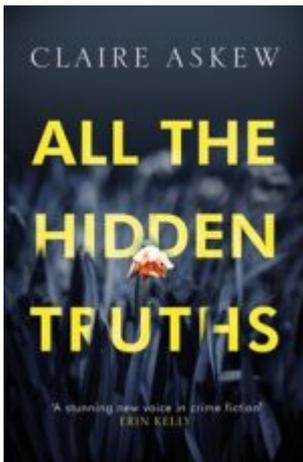


# Best Scottish Books of 2018

What did Scotland's writers have on their minds in 2018? Everything you can imagine, and more! And to help you keep track, ASLS has asked authors, critics, academics, and members of the literary sector to tell us about their favourite Scottish book from this past year. The book could be in English, Scots, or Gaelic, it could be published for the first time in 2018 or re-issued this year, and could be a work of fiction, poetry, or academic research. And what a wonderful list it is. We've got some well-kent faces here and exciting new ones, and they all show the breadth and vibrance of Scotland's writing culture. There is something for everyone, so get comfy, and have a browse through the Best Scottish Books from 2018. The list is organised by title. If your favourite isn't here, let us know about it!

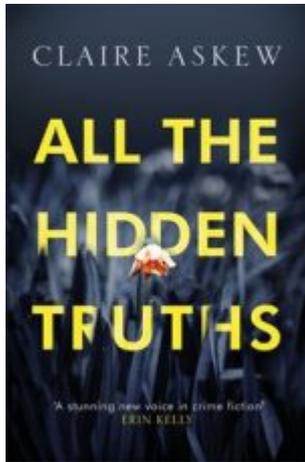


## ***All the Hidden Truths* by Claire Askew | Hodder & Stoughton, 2018**

— chosen by Heather McDaid, Publishing Director at 404 Ink, Books Editor at *The Skinny*, and an award-winning freelancer

*All The Hidden Truths* is a bizarre crime novel, in that you know the crime happened, you know how, and you know who did it. So what is there to solve? Instead, readers are taken through the stages of grief after tragedy, as it turns to anger, and something more insidious. Askew's exploration of the aftermath of a school shooting in the UK is heartbreaking and difficult, and really splices open conversations around toxic masculinity, posing massacres as both terrors and successes against the feminist agenda, depending on which characters you turn to. Can you find an answer? Can you find peace when the killer isn't around to answer? While the crime seems clear cut to the reader, the finger of blame is pointed in all directions — a mirror to today's response and press coverage around tragedies. What did the mother do? Why didn't she stop him? What did the

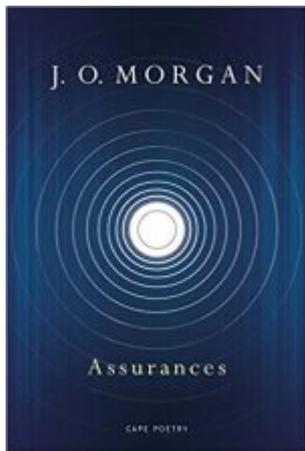
girls do to warrant their fate? *All The Hidden Truths* is a gripping read and one that you dip into, but find yourself compulsively page-turning, looking for answers you couldn't possibly get. It's very good, very sad, and uses death as a jumping off point to explore the bigger, more uncomfortable questions around death and blame. An incredible read.



***All the Hidden Truths* by Claire Askew | Hodder & Stoughton, 2018**

— chosen by Theresa Muñoz, poet and critic

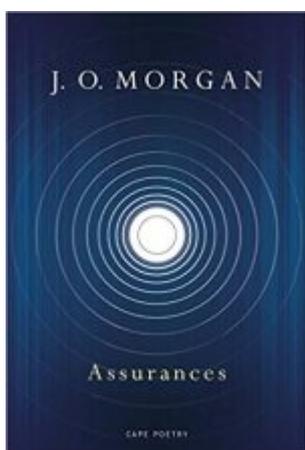
My pick for *Best Scottish Books 2018* is Claire Askew's *All the Hidden Truths*. Askew has established a reputation as a fine poet and has now turned her talented hand to fiction. Though generally categorised as 'crime fiction', her book is not exactly that. It turns on an achingly familiar scenario: thirteen young women killed at a college campus with the young male shooter committing suicide at the scene. Early in the book, a Wikipedia extract gives us the basics of what happened and names the perpetrator. The narrative is in three voices: the female police officer who is put in charge of the case, the mother of one of the victims and the mother of the shooter. Between them, the three women create an extraordinary exploration of grief, guilt, fear and loss. Pulsing away in the background is social media and its power to promote truth and lies, create conspiracy theories, blame and punish. In short, this is a novel for our times and a truly extraordinary debut.



***Assurances* by J. O. Morgan | Jonathan Cape, 2018**

— chosen by Niall Campbell, a poet from the Outer Hebrides

I had the rather complicated pleasure of reading over 200 poetry collections as part of this year's Forward Poetry Prize - and in among the piles (oh there were piles!) were some terrific books with connections to Scotland. *Who is Mary Sue?* by Sophie Collins (shortlisted for this year's Saltire Poetry Book of the Year) is a great first collection. It's punchy, innovative, I admire how the poems strike out boldly on their own terms - part poetry, part collage of thoughts - it's a sophisticated co-weaving. Do look out for it. Continuing, I would like to say something stupid, especially given the context: but I can't help feeling that we slightly underrate the poet J.O. Morgan. A potentially stupid comment as he is published by one of the largest UK presses, is garlanded by shortlisted for all the major prizes, and yet ... seems always on the periphery of the conversation regarding Scottish poetry. This past year he published *Assurances* and it is, again, an exceptional book. Rhythmic and unsettling, it imagines lives lived in the threat of atomic warfare, interspersing such passages with rich moments of reflection on life and longing. It's great stuff.



