyric compositions. This essay will look at the traditional criteria within the panegyric code to show how the framework was a useful tool in the creation of songs and how by following these rigid guidelines the poets were successful in creating rich imagery and emotion.

Essential features that had to be detailed in successful panegyric compositions were for a subject to be eulogised, the individual to be addressed by their title and to note where their lineage comes from. This was always the patron that hired the bards to compose a song for them. The generosity and magnificence of the chiefs household would be praised, along with his prowess as a warrior and hunter. If the poem was composed as an elegy, the loss of the individual to the bard and kin would be emphasised, the wife (if there was one) would be mentioned. In Niall MacMhuirich's composition of 'To Ruaidhri Mór' he followed the essential fundamentals of the

panegyric pattern. We can see the pattern with the praise of the chief being a descendent of the mythical forefather of the clan MacLeod. He does this in the first line of the fourth stanza, 'The King of Olbhur's fresh spirited line.' Macmhuirich is praising the chieftain's lineage as well as creating vivid imagery of strong and healthy qualities being passed down from noble blood. He does this successfully with the words 'fresh' and 'spirited'. MacMhuirich's descriptions are very successful in showing the generosity of the chief. Within the first stanza we can see such an example of this 'Six nights for me in the fort... Liquor in plenty been drunk from gold.' Starting with the number of nights he stayed is an open marker of the chieftain's wealth, and 'six nights' of celebrations show that the union between two clans was not only a big event to celebrate but showed that the chief was rich enough to sustain the celebration for so long. The mention of 'liquor in plenty' again follows the conventions of classical verse by praising the chieftain of his open handedness, mentioning his generosity with the flow of alcohol he has given to everyone. The mention of 'Twenty times were we drunk each day' can be argued that MacMhuirich cleverly was praising the chief's wealth but also displaying his great talent for drinking a large amount of alcohol and succeeding in such a challenge. MacMhuirich also praises the might of the chief by mentioning his troops in the first, second and fourth stanzas. This was another fundamental of panegyric in where he was praising the chiefs household as well as showing it as a formidable clan.

Mary Macleod composed 'To Macleod' which closely follows the bardic conventions of traditional panegyric patterns of eulogy. She praises the greatness of the chief and his household, this can be seen in the second stanza where she describes the chieftain's hall: 'Great joyful Blyth Castle/of youths and of maidens/where drinking horns clatter was loud'. Macleod successfully creates vivid imagery of the hall that was loud and filled with life along with the drinking and merriment of the youth. Macleod praises the chief's lineage of being the 'heir of Tormod's descendants' which would strengthen the chief's ancestral lineage and nobility. She states in the last line of stanza four 'neither dissoluteness nor deceit left you dead'. Macleod is reinforcing the ideology that the chief's death was not because of some immoral act or treachery but rather that he died of natural causes. Another fundamental within the panegyric code was to praise an individual's prowess as a hunter as well as a warrior, and Macleod praises the chief's skill with his weaponry. This can be seen in stanza six with the

description of the gun which 'always yielded to its lock' meaning it never failed, and can be seen again in stanza eight with the 'heavy quiver' and arrows 'without twist or defect'. The possessions were made of the highest quality and without fault, as well as being metaphoric representations of the chieftain's personal qualities, which again was represented as flawless. Macleod's application of a kenning with the description shows her creativity with words, we see this in the last line of the fifth stanza; 'antlered white-buttocked throng'. This is a beautiful description of a stag without saying it's an actual stag, and the imagery still creates a strong white stag in the audience's mind.

The application of kennings was a useful way to reference qualities of majestic animals to that of the personal qualities of a chieftain. In the composition 'Alexander from Glengarry' Cicely MacDonald incorporates an impressive list of kennings to describe the fallen chief Alexander. We can see such examples within the last line of the second stanza 'A blue-eyed nimble powerful hawk', again in the last three lines of the fifth stanza with descriptions to 'an eagle', 'a lion' and 'the broad stag'. The comparisons to 'hawk' the 'lion', the 'eagle' and the 'stag' was a creative way in incorporating the qualities with reference to the fallen chieftain, these animals were portrayed as the kings of their natural domains. By comparing the chief to the animals MacDonald is showing not only the noble qualities that she feels the chieftain held but also connecting him to nature as a master over his domain and nature. MacDonald strengthens the connections to nature with the use of natural imagery; she likens Alexander to the grandest portrayals of the Scottish landscape. This is portrayed in the first half of the sixth stanza, with descriptions like 'Loch that couldn't be emptied' or 'generous well of health' or 'Ben Nevis above every hilltop'. The use of natural imagery portrays Alexander as the very best nature has to offer as well as being the greatest chieftain known, almost like a demigod who is near perfect. Very good. MacDonald goes on to compare the chieftain to the qualities of all the noble trees such as the 'yew', the 'strong and steadfast oak', 'Holly', 'Blackthorn' and the 'knotted blossoming Apple'. Trees were powerful icons in Gaelic poetry, they were used to describe both the negative and positive qualities and characteristics within humans. These 'metaphorical tropes' were used extensively throughout Gaelic literature and matches the reinforced concept that humankind is 'inextricably a part of nature'. With that in mind the concept was that the metaphors would be understood in the same terms and frames to the reference of trees. Scottish Gaelic tradition divided

trees into noble and non-noble classes; this is clearly seen when MacDonald records the qualities that the chieftain doesn't contain from the non-noble trees. This is seen in the last three lines of the seventh stanza; 'there wasn't a finger in you of aspen/ you had no connection with the alder/you had no relationship to the Elm'. MacDonald is showing that there was no imperfection within the chieftain's qualities and characteristics. Poets would to have had a thorough knowledge of the species of tree and their different qualities to use them successfully as a metaphor or a symbol within the compositions. MacDonald successfully uses a vast selection of 'metaphorical tropes' when describing Alexander's characteristics, which in itself shows her creativity in using her extensive knowledge of the different species of trees.