***Assurances* by J. O. Morgan | Jonathan Cape, 2018**

— chosen by Helena Nelson, poet and founder-editor of HappenStance Press

If you had four minutes — *precisely* four — before the world was going to end, what would you do? Everything in this verse novella hinges on the fact that

nuclear annihilation might — at any moment of any day — commence. A male navigator, one of an airborne deterrent crew, keeps winding his watch: ‘The military state of mind is one of alertness, / nothing more than that. To be wound up tight one moment and then: just / as tight the next.’ His watch gains fifteen seconds a day—practically negligible, except in the context of four minutes. When ‘the warning is given, / those few minutes granted’, a female spy steps outside into a garden and waits ‘for all the quicknesses in her / to be wrenched out, to leave her egg-blown’. One instant of redemption is balanced against another of disintegration, the reader compelled by fluid twists of pace and style. But the pilot and crew resist orders. The machines resist agreement. The man and woman meet. I know no other writer who can escalate musical narrative to such tender and poignant resolution: ‘How still they stand, / one’s fingers pushing backward / slowly through the other’s hair. / And of such stillness, of such touch, / it’s here they find / there is no need, no want, / for any more than this.’ Is it the end of the world? Or the beginning?



***The Book of Scotlands* by Momus (Nick Currie) | Luath, 2018**

— chosen by Carla Sassi, Professor of English Literature at the University of Verona

Surreal, dark, witty and exhilarating, this is one of the subtlest parodies of ‘Scotland’ - as a concept, ideal or project - ever to be written. *The Book* evokes over 160 ‘possible’ Scotlands, numbered and listed in jumbled order, and captured in pithy aphorisms, visionary sketches or autobiographical cameos. There is no stone left unturned as Momus (the Greek god of mockery, aka Scottish songwriter, author and blogger Nick Currie) gathers and deconstructs every possible notion of Scotland ever conceived, from mythical to historical, from ancient to contemporary, from social to political, from globally relevant to pettily idiosyncratic. Originally published in 2009, its implacable dissection of the author’s native country’s imagination has no doubt grown in appeal since its first appearance, as the past decade’s accelerated succession of epochal events and changes have trained us to accept that the impossible is (unfortunately) possible.

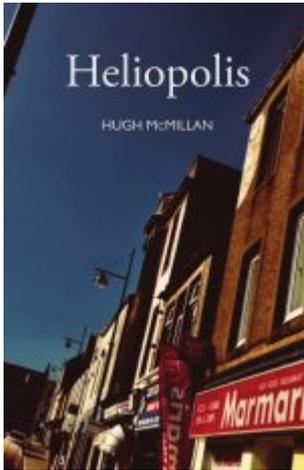
Is there any hope to reconcile this chaotic and evanescent record of im/possibilities within a feasible 'national' project? If so, this is tentatively offered in the more articulated "Scotland 88" section: 'Love, even self-love, often starts off as a lie. But it's a virtuous and transformative lie [...] If you believe contentment is something [...] a nation should aspire to, you have to accept that self-contentment might be a perfectly reasonable way to achieve it.'(p. 93) Those who are more skeptical about Scotland's future, however, will probably enjoy more the aphoristic "Scotland 73": 'Would the last to leave Scotland please switch off the light?' (p.125)



***The Growing Season* by Helen Sedgwick | Penguin, 2018 (2017)**

— chosen by Ali Bowden, Director of Edinburgh UNESCO City of Literature Trust

My outstanding book for 2018 is Helen Sedgwick's *The Growing Season*. This is an impressive and intriguing story, quietly told. It is set in an alternate reality - where a major scientific discovery has affected reproduction - and the book offers a glimpse of a possible future. This is a story told with intelligence and skill. It has a clear structure with three narratives that each present a distinct viewpoint and slowly lead you to understand the background to, and the implications of, such a shift in technology and power. Perhaps because it proposes a fundamental shift in something so universal - to give birth, to create a family, to be part of a family - it makes a quick and deep connection with you as the reader. Long after I'd put the book down I was still unravelling the implications, still pondering the characters' motivations, dealing with the emotional punch the book delivers, and looking at my own world with fresh eyes. It's a book that leads you to ask questions of yourself and the world, to think again about the most fundamental of relationships, to question what it is biology locks us into. The book has garnered comparisons to the work of Angela Carter and Margaret Atwood, and it deserves them; so I say find this book, read this book, watch out for this author.



***Heliopolis* by Hugh McMillan | Luath Press, 2018**

— chosen by Stuart A. Paterson, poet and performer in Scots and English

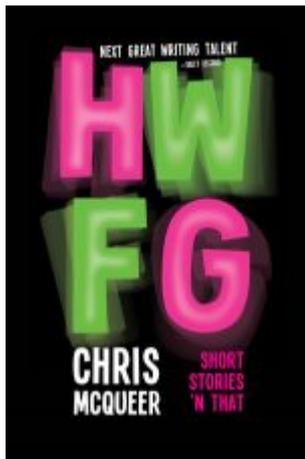
Hugh McMillan's *Heliopolis* sees the poet explore familiar and newer themes with equal candour and lyricism. Dumfries and Galloway, its voiceless people and neglected history, permeates most of this engaging, accessible and occasionally, shockingly honest collection. McMillan's not afraid to look inside the biscuit tin and tell us it's not all shortbread and tartan. In fact, it rarely is and despite his obvious passion for Scottish and Gallovidian culture (he often refers to Dumfries and Galloway, not without basis, as 'a giant theme park') he feels it his artistic and human duty to point out what the brochures, guides and TV historians don't say. His poems can sometimes be all the more eye-opening for couching such (in my view) refreshingly welcome views in language and phrase both lyrical and imaginative. Hyperborea, an idyllic somewhere of permanent warmth and sunshine, sits uneasily beside the reality of home where:

*Dykes twist to the horizon.  
Where are the men who built them?  
Gone to Nova Scotia  
with their pipes and neckerchiefs.  
(‘The Old Fort at Grennan’)*

The dispossessed, the disenfranchised, from past, vast monumental land clearances and forced migrations from the Port of Dumfries to the current steady outflow of the new generation due to lack of opportunity and work, are all given poignant voice in an elegiac tone which runs through *Heliopolis* like the beautiful, cold flow of the Nith through Dumfries. McMillan still surprises with a sardonic or witty phrase which elevates and brings a smile, an occasional belly laugh. And history is all well and good and a rich topography for re-imagination and learning. But it's the poetry that wins out, as he refreshingly writes in 'Queran's Well', a

beautiful poem which concludes that:

*History is a book, words  
crowding to the edge  
till there's no room left.  
But memories? They are unending  
walks in the rain.*

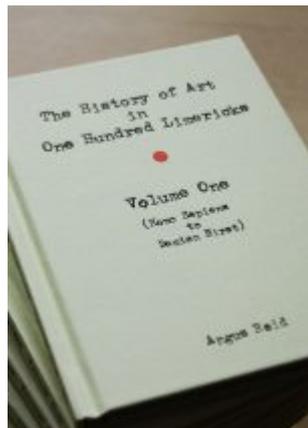


***HWFG* by Chris McQueer | 404 Ink, 2018**

— chosen by Alan Bissett, a multi-award winning playwright, novelist and performer from Falkirk

Every ten years or so, a young Scottish writer comes along to detail working-class life with enough demotic energy, humour and pathos to unlock an army of readers who had previously found themselves alienated by 'literary fiction'. Chris McQueer is undoubtedly one of those writers, in the realist-absurd tradition of Irvine Welsh, Laura Hird, Gordon Legge and Limmy. His previous short story collection, *Hings*, was the sort of unexpected success we're not used to seeing anymore: a debut from an independent Scottish publisher which found an audience not through winning prestigious prizes, receiving extensive review coverage or being backed by a huge marketing campaign, but through sheer force of its own charms. That collection's legion of fans will be delighted by *HWFG* (and how I wish bookshops were bold enough for its actual title, *Here We Fuckin Go*), as it contains the same mix of verbal pyrotechnics and cavalier storytelling, with the added bonus of an emotional darkness and layering this time around. This signifies both an evolution and an even greater future maturity. Never afraid to give society, or his characters, a gid skelping, while still finding room in his heart to love even the edgiest and most troubling of his narrators, McQueer proves himself a natural observer of schemie culture. In defiance of the increasing gentrification of fiction (sometimes it seems as though the punk revolution of the Nineties never happened) McQueer reminds that us sometimes all a good writer

needs is a pen, a good eye and the gift of the gab. Here we fuckin go, indeed.



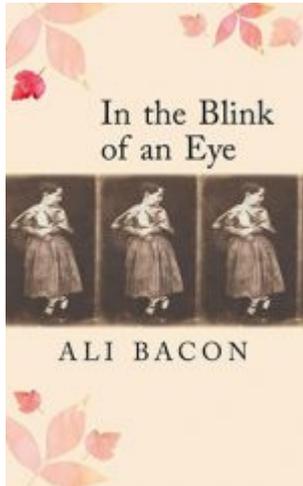
***The History of Art in One Hundred Limericks* by Angus Reid | Luath, 2018**

— chosen by Ken Cockburn, poet and translator, author of *Floating the Woods* (Luath, 2018)

Angus Reid is a poet, painter and film-maker, and he combines his verbal and visual skills in this partial, playful and provocative gallop through Masters Old and New. The limericks themselves aim to convey something essential about an artist and their work in five lines; here is the Scottish-Italian sculptor Eduardo Paolozzi:

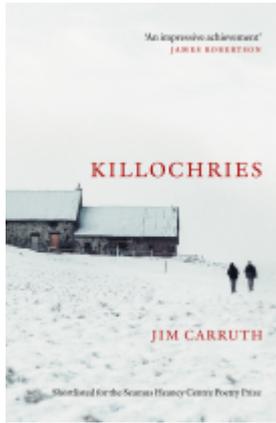
*Consider the magpie Paolozzi,  
who takes all of art as his proxy;  
confronting a classic  
he'll take it and smash it  
then glue it back up with epoxy.*

A clever design presents poems typewritten on scraps of paper, attached with a paper-clip to an image they offer a pithy comment on. As for the images themselves, their selection required a judicious search for material not subject to expensive royalties, so we get a shot of Jackson Pollock's studio floor, which doesn't in fact look so different from one of his drip paintings. The final limerick on Damien Hirst is one of several to offer an caustic opinion on art and commerce. A set of notes at the back tease out further resonances of the poem / image combinations; when Dalí met Franco, Rothko's seven-ingredient 'recipe' for art, when exactly Bomberg wore his homburg. This is the first in a projected series of four; may the rhymes keep coming.



***In the Blink of an Eye* by Ali Bacon | Linen Press, 2018**  
— chosen by Catherine Czerkawska, author of fiction, non-fiction and plays for radio and theatre

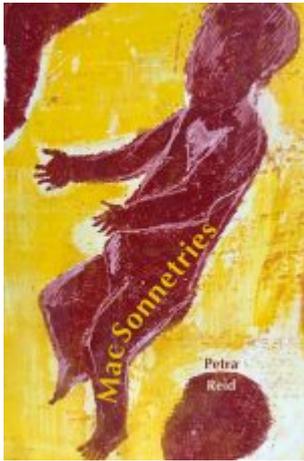
Scots-born writer and St Andrew's University graduate, Ali Bacon, sets her story mostly in mid-1800s Edinburgh and writes in a luminous, elegant prose that reflects her subject matter perfectly. In 1843, Edinburgh artist, David Octavius Hill, was commissioned to paint the portraits of 400 ministers who had broken away from the Church of Scotland. When he met Robert Adamson, an early exponent of photography, the pair found a way to facilitate the huge task that the artist had set himself, but between them, Hill and Adamson found so very much more: a way of turning the new science of photography into the art it would become. This is a glorious patchwork quilt of a novel. Structurally complex, it is accurate as to time and place, but above all wonderfully engaging and moving. Bacon climbs inside the minds of a variety of characters, especially the women in Hill and Adamson's milieu. All are brought satisfyingly to life, from the pioneering Jessie Mann, with her own passionate interest in photography, to Hill's beloved daughter, Chattie. Never far from the reader's mind is the notion that these women's lives are often circumscribed by the time and place in which they find themselves, and yet that notion is never allowed to dominate the novel. This is an important book about love and loss, about art and science, above all about friendship. The author wears her learning lightly, brilliantly handling a multitude of perspectives without ever losing her (and our) thread. Historical fiction at its best.