Composing eulogy and elegy within the panegyric patterns was a tradition that the bards were proud to follow. The classical bards saw it as an inheritance and a way to follow the tradition of their ancestral families by participation in the composition of praise poetry. When viewing these compositions through a 21st-century lens the panegyric code would be seen as a very strict framework with no room for imagination or individuality. What must be remembered when viewing a collection of poems is that they were composed for the audience of the time for the patrons who would pay handsomely to be praised within the traditional patterns of their forefathers, or for the kin of those fallen chieftains. We can liken these compositions to modern day eulogies where people write about the positive achievements and attributes of the individual, foregoing the negative parts of that person's life and only concentrating on the better attributes. The panegyric code was a useful framework for the bards to build upon, but you can still see the individuality within each poem as each composer takes to the fundamentals of the panegyric pattern differently. Niall Macmhuirich's composition of 'To Ruaidhri Mór' celebrates the marriage of Iain Muideartach and the daughter of the MacLeod chief. He successfully creates the vivid imagery of a grand and joyous celebration all the while hitting the essential fundamentals of the panegyric code. Mary MacLeod's composition of 'To Macleod' ticks every box of the panegyric, her beautifully descriptive rhetoric in the kennings of the eulogy successfully creates the imagery of a life that was lived to the full and you can feel the celebration of it. MacDonald shows off her skills in her composition 'Alexander from Glengarry' really beautifully with an extensive list of kennings, but also creates this image of a really well loved chieftain, who was not only the bright light in his clan but shows that the

world was now a darker place without him in it. Though these poets followed the strict framework of the panegyric, you can see that it was a very good foundation for these poets to build their compositions on and we can still see their individual interpretations of the panegyric showing through.

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Scottish Traditions, Superstitious Beliefs and Customs Surrounding Birth: One of the Main Events from the Cycle of Life

Introduction

Every single human being experiences the first stage in the cycle of life, childbirth. Though we never remember our own birth, it is the generation before us who remember and acknowledge the beginning of our existence. As Hendry stipulates 'the arrival of a completely new member of society is an occasion of ritual observance' (Hendry, 1999). In today's society the arrival of a new-born is usually met with great anticipation and excitement with little fear of uncertainty and the unexplained. Twenty First Century education for childbirth is freely available through a vast range of intrapersonal, broadcast, print and digital media (Mander & Marshall, 2016). This has not always been the case. Throughout history pregnancy and childbirth have been steeped in supernatural and religious superstitious fears, related to the unexplained and misunderstood. This resulted in many communities adopting customs and rituals, relating to these beliefs, over the centuries, to help them safeguard the basic and primal human interest of survival (Hendry, 1999). In western society today, communities are not as heavily influenced by religious fears relating to the unexplained, nor as in the past, that women were seen as a likely medium for the supernatural. In modern Scottish society we maintain some of the rituals and traditions surrounding this important part of the cycle of life. But for the most part it has become a 'behaviour prescribed by society' (Hendry, 1999).

This project is a study of past customs, beliefs and traditions that have been influenced by religion, superstition, and the fear of the supernatural in childbirth. This project will be carried out using various research methods. These include visits to multiple sites that reference the religious character of St Margaret. Along with researching traditions and customs of birth practices from the UHI Library and online journals. I will look into the influence of Religious Saints, superstition and supernatural beliefs and how these have affected the development of customs and practices leading to preparations before, during and after birth.

Methodology

I have focused on a historical research project and incorporated an ethnographic approach, where I aimed to understand the social beliefs of Scottish communities surrounding childbirth and researched their traditions and rituals (Richards & Lewis, 2003). Through the use of historical research and the site visits I aim to document societies beliefs relating to childbirth in the past. How Influences of religion, superstition and the supernatural shaped the customs of Scottish society.

I began by visiting Edinburgh Castle and Dunfermline Abbey to conduct research into The Holy Shrine and the Chapel of St Margaret. I took a tour of the castle and the Abbey. While visiting Dunfermline Abbey I took the guided tour around and listened to The Historic Scotland Guide talk about the pilgrimage cult of St Margaret. I used the UHI Library and The Internet to research the practices and rituals of childbirth from past communities. I used sources, such as books, online journals and educational websites.

Findings

The age-old saying '*it takes a village to raise a child*' could never have been more relevant in the Scottish communities of the past. Once a child was expected an announcement was made public. This would have been viewed not only as a transitioning time into the next phase of life for the infant but, it was also seen as a perilous time for the mother and child to be (Hood, n.d.). The genuine fear of death in childbirth was experienced by most women from all social standings. Although more than half the population of early modern Scotland was female, the status of women from the sixteenth through to eighteenth-century society remained obscure. Women were often omitted entirely from the historical accounts of these periods. The neglect of women in historiography is attributable to the lack of documentation on their lives (Houston & Whyte, 2005). The limited historical accounts recorded are often from the higher ranks of society, as these women were educated.

Religious Influence and Saints

Women shared the anxiety and fear of childbirth and held a strong belief in ‘God’s will’ over their fate. An example of this type of exchange was a section of a letter that the Countess of Eglinton wrote to Mrs John Murry around 1616; “*I expect you will pray for me, that I may bring forth this child and live to deserve your innumerable kindness.*” (Mander & Marshall, 2016). Religion held a strong sway over the Scottish communities regarding their practices and rituals, before the reformation of 1560. Catholicism was widely practised throughout Scotland before this. That incorporated practised rituals and prayers to Saints for miracles.