### ***Killochries* by Jim Carruth | Birlinn, 2018 (2017)**

— chosen by Brian Johnstone, poet, writer & performer

There has been a wide variety of nature writing available in recent years. A fashionable genre, much of it functions as a source of retreat from the pressures of modern life. Not so Jim Carruth's *Killochries*, a harsh take on a harsh environment. Also of the moment is the 'verse novel', a genre into which this book might be said to fit. It tells the story, over a single year, of a damaged, city-bred individual exiled - for that is the predicament he is in - to the isolated hill farm of a distant relative. This relative is an aged sheep farmer, caring for a bed-ridden mother and, more importantly, for a flock of Blackface ewes and a rapidly deteriorating farm. What is not particularly in the fashion, though, is redemption - through work, solitude, silence, self-denial. This is the redemption the exile finds through a gradual coming to understand the nature of the old shepherd's life. In a language as tough and unforgiving as the environment it evokes, Jim Carruth captures a way of life whose very extinction we are witnessing today. The level of understanding and empathy he is able to convey through the interaction of the two lead characters is masterful, and ultimately life-affirming. Reading this book-length sequence is an experience as close to the epiphany the young man undergoes as a year on the hill itself.



***MacSonnetries: The Buds of May be* by Petra Reid | Scotland Street Press, 2018 (2017)**

— chosen by Jameela Muneer, teacher, solicitor, writer, and would-be ukulele player

I loved Petra Reid's *MacSonnetries: The Buds of May be*, a witty sequence of 154 sonnets, with a contemporary postmodern twist. Each sonnet stands alone: the *May be* after the *Buds* suggests a joyful irreverence. Each poem is a response to Shakespeare's original. It employs the Golden Shovel method, maintaining the Bard's line endings in every sonnet. I did not immediately notice this at first reading: the structure is unobtrusive. Reid glides effortlessly over the social, political, cultural, and ideological mores of our times. The imagery of social media, computers and artificial intelligence, is juxtaposed humorously with Shakespeare's concerns over procreation, jealousy and mutability. One of my favourite lines from Sonnet 65 becomes 'Since jobs, nor shifts, nor hours, nor rising sea' — I laughed out loud, not resenting the liberty taken by Reid. Shakespeare's Sonnet 2 provokes the nonchalant feminist response that fillers can produce 'baby bum smooth skin'; seventy-year olds can look like twenty somethings nowadays. Elsewhere there are references to Rupert Murdoch and Jerry Hall: 'she will make him last for ever'. Madonna, Nigella, and domestic goddesses also get a mention. I relished the online dating advice: 'only post your happy' bits because 'bingo wings selfies so cruelly show', as well as 'how to drop that sinful extra stone'. Subprime mortgages, non-Doms in London, Kim Kardashian and Tinder with Toy-boys are all covered. Finally, Shakespeare's Sonnets 104, 105, rendered into Scots, reveal Reid's skill in this medium too. This erudite versatile collection offers the double pleasure of rereading Shakespeare, and Reid's responses, separately, or side by side.



***The Mandelbaum Gate* by Muriel Spark | Muriel Spark  
Centenary Editions | Birlinn, 2018**

— chosen by Ajay Close, novelist, playwright and journalist

Deliciously observed characters, jewelled ironies, comedy, cruelty, the dark immanence of divine purpose: the classic components of a Muriel Spark novel are all present in *The Mandelbaum Gate*, but the trademark faint ticking of the watchmaker plot is drowned out by a beating heart. This thrillerish, thematically ambitious tale of geopolitics and identity may or may not be autobiographical (who knows?), but it has the meaty whiff of life. Barbara Vine is a Catholic 'half Jew' unsure who - or what - she is: Anglo-Saxon or Semitic, spinster or sexual wanton, pious convert or an apostate prepared to jeopardise her immortal soul by marrying a divorced man. Waiting to hear if Rome will sanction the match, she makes a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. It's 1961. The city is divided between Israel and Jordan. Determined to visit the Jordanian Biblical sites where her Jewish blood puts her at risk of being shot as an Israeli spy, she enlists the help of Freddie, a sexually closeted English diplomat, and the liberated Arab travel agent Suzi Ramdez. But no one in this novel is quite what they seem. Every character breaks out of their box - with the exception of Adolf Eichmann, encased in reinforced glass, parrying questions about the Holocaust with droning bureaucratise. The day Barbara spends watching his trial is described in five brief pages, but the questions raised about human capability cast a chilling shadow over this engaging, funny, profoundly serious book.

LOUISE  
WELSH

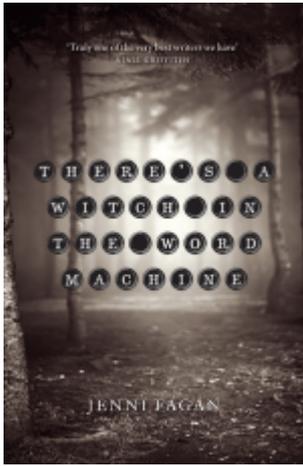


NO DOMINION

***No Dominion* by Louise Welsh | Hodder & Stoughton,  
2018 (2017)**

— chosen by Duncan Jones, Director of ASLS

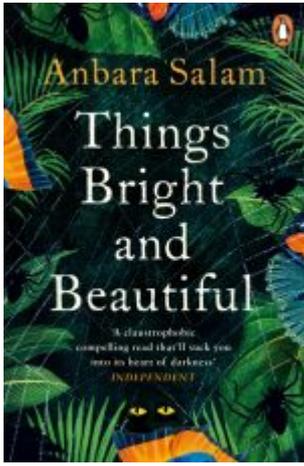
2018 offered a number of possible candidates for my choice for Best Scottish Book of the Year - not least James Kelman's new collection of anxious, angular short fiction *That Was a Shiver, and Other Stories*, and Kirsty Logan's shadowy, sea-born novel *The Gloaming*. My final choice, though, is *No Dominion* by Louise Welsh - the capstone to the harrowing and alarmingly plausible Plague Times trilogy. This trilogy is a modern classic of Scottish Post-Apocalyptic, a small but significant subgenre which descends from Ian Macpherson's *Wild Harbour* (1936). The first two novels in the series - *A Lovely Way to Burn* (2014) and *Death is a Welcome Guest* (2015) - both focus on the apocalypse itself, the global pandemic called 'The Sweats'. Each follows one principal character (TV shopping channel host Stevie Flint, and standup comedian Magnus McFall, respectively) through the emergency, which becomes a crisis, which snowballs at a frightening speed and without the slightest need for suspension of disbelief into the collapse of human civilisation. *No Dominion*, by contrast, winds the clock on by seven years, and we find our two survivors on Orkney, within a small community struggling to cope with life after the cataclysm. Heightening the split between the old, pre-plague world and the new reality are the island's few children - more fitted to this low-tech existence than the older generation, but also naïve, vulnerable, and lost. And then the outside world intrudes, and Stevie and Magnus must both return to a mainland changed in strange and dangerous new ways.