Throughout the Middle Ages pregnant women would seek to increase their chance of surviving childbirth by undertaking a pilgrimage and praying for a safe birth (Mander & Marshall, 2016). One such place was St Margaret’s shrine located in Dunfermline.



Figure I: The foundation of St Margaret’s Shrine (Powell 2019)

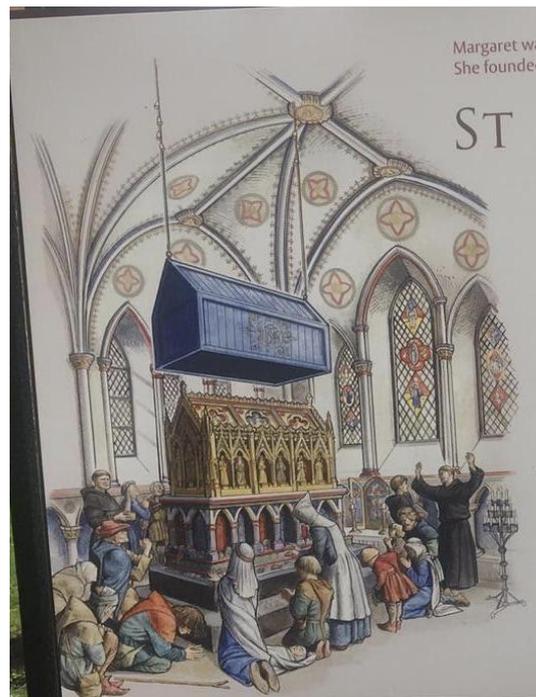


Figure II: An Illustration of St Margaret's Shrine (Powell 2019)

Local women would travel to what was believed to be a sacred sight to pray to St Margaret for protection during their pregnancy and during their 'crying' (labour) (Shaw, 1997). It was widely believed she held healing properties (Lee, 2018). Though there was no mention of these types of miracles associated with St Margaret, her 'sark' (shirt) was used as a relic during royal pregnancies of Mary of Guelders (1434-63) and her successor Margaret Tudor in 1512 during childbirth.

The fervent belief in the power of objects has been taken further to include actual body parts being used. Mary Queen of Scots constructed a gilded shrine containing the skull of St Margaret. She believed it would give her protection during her pregnancy (Lee, 2018).

In a society that believed in divine intervention, the measures to seek out the help from a deity might have increased the women's confidence in a successful outcome. The deep-seated belief in the saints even prevented Robert the Bruce from burning down St Margaret's Chapel when he won back Edinburgh castle. As well as having the opportunity of praying to a saint, women would make a donation of money to help with

the upkeep of the shrine/church. Unlike royalty who had access to 'powerful relics', women would take bed linen to be consecrated to promote safe birth and an easy recovery (Mander & Marshall, 2016).



Figure III: St Margaret's Chapel in Edinburgh (Powell 2019)

It was widely believed that a woman needed to be protected at her weakest point, such as childbirth. This was due to the common conviction that women were easy conduits for malevolent spirits and were more likely to fall prey to Satan's temptations (Ljosland, 2019). It can be argued that these misconceptions of women's weakness could have stemmed from the teachings of the fall of Adam and Eve (Genesis:3). It was widely accepted that woman and new-borns were unclean in the eyes of God after childbirth and at their most vulnerable state.

With this strong ideology the christening was a vitally important ceremony for the new-born. It was believed that the ritual would cleanse and protect the child's soul from Satan and supernatural influences. Before the reformation in the more rural and

isolated parts of Scotland where access to a priest would have been very limited, parents might have asked the 'Howdie' (midwife) attending them through birth to perform a lay baptism. Three drops of water were sprinkled over the child to represent The Holy Trinity. In other cases, children may have been taken to the local blacksmith for a ceremony over the anvil. This would have been made of iron and considered protection against fairies and malevolent spirits (Shaw, 1997).

Precautions

The days leading up to the birth of the child and shortly after were considered to be the most dangerous. For the safety of the mother and the infant, precautions were taken to protect them from physical dangers and supernatural ones.

Some of the precautions taken may seem strange under a twenty first century lens but were genuinely believed to be in the best interest of the mother and infants' safety. In 1874 Revd Walter Gregor from the North-East of Scotland shared a few of these precautionary practices. A pregnant woman was not allowed to be in the same room as one who was in labour. If it so happened, they were living under the same roof and one felt labour pains, they would take a straw or a stalk of grass and would break it repeating the words 'Ye tak yours, an I tak mine' (Bennett, 2004).

This was to ensure the that their own child would not get confused and be born to the wrong mother (Shaw, 1997). It was believed that a child's soul could be trapped within mirrors and corked jars. While the mother was in labour all the mirrors in the house were covered up and all corked jars were opened to prevent the soul from being trapped or captured (Shaw, 1997).

Another custom was that a mother who was breast feeding could not sit on the edge of the bed of a lying woman, due to the belief that this action would stop the flow of milk from the mother who was lying down. If the milk flow stopped the woman would secretly have to take the child of the mother who had caused the disappearance and with an aid of a friend pass the baby under and over her apron to bring back, her milk flow (Bennett, 2004).