***There's a Witch in the Word Machine* by Jenni Fagan | Birlinn, 2018**

— chosen by Alistair Braidwood from the Scottish cultural website & podcast *Scots Whay Hae!*

2018 was a year of true diversity in Scottish writing in terms of style and substance. I have to mention Stuart Cosgrove's *Harlem '69*, the final book of his epic soul and civil rights trilogy, bringing matters to a fitting and satisfying conclusion. Helen McClory's short fiction collection *Mayhem & Death* was further proof that she is one of the finest and original writers around, and Robin Robertson's Booker shortlisted *The Long Take* pushed the boundaries of what can be done with storytelling and form. However the best novel of the year was Donald S. Murray's *As The Women Lay Dreaming*, his poignant and moving account of the 1919 Iolaire disaster, using it as a starting point to say much about Scotland as a whole. But my Scottish Book of the Year is Jenni Fagan's poetry collection *There's A Witch In The Word Machine*. Fagan's spell poems do their job as there's something magical on these pages, with an honesty and integrity at their core that makes you confront your own. The best poetry collections take hold in a manner similar to favourite albums in that you are compelled to return to them again and again, finding something new each time while also taking comfort in a growing familiarity. *There's A Witch In The Word Machine* is highly personal, yet its themes are universal, and no other book captured the cultural spirit of 2018 as it has.



***Things Bright and Beautiful* by Anbara Salam | Penguin, 2018**

— chosen by Caroline McCracken-Flesher, Professor in the Department of English at the University of Wyoming

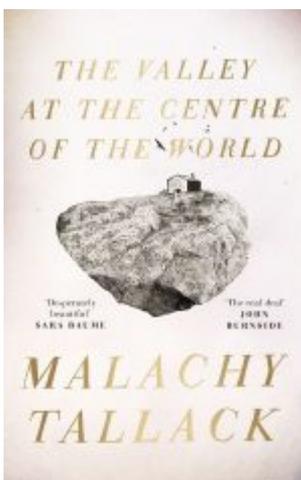
‘Beatriz knew it was wrong to hate a missionary’, Anbara Salam begins. And *Things Bright and Beautiful* gets only more challenging, intriguing, and even darkly funny, from there. Victorian literature is full of anguished considerations of colonial encounter. From Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* to Stevenson’s *The Ebb-Tide*, the invader stumbles blindly into complexity and guilt. Here, however, Anbara Salam has achieved a novel that embraces a world of difference. Beatriz is sister to Jean Rhys’s Antoinette/Bertha (*Wide Sargasso Sea*), or Doris Lessing’s Mary Turner (*The Grass is Singing*). Her missionary husband calls to mind Robert F. Young’s hapless priest, on whom the natives of a distant planet test his own crucifixion theology. But this is a story of a woman breathing in the wilderness as those around her fail under its touch. Bea finds ‘The tickling of ants stirring in the earth, the rain in the palms’ a blessed relief from a missionary discourse that grates in the ears. She nonchalantly picks ‘large curds of rat droppings out of the rice sack’, but sometimes misses them so that ‘a softened and mushy rat dropping would turn up in the supper’; she learns to ingest otherness in the undifferentiated greenery that is ‘hedge’. Like Bertha, Bea has led a life complicated by her origins; like Anbara Salam, who is Palestinian and Scottish and holds a degree in theology, she warms to a different world. Let the missionaries beware.



***Three Kinds of Kissing* by Helen Lamb | Vagabond Voices, 2018**

— chosen by James Robertson, a poet, writer of fiction, editor, and co-founder of the Scots language imprint Itchy Coo

It's odd to be welcoming such an accomplished first novel that is, sadly, also a last novel. Helen Lamb, a poet and short story writer, completed *Three Kinds of Kissing* shortly before her death in 2017, and the sadness is that she did not see it in print, in the very fine paperback edition produced by Vagabond Voices. Set in a small town in central Scotland in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it is short, written without fuss or frills but packed with incident, a page-turner yet also a closely observed coming-of-age story that rings true over and over again. Grace and Olive, the two girls at its heart, are desperate to escape the suffocating constrictions of their small town but also in need of an emotional security that is lacking in their relationships with parents and neighbours who are otherwise preoccupied. When Olive goes missing, Grace has to face up to the secrets they shared. There is darkness and cruelty in what is revealed but also humour and humanity. *Three Kinds of Kissing* is a wonderful novel and I hope it gets the readership it deserves.

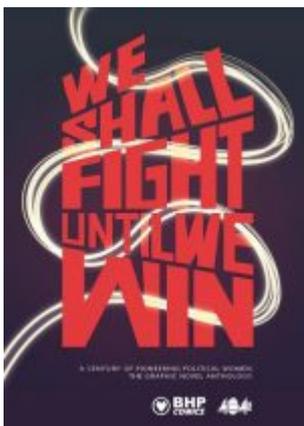


***The Valley at the Centre of the World* by Malachy Tallack | Canongate, 2018**

— chosen by Lin Anderson, author, screenwriter, and crime-writing creator of forensic scientist Rhona MacLeod, who most recently appears in *Sins of the Dead* (2018)

Shetland: so far northeast of the Scottish mainland that the BBC puts it inside a box and drags it back into view. Shetland, often paired with Orkney, yet as

different as Glasgow and Edinburgh. Orkney, lush and fertile, a predominantly farming community who fish a little. Shetland, a fishing community who sometimes farm. Both have been affected by the discovery of oil, but Shetland arguably much more so. In Malachy's book we find ourselves in a farming valley in Shetland. A valley with a history that is still alive and functioning despite change in the outside world. The valley is not an adage to that world but the very centre of it, to those who live there. Settlers and locals alike. The work of the land by its people is told with a lyrical deftness that transforms what might appear to be harsh grind into a poem of man's connection to the land. The chapters written in the Shetland tongue were my favourite. David, patriarch of the valley now that its oldest inhabitant has passed on, regards it as both a child to be wrestled with, and to be kept safe and nurtured for the benefit of the next generation, who are themselves still unsure what they seek from life. Some passages made me weep, others smile for joy. The valley at the centre of the world will stay with you, both the landscape, the life and its people, long after you finish it. Highly recommended.

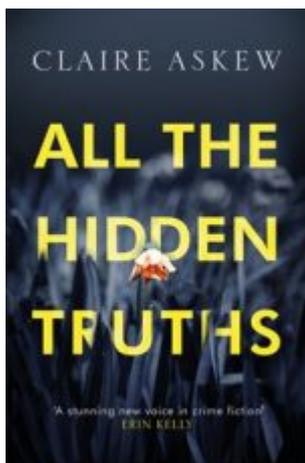


***We Shall Fight Until We Win: A Century of Pioneering Political Women The Graphic Anthology | 404 Ink & BHP Comics***

- chosen by Michael Dempster, National Scots Scriever, musician and comicser

When A wis asked tae gie ma best buik o 2018 A wis that gled the medium here taen precedence ower the airtform. This graphic anthologie pult thegither mair'n twinty o the maist impressive comics creators in the gemm tae luik at wummin exercisin political poer in public spaces fae the 1918 representation o the people act. The nineteen biographies boont athin Kirsty Hunter's weel wrocht cover sprachle wi monie themes includin sufferage, social activism, ethnicitie, trade-unionism, cyberbullyin, an hou wimmen deal wi baith exclusion an inclusion. Staun-oots in storiellin fir me wis Fionnuala Doran's uiss o colour, Denis Mina's uiss o fitnotes an Jenny Bloomfield an Grace Wilson pappin theirsels intae their storie tae hae a wee blether wi Mhairi Black about her choices. The inclusion o naitural Scots in the mooths o Scottish spikkers wis guid tae see. The artistry o

Hannah Berry, the new Comics Laureate expertly serves her storie as dis Hari Conner's. An Kathryn Briggs' uise o Scottish iconography is jist grand. Comics the noo is birlin about fechtin ower haein better representation. This thematic anthologie's nae symbolic cypher, hit's a smashin guid read, check it oot. What did Scotland's writers have on their minds in 2018? Everything you can imagine, and more! And to help you keep track, ASLS has asked authors, critics, academics, and members of the literary sector to tell us about their favourite Scottish book from this past year. The book could be in English, Scots, or Gaelic, it could be published for the first time in 2018 or re-issued this year, and could be a work of fiction, poetry, or academic research. And what a wonderful list it is. We've got some well-kent faces here and exciting new ones, and they all show the breadth and vibrance of Scotland's writing culture. There is something for everyone, so get comfy, and have a browse through the Best Scottish Books from 2018. The list is organised by title. If your favourite isn't here, let us know about it!

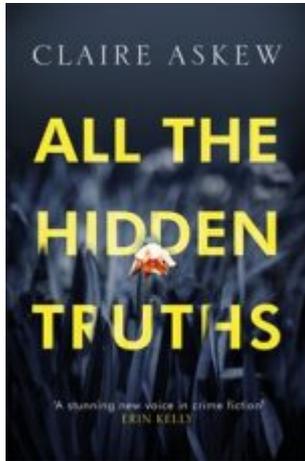


***All the Hidden Truths* by Claire Askew | Hodder & Stoughton, 2018**

— chosen by Heather McDaid, Publishing Director at 404 Ink, Books Editor at *The Skinny*, and an award-winning freelancer

*All The Hidden Truths* is a bizarre crime novel, in that you know the crime happened, you know how, and you know who did it. So what is there to solve? Instead, readers are taken through the stages of grief after tragedy, as it turns to anger, and something more insidious. Askew's exploration of the aftermath of a school shooting in the UK is heartbreaking and difficult, and really splices open conversations around toxic masculinity, posing massacres as both terrors and successes against the feminist agenda, depending on which characters you turn to. Can you find an answer? Can you find peace when the killer isn't around to answer? While the crime seems clear cut to the reader, the finger of blame is pointed in all directions — a mirror to today's response and press coverage around tragedies. What did the mother do? Why didn't she stop him? What did the girls do to warrant their fate? *All The Hidden Truths* is a gripping read and one

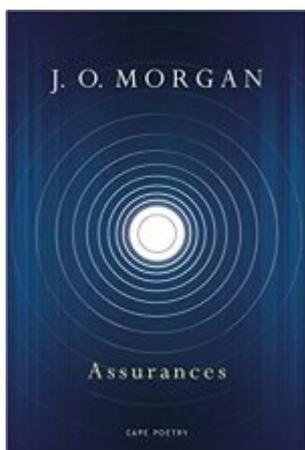
that you dip into, but find yourself compulsively page-turning, looking for answers you couldn't possibly get. It's very good, very sad, and uses death as a jumping off point to explore the bigger, more uncomfortable questions around death and blame. An incredible read.