Precautions against Fairies

After childbirth, the 'saining ritual' would have been performed on the mother and child. A fir-candle would have been lit and carried three times around the bed or above the head. Then a bible and cheese or a biscuit were placed under the pillow and these words were repeated, 'May the Almichty debar a' ill fae this umman an be about ir, an bliss ir an ir bairn'. This was a ritual to protect the mother from being taken away by the fairies. It was believed that fairies had a great liking for human milk and would find any opportunity to carry away unsained mothers (Bennett, 2004).

Babies cribs were made out of sacred Rowan wood and iron nails, it was seen to have repellent properties against fairies (Shaw, 1997). It was frowned upon to take children out of the room they were born in before the christening, it was believed it would tempt the fairies to come and take away the child. People genuinely feared the threat of fairies taking away their child and replacing them with a changeling in order for them to feed on the human mother's milk (Bennett, 2004). There are many folklore stories of babies with 'large heads and staring eyes who just drank and did nothing' (Hafter, 2006). Without the knowledge of twenty first century medicine, people genuinely believed that sick and disabled children were changelings left by fairies.

Signs and omens

Birth signs and omens were believed to be connected to the prediction of a child's fate in life. There was significance attached to the days and dates of a child's birth. It was believed that if you were born on the first day of the month you were lucky and if you were born on the second day of the month you were less fortunate (Shaw, 1997). It was not just the dates that held significance, there is a traditional Scottish rhyme explaining and attaching meaning to a child's temperament and quality of life based on the day they were born. The rhyme states 'Sunday's child is full of grace, Monday's child is full in the face...' (Bennett, 2004)

The belief in good luck and second sight was intertwined with unusual births and customs, as such if a caul was still present at the birth of a child they were believed to be gifted with second sight and luck (Shaw, 1997). One of the customs surrounding this belief was for the caul to be removed, dried and preserved. Those who owned a caul believed it would give them good fortune as well as it being seen as a powerful charm against drowning. Due to this belief dried cauls were highly prized amongst sailors (Bennett, 2004).

Conclusion

Looking back through history it is evident that many rituals and customs of past communities, all stemmed from the limited knowledge of medicine and lack of scientific knowledge. However, what can be argued is that religion and supernatural belief was built upon from their forefathers' and was their rational explanation of the unknown or the unexplained.

Though many beliefs and customs from the past would be seen as obsolete and archaic in today's society, for instance covering all mirrors in the house to prevent the baby's soul from being trapped or believing that luck would be bestowed upon a child born on the first day of the month. We still follow some customs even today that are influenced by religion and superstitious beliefs, such as in Catholicism people still believe in the power of prayer to saints. People still follow small rituals, without realising it, because it has always been done. The 'handselling' ritual of gifting a child with a silver coin in their hand, in the past was believed to bestow luck and wealth. (Bennett, 2004) This is continued today but may not hold the same meaning as it once did.

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Travellers of the Wilderness

Drama is the experience of watching a story being brought to life on stage. It has different elements that work to its advantage when compared with prose. These elements create an exciting experience for all types of people with different backgrounds and upbringings to enjoy. It introduces people to literature who wouldn't normally interact the same way if they were reading prose. Theatre is a form of art that can be enjoyed and understood by all on different levels, from children through to adults. This brings people together because making a play takes a lot of people and time, so many experiences and talents are put together to create something beautiful and magical. With prose it is the reader not the author who has total control of the interpretation and imagination used to understand the message of the story. On the other hand, drama happens on stage and is brought to life using different elements and mediums the author feels is important to communicate the message they are trying to portray. One example of this is the use of staging, the author can decide what is important, such as lighting, colour, music and what materials are used. All of these can have an effect on the message and can dramatically change the experience the audience has in each production. This essay will look at the use of symbolism and contemporary rhetoric language that David Greig incorporates within 'Dunsinane' to address the themes of Scottish identity, viewing the intricate political relationship shared with England as well as reclaiming the story of Macbeth through the view of a Scottish lens.

Greig cleverly combined the old with the modern to create what Bertolt Brecht defines as 'Epic theatre', where he tackles large scale ideas and topics that affect not only people but nations. This was evident in the Scottish production staging in Glasgow in 2011, the slate lined staging represented both the stone flags of Dunsinane Castle and the rocky ground of 11th century Scotland with a large Iona cross that was displayed at the top of a flight of granite stairs, located stage right. This helped set the tone and feel for a medieval Scotland. 'It was the use of un-poetic modern language that contrasted this, instead of replicating 17th century verse that Shakespeare used in 'Macbeth'. Greig brought a modern twist to the sequel of "The Scottish play" which the audience could relate to with current day events. 'Dunsinane' is an answer back

to Shakespeare's English glossed-over historical view of the story of the 'Tyrant king'. Greig highlights the 'ethico-political' dimensions of Scotland with an English lens. This was evident within the two premiers of the play (London premiered in 2010). The play's storyline unveiled the questionable military decisions made by Siward and the English army in the invasion and occupation of Scotland. "We'll set a new king in Dunsinane... Summer will come... By next spring it will be as if there never was a fight here." Through the misleading information given by Malcolm, the naïve idea of establishing him to the throne, the misinterpreted ideology that peace would be easy to obtain after was far more complex and well-nigh impossible to obtain. Greig had the American British occupation of Iraq in mind when he wrote this play, it was the ongoing Afghanistan campaign and the continual bloodshed that the audience members resonated with and made reference to with regards to this play.

The play's warning of political intervention with the misleading ideology of stabilisation for foreign countries is not only applicable to the American British intervention in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria but also looking back on South African history, heavily resonates with the British Empire's reasoning for the invasion into the Boers Orange Free State and Transvaal. The British aspirations for global dominance was not the only reason for the driving force of stabilisation in its control over South Africa against the growing tensions between them and the Boer free states. In an article 'Biedrošanās un vientulība', Bluamanis highlights The British actions in the Transvaal was driven by no other motive than greed. It was not because of President Kruger's restrictions put onto 'Uitlanders' (foreigners) after assessing all of them as a threat due to the discovery of gold in the Witwatersrand. The British wanted full control over the goldmines in order to stabilise the British pound which was based on the gold standard but also to neutralise the rising threat the Boers presented with their fast-growing wealth. Although the British won in South Africa, the cost of military mortality was high. Similarly, Siward paid a high price for his poor decision to forcibly unite Scotland with marriage of Malcolm and Gruach, "So England proposes a marriage... we would enforce it.". He believed by marrying off the potential threat Gruach posed, to Malcolm, it would serve England two-fold with a King pliable to English control and no opposing claims to the Scottish throne. The deluded belief he would achieve peace, cost him the actual peace he could have brokered with Gruach when she offered a marriage

between herself and him. The high mortalities that followed Gruach's escape could have been avoided if he hadn't heavily underestimated her political capabilities.

Glasgow's production in 2011 interestingly took on a whole new relevance and was seen in a new critical perspective. With an overwhelming SNP victory in the Scottish elections, the political relationship between Scotland and England became more focused and relevant to Scottish audience, with the independence debate focused on more than ever before as Salmond pushed for the possibility of an independent Scotland in his re-election speech he quoted, "wish to see... Scotland and England stand together as equals... Difference between partnership and subordination." This worked really well with the play being set before the unification of Britain, the use of contemporary rhetoric speech and the medieval backdrop suggested to the audience that the idea of a future Scotland could 'somehow be found in its past'.

The play is divided into four sections and labelled the four seasons of the year which enabled Greig to highlight the deterioration, growing disillusionment and brutality of the English army towards the Scottish which turned their environment hostile and more alien over time. The audience could see parallels with the deterioration between the English army and the resistance of Scotland to the current deterioration of political relations between England and Scotland, even more so in recent days after the referendum results on Brexit. The four sections of the play are divided into sections that coincides with the seasons that are symbolic for how the play develops with the traits of each season. For example, spring symbolises the new beginning of a Scottish reign with Malcolm on the throne. Summer sees the growth and continuation with English occupation solidified, with the army establishing themselves in Dunsinane as well as Siward becoming romantically involved with Gruach. Autumn, with the turning weather, saw a bitter turn of events from the celebration to that of bloodshed. With Siward's mistake of underestimating Gruach's resourcefulness, their relationship in itself can be symbolised as the relationship between Scotland and England. Which leads to the final section of the play, like death, winter's representation of stillness a bitter end to all things such as Siward's relationship with Gruach coming to an unhappy stand-off where neither win. Like Shakespeare with 'Macbeth', Greig brings the end of his play to a full circle where the last line of the play "And then there is only white." points to a promising new beginning for Scotland.

Greig is able to successfully tackle large-scale ideas and topics that affect not only people and nations through the combination of the old with the modern. He does this with using an 11th century backdrop, setting the tone for an ancient Scotland before the unification of Britain, but with the contemporary rhetoric language of today. He was able to merge historical context with today's sentiment and debate to successfully allow the audience to be reached on multiple levels. The context of the referendum in 2014 allowed Greig's play to draw comparisons and feelings regarding English oppression of Scotland both in the past and today and creates an opportunity for discussion regarding Scottish Independence. Not only that, the audience could relate to the important questions Greig raises over British military involvement in the intervention of foreign countries with the preconceived ideology of peace. The audience can draw reference to the issues addressed in current affairs like Afghanistan and Iraq through the descriptive story Greig paints. This play drew similar relevance to reflections of South African history with the British involvement in the Boer wars. The use of symbolism within the seasons, shows the deterioration of Scottish tolerance to the disdain England has towards them. The intention of peace could no longer be used to justify the brutal actions done in its name. The symbolism of Siward and Gruach's relationship has parallels to England's relationship with Scotland in the sense that it is the English who now prevent peace. I respect and like his argument for Scotland's Independence and it reminds me of how South Africa had to fight for its independence. Likewise, in life and society it is a reminder of the importance of respect and humility in relationships whether that is between countries, businesses or individuals.

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Sophie Wink

How effective is autobiographical performance in contextualising large-scale issues?

If the new [autobiographical] performance remains centered on the self – yet not self-centered – it can potentially become the most affecting form of political theatre. (Robinson et al, 1987:55)

Robinson discusses here that autobiographical performance can provide a new innovative way to examine wide-spread socio-political issues because it considers personal experiences. I will be focusing on this argument to evaluate the efficacy of autobiographical performance in contextualising the global issue of Dementia, using my autonomous performance, *Making Coffee*, as a case study. I will do this by critically evaluating my process from idea conception to performance paying particular attention to my research, storyline, autobiography and audience response (the performance aspect will be based on the work-in-progresses, as due to the global pandemic of COVID-19 the final performance was not possible). I will be discussing my use of multirole and character development (in consideration to practitioners such as Chekhov and Brecht), and my experimentation with multimedia throughout my autonomous piece to determine how well these elements support the autobiographical work and its engagement with global issues.