***All the Hidden Truths* by Claire Askew | Hodder & Stoughton, 2018**

— chosen by Theresa Muñoz, poet and critic

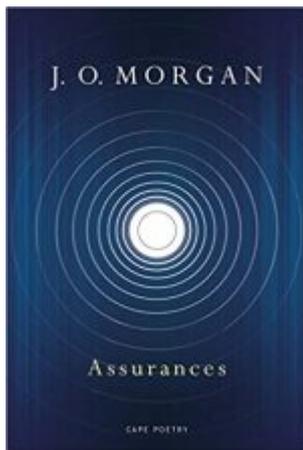
My pick for *Best Scottish Books 2018* is Claire Askew's *All the Hidden Truths*. Askew has established a reputation as a fine poet and has now turned her talented hand to fiction. Though generally categorised as 'crime fiction', her book is not exactly that. It turns on an achingly familiar scenario: thirteen young women killed at a college campus with the young male shooter committing suicide at the scene. Early in the book, a Wikipedia extract gives us the basics of what happened and names the perpetrator. The narrative is in three voices: the female police officer who is put in charge of the case, the mother of one of the victims and the mother of the shooter. Between them, the three women create an extraordinary exploration of grief, guilt, fear and loss. Pulsing away in the background is social media and its power to promote truth and lies, create conspiracy theories, blame and punish. In short, this is a novel for our times and a truly extraordinary debut.



***Assurances* by J. O. Morgan | Jonathan Cape, 2018**

— chosen by Niall Campbell, a poet from the Outer Hebrides

I had the rather complicated pleasure of reading over 200 poetry collections as part of this year's Forward Poetry Prize - and in among the piles (oh there were piles!) were some terrific books with connections to Scotland. *Who is Mary Sue?* by Sophie Collins (shortlisted for this year's Saltire Poetry Book of the Year) is a great first collection. It's punchy, innovative, I admire how the poems strike out boldly on their own terms - part poetry, part collage of thoughts - it's a sophisticated co-weaving. Do look out for it. Continuing, I would like to say something stupid, especially given the context: but I can't help feeling that we slightly underrate the poet J.O. Morgan. A potentially stupid comment as he is published by one of the largest UK presses, is garlanded by shortlisted for all the major prizes, and yet ... seems always on the periphery of the conversation regarding Scottish poetry. This past year he published *Assurances* and it is, again, an exceptional book. Rhythmic and unsettling, it imagines lives lived in the threat of atomic warfare, interspersing such passages with rich moments of reflection on life and longing. It's great stuff.



***Assurances* by J. O. Morgan | Jonathan Cape, 2018**

— chosen by Helena Nelson, poet and founder-editor of HappenStance Press

If you had four minutes — *precisely* four — before the world was going to end, what would you do? Everything in this verse novella hinges on the fact that nuclear annihilation might — at any moment of any day — commence. A male navigator, one of an airborne deterrent crew, keeps winding his watch: 'The military state of mind is one of alertness, / nothing more than that. To be wound up tight one moment and then: just / as tight the next.' His watch gains fifteen seconds a day—practically negligible, except in the context of four minutes. When 'the warning is given, / those few minutes granted', a female spy steps outside into a garden and waits 'for all the quicknesses in her / to be wrenched out, to leave her egg-blown'. One instant of redemption is balanced against another of disintegration, the reader compelled by fluid twists of pace and style. But the pilot

and crew resist orders. The machines resist agreement. The man and woman meet. I know no other writer who can escalate musical narrative to such tender and poignant resolution: 'How still they stand, / one's fingers pushing backward / slowly through the other's hair. / And of such stillness, of such touch, / it's here they find / there is no need, no want, / for any more than this.' Is it the end of the world? Or the beginning?



***The Book of Scotlands* by Momus (Nick Currie) | Luath, 2018**

— chosen by Carla Sassi, Professor of English Literature at the University of Verona

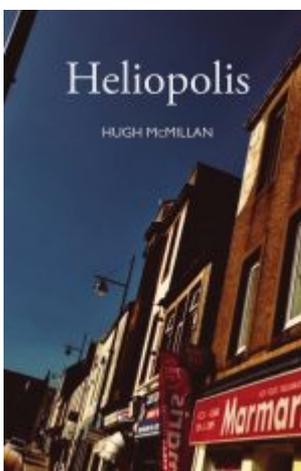
Surreal, dark, witty and exhilarating, this is one of the subtlest parodies of 'Scotland' - as a concept, ideal or project - ever to be written. *The Book* evokes over 160 'possible' Scotlands, numbered and listed in jumbled order, and captured in pithy aphorisms, visionary sketches or autobiographical cameos. There is no stone left unturned as Momus (the Greek god of mockery, aka Scottish songwriter, author and blogger Nick Currie) gathers and deconstructs every possible notion of Scotland ever conceived, from mythical to historical, from ancient to contemporary, from social to political, from globally relevant to pettily idiosyncratic. Originally published in 2009, its implacable dissection of the author's native country's imagination has no doubt grown in appeal since its first appearance, as the past decade's accelerated succession of epochal events and changes have trained us to accept that the impossible is (unfortunately) possible. Is there any hope to reconcile this chaotic and evanescent record of im/possibilities within a feasible 'national' project? If so, this is tentatively offered in the more articulated "Scotland 88" section: 'Love, even self-love, often starts off as a lie. But it's a virtuous and transformative lie [...] If you believe contentment is something [...] a nation should aspire to, you have to accept that self-contentment might be a perfectly reasonable way to achieve it.'(p. 93) Those who are more skeptical about Scotland's future, however, will probably enjoy more the aphoristic "Scotland 73": 'Would the last to leave Scotland please switch off the light?' (p.125)



***The Growing Season* by Helen Sedgwick | Penguin, 2018 (2017)**

— chosen by Ali Bowden, Director of Edinburgh UNESCO City of Literature Trust

My outstanding book for 2018 is Helen Sedgwick's *The Growing Season*. This is an impressive and intriguing story, quietly told. It is set in an alternate reality – where a major scientific discovery has affected reproduction – and the book offers a glimpse of a possible future. This is a story told with intelligence and skill. It has a clear structure with three narratives that each present a distinct viewpoint and slowly lead you to understand the background to, and the implications of, such a shift in technology and power. Perhaps because it proposes a fundamental shift in something so universal – to give birth, to create a family, to be part of a family – it makes a quick and deep connection with you as the reader. Long after I'd put the book down I was still unravelling the implications, still pondering the characters' motivations, dealing with the emotional punch the book delivers, and looking at my own world with fresh eyes. It's a book that leads you to ask questions of yourself and the world, to think again about the most fundamental of relationships, to question what it is biology locks us into. The book has garnered comparisons to the work of Angela Carter and Margaret Atwood, and it deserves them; so I say find this book, read this book, watch out for this author.