Researching the disease was an integral part of *Making Coffee* because the representation of dementia throughout the story needed to be accurate yet sensitive due to it being a real condition affecting hundreds of thousands of lives, although this was also necessary to appropriately contextualise the issue. To do this I highlighted the commonalities of the disease considering its characteristics, to break the information down so it is accessible for myself to digest and interpret and it was also essential in developing my characters. Furthermore, the commonalities provided me with inspiration for each scene, by highlighting a specific characteristic that my characters can respond to. This places emphasis on their experiences with the disease, providing me with scope to showcase their relationship and how it changes with disease progression. This process of breaking down the information (by focusing

on one characteristic at a time) allows it to become more digestible for an audience too, making the piece more effective by avoiding overwhelming my audience.

My main concern regarding the storyline was the successful portrayal of dementia. I combatted this doubt by extensive research and by peer-reviewing within a writing workshop. My feedback concluded that the portrayal of the disease was both appropriate and mindful. As a writer and performer there is a responsibility of creating a positive working relationship with your audience, to do this I offered two different perspectives: mother and daughter, within the storyline using Brecht's multirole. This allows for the audience and performer relationship to grow by giving them multiple ways to connect with the characters presented; through, for example, sympathy and relatability. This technique also promotes and supports the story's awareness of dementia as a real condition that is a social issue because there is no cure, taking the audience on a journey of waiting for the inevitable. I believe this recognition allows for the successful portrayal of the disease within my story.

To further the success of this portrayal I aimed to place emphasis on their individual experiences. To do this, I drew inspiration from performance practitioners such as Brecht and Chekhov. Brecht's *Gestus* was particularly important in providing the technique to my autonomy as 'an embodiment of the social relationships' (Unwin, 2016: 62) created between Mother and Daughter who are challenged by disease, emphasising the role reversal of the relationship. This technique also implemented a mode of differentiation between characters, which upon audience feedback was effective as the distinction was clear; however, it was noted that I should slow down the transition between characters to allow the text to take effect. Therefore, throughout the rehearsal process I slowed my pacing down by adapting my breath control to manage my nerves and emphasise the technique between transition. My feedback also indicated that differentiation could be developed further with my use of voice. Taking this into consideration for future performances I will experiment with accent and dialect. Using Chekhov's psychological gesture allowed me to 'entice, provoke and coax' (Chekhov, 2014: 63) my feelings through physical means such as stance and posture, and is therefore integral to character development in order to heighten the emotional value. I believe this was successful as I had no criticisms regarding believability. However, I do believe that I could have used this more frequently during the rehearsal process because it would have aided my connection with both

characters. Instead a lot of my rehearsal was taken up with line-learning, which was bad time management on my part. I, in future, will make more time outside the rehearsal room to develop my piece as this will allow me to focus on the authentic portrayal of the characters. The audience's emotional connection with the characters (influenced by my portrayal of them) is relevant to the efficacy of this performance because it increases the accessibility by providing multiple experiences or emotions for individuals to connect with.

Using my autonomous performance as a case study I recognise that the action within the story contextualises the autobiographical narrative voice by demonstrating its relationship to me: that for me this particular circumstance is hypothetical, with the knowledge and understanding that for many others it is not. Using a fictitious story in line with the autobiography acts as a personal contextualisation of dementia, supporting the efficacy of the autobiographical performance by placing emphasis on different experiences. This strengthens the efficacy of my performance because it unifies the audience and performer. As a practitioner experimenting with this form of performance, it is clear to me that personal contextualisation of social issues informs and provides a basis for the relationship between audience and performer, by asking them to reflect upon how an experience with, in this case, dementia may affect their lives.

The autobiographical narrative acted as a personal and factual voice commenting on the action of the story. The learning of dementia was harrowing and hard, but it was also humbling to imagine myself and my family in the situation. I chose to include facts, figures and statistics throughout the autobiography because it allows for my audience to trust me, increasing my validity by showing I have done my research. Govan maintains that, 'large-scale traumas... can prove to be overwhelming and incomprehensible' (2007: 61) which is why it was important that any factual information was also personable, so I broke down the statistics to affect both myself and the audience. The incomprehensibility was also addressed by contextualising the issue in the form of a mother-daughter relationship. By '[directly addressing the] audience... it recognises a dialogue between performer and audience' (Govan, 2007: 69) allowing the statistic to increase its impact by increasing the transparency in the relationship. I believe this worked well because, from audience feedback, they were 'moved' by my performance. Also, as a performer, I felt the bond of trust between myself and the

audience, which I think increased my emotional response to the piece, humanising my autobiographical voice by being honest with my audience. As Govan discusses here:

‘Presenting authentic detail from the performer’s experience opens up personal memories for the audience members’ (2007: 65)

meaning that being transparent with an audience about your connection to the subject matter opens up an opportunity for an audience to reflect upon their own connection. So, although I wasn’t presenting experiences (instead, I was presenting *hypothetical* experiences which explored my feelings towards the subject), I think this still allowed audience members to draw on their personal experiences, but also opened a window for them to imagine what-if. This furthers the efficacy of my performance by allowing members of my audience who do not have experience with dementia to access the piece emotively. I found this experience to deepen my appreciation for my parents by recognising their mortality which already has such weight to it. The sheer gravity of this recognition is why it was particularly difficult to write and took much longer than expected. From this, I have learned that the writing simply needs more time overall to increase its effectiveness emotionally on an audience and with the autobiography.

To adhere to my aims of trying new things, I also decided to experiment with multimedia. Originally, I had proposed to use microphones to highlight the autobiography, and live camera. Unfortunately, due to my poor time management, I did not allow for enough time to practice with a live camera during my rehearsal process; however, I don’t think it was necessary as the liveness element added by the live camera was already achieved through multirole and with microphones. Reflectively, I think the addition of another element would have overloaded the performance when what was important was the simplicity due to the weight of the subject at hand.

When I was rehearsing with the microphones, what I found most interesting was that, when I used the microphones, my fellow practitioners in the room tended to stop what they were doing and listen. This indicated to me that the microphones did exactly what I had intended they do: bring attention to my voice. This attention placed emphasis on the idiosyncrasies of my voice such as breath and emotion, therefore highlighting my humanness accentuating my vulnerability. This vulnerability makes me more relatable

to my audience, which makes them more likely to engage with the subject matter therefore enhancing the efficacy of the piece. I believe the use of microphones was a successful aspect of my performance because, from audience feedback, it emphasised my autobiography. By illustrating an authenticity in one's voice; exposing truth establishes a unique connection with an audience. I have learned that the connection between a performer and their autobiography is like no other because the honesty presented is raw and unfiltered. If *Making Coffee* was to be performed by another actor, I think it would only remain effective if they write their own autobiographical response; otherwise it would puncture the authenticity of the piece, of which makes it so effective.

I also experienced my audience being open and honest with me by sharing their personal experiences after my performance, which was unexpected yet affirming because it shows that I created an atmosphere that allowed for such openness and authenticity. This indicates that I have successfully contextualised a wide-spread issue as it has been processed and interpreted by my audience. It also emphasises that autobiography better engages the audience and creates a supportive network between audience and performer promoting the efficacy of autobiographical performance.

In relation to my question, by using my autonomous performance as a case study, it is clear to me is that the efficacy of autobiographical performance in contextualising wide-spread issues is indicated in the relationship between performer and audience. To contextualise the issue at hand, the information must be broken down to create mass impact for both performer and the audience. It is important that this information is digestible because it makes the factual personable, allowing both performer and audience to connect with the information. Having both performer and audience connect with the same pieces of information establishes a relationship. The growth of that relationship is dependent on the authenticity and transparency of the autobiography: the performers connection with their autobiography is inherently authentic simply because it is the performer that wrote it however, the engagement with the autobiography is also key.

Being engaged in the moment is of course key to all performance practice but with autobiographical work this dynamic is heightened as performers seek to

make real connections with the audience through the revelation of self.
(Govan, 2007:66)

As Govan discusses, by directly emphasising one's experiences of, connection to, and their vulnerability in relation to the subject matter, one increases the credibility of the relationship between oneself and the audience. The honesty and genuineness of the autobiography of the performer is, in my experience, what creates the bond of trust with the audience, as they are able to relate to the humanness presented. This is where the efficacy is highlighted; the relationship provides connection through personal experience and emotion allowing for individuals in the audience an opportunity to expose their vulnerability too. This creates a space for both performer and audience to be vulnerable and showcases just how effective autobiographical performance is in contextualising wide-spread issues.

Reflectively, this experience has been meaningful, rewarding and very humbling. It has emphasised my style as a practitioner: using a Brechtian approach through Gestus and multirole; performance elements I wish to use in the future. I found using an autobiographical narrative challenging emotionally but also cathartic, it allowed me to connect further with my fellow practitioners as the form provided a supportive network allowing the expression of vulnerability. By 'performing [autobiographical] narrative we discover the human capacity to continue storytelling' (Langellier and Peterson, 2004: 242) improving the efficacy of the form and promoting togetherness by allowing conversation of individual experiences relating to wide-spread social issues.

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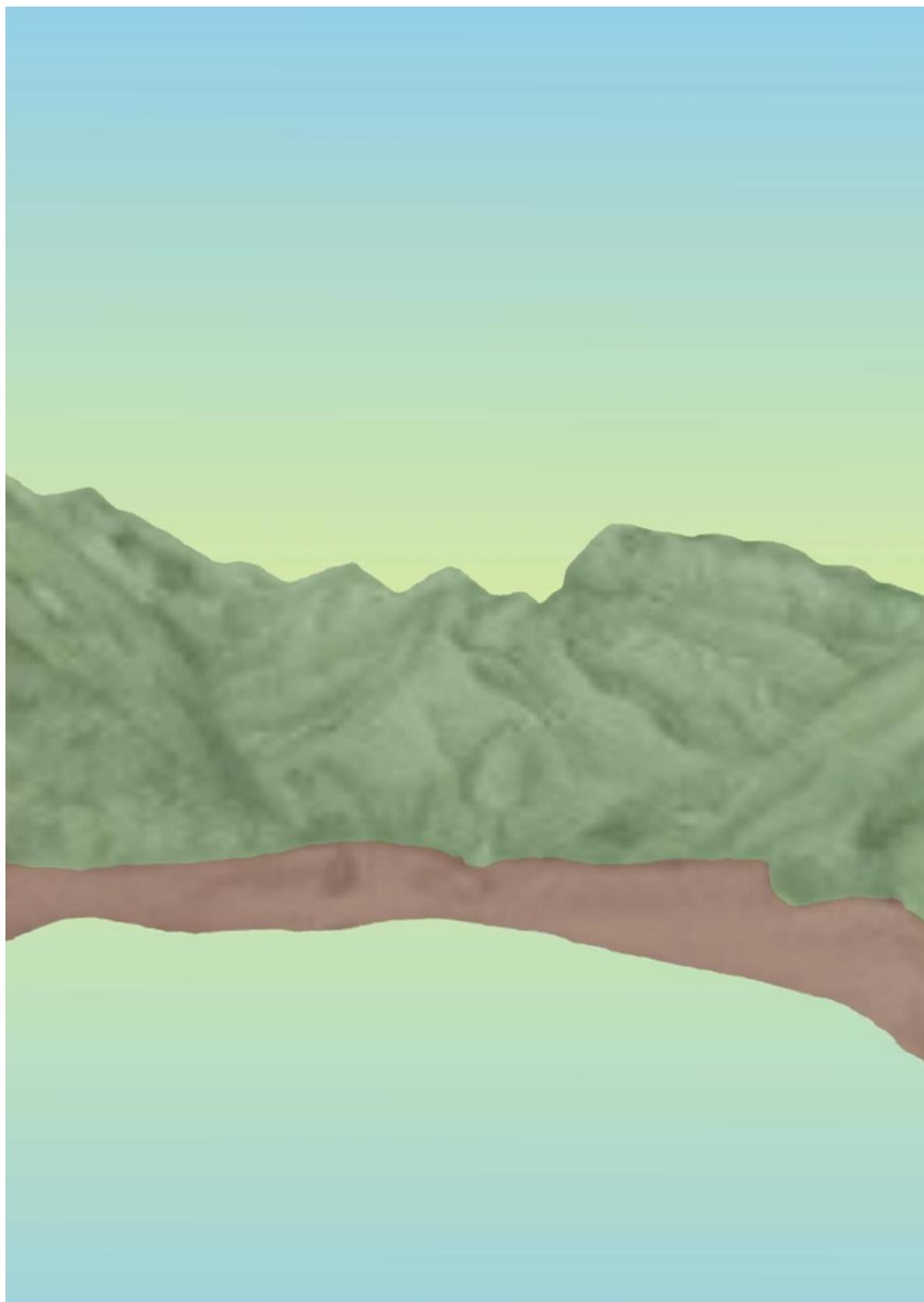
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Art Competition Submissions

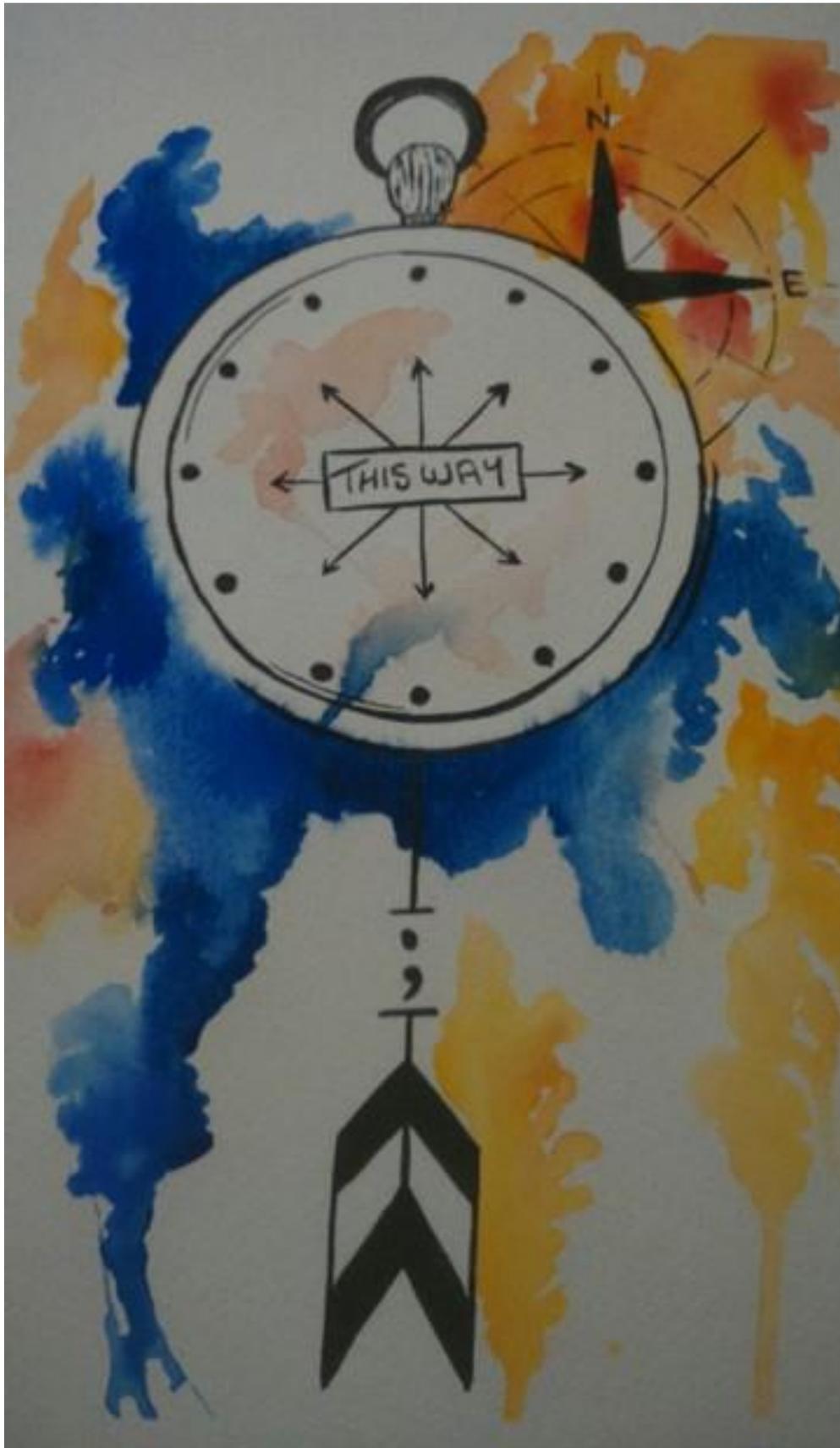


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