***Heliopolis* by Hugh McMillan | Luath Press, 2018**

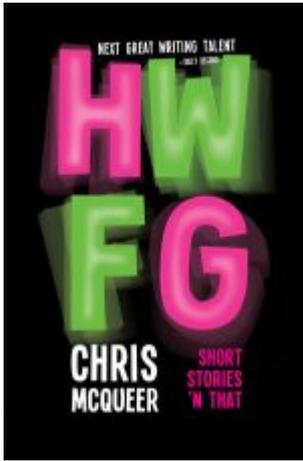
— chosen by Stuart A. Paterson, poet and performer in Scots and English

Hugh McMillan's *Heliopolis* sees the poet explore familiar and newer themes with equal candour and lyricism. Dumfries and Galloway, its voiceless people and neglected history, permeates most of this engaging, accessible and occasionally, shockingly honest collection. McMillan's not afraid to look inside the biscuit tin and tell us it's not all shortbread and tartan. In fact, it rarely is and despite his obvious passion for Scottish and Gallovidian culture (he often refers to Dumfries and Galloway, not without basis, as 'a giant theme park') he feels it his artistic and human duty to point out what the brochures, guides and TV historians don't say. His poems can sometimes be all the more eye-opening for couching such (in my view) refreshingly welcome views in language and phrase both lyrical and imaginative. Hyperborea, an idyllic somewhere of permanent warmth and sunshine, sits uneasily beside the reality of home where:

*Dykes twist to the horizon.  
Where are the men who built them?  
Gone to Nova Scotia  
with their pipes and neckerchiefs.  
(‘The Old Fort at Grennan’)*

The dispossessed, the disenfranchised, from past, vast monumental land clearances and forced migrations from the Port of Dumfries to the current steady outflow of the new generation due to lack of opportunity and work, are all given poignant voice in an elegiac tone which runs through *Heliopolis* like the beautiful, cold flow of the Nith through Dumfries. McMillan still surprises with a sardonic or witty phrase which elevates and brings a smile, an occasional belly laugh. And history is all well and good and a rich topography for re-imagination and learning. But it's the poetry that wins out, as he refreshingly writes in 'Queran's Well', a beautiful poem which concludes that:

*History is a book, words  
crowding to the edge  
till there's no room left.  
But memories? They are unending  
walks in the rain.*



## ***HWFG* by Chris McQueer | 404 Ink, 2018**

— chosen by Alan Bissett, a multi-award winning playwright, novelist and performer from Falkirk

Every ten years or so, a young Scottish writer comes along to detail working-class life with enough demotic energy, humour and pathos to unlock an army of readers who had previously found themselves alienated by 'literary fiction'. Chris McQueer is undoubtedly one of those writers, in the realist-absurd tradition of Irvine Welsh, Laura Hird, Gordon Legge and Limmy. His previous short story collection, *Hings*, was the sort of unexpected success we're not used to seeing anymore: a debut from an independent Scottish publisher which found an audience not through winning prestigious prizes, receiving extensive review coverage or being backed by a huge marketing campaign, but through sheer force of its own charms. That collection's legion of fans will be delighted by *HWFG* (and how I wish bookshops were bold enough for its actual title, *Here We Fuckin Go*), as it contains the same mix of verbal pyrotechnics and cavalier storytelling, with the added bonus of an emotional darkness and layering this time around. This signifies both an evolution and an even greater future maturity. Never afraid to give society, or his characters, a gid skelping, while still finding room in his heart to love even the edgiest and most troubling of his narrators, McQueer proves himself a natural observer of schie culture. In defiance of the increasing gentrification of fiction (sometimes it seems as though the punk revolution of the Nineties never happened) McQueer reminds that us sometimes all a good writer needs is a pen, a good eye and the gift of the gab. Here we fuckin go, indeed.



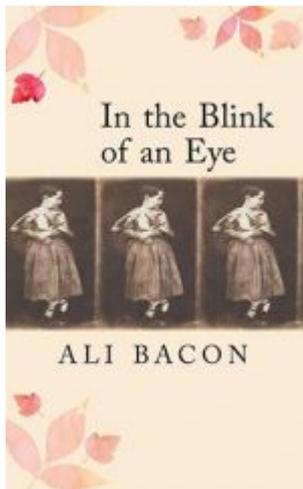
***The History of Art in One Hundred Limericks* by Angus Reid | Luath, 2018**

— chosen by Ken Cockburn, poet and translator, author of *Floating the Woods* (Luath, 2018)

Angus Reid is a poet, painter and film-maker, and he combines his verbal and visual skills in this partial, playful and provocative gallop through Masters Old and New. The limericks themselves aim to convey something essential about an artist and their work in five lines; here is the Scottish-Italian sculptor Eduardo Paolozzi:

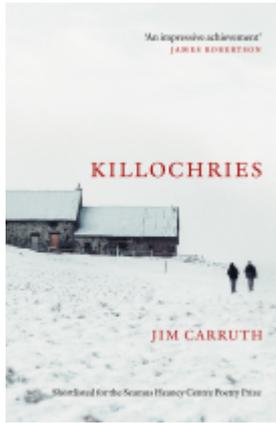
*Consider the magpie Paolozzi,  
who takes all of art as his proxy;  
confronting a classic  
he'll take it and smash it  
then glue it back up with epoxy.*

A clever design presents poems typewritten on scraps of paper, attached with a paper-clip to an image they offer a pithy comment on. As for the images themselves, their selection required a judicious search for material not subject to expensive royalties, so we get a shot of Jackson Pollock's studio floor, which doesn't in fact look so different from one of his drip paintings. The final limerick on Damien Hirst is one of several to offer an caustic opinion on art and commerce. A set of notes at the back tease out further resonances of the poem / image combinations; when Dalí met Franco, Rothko's seven-ingredient 'recipe' for art, when exactly Bomberg wore his homburg. This is the first in a projected series of four; may the rhymes keep coming.



***In the Blink of an Eye* by Ali Bacon | Linen Press, 2018**  
— chosen by Catherine Czerkawska, author of fiction, non-fiction and plays for radio and theatre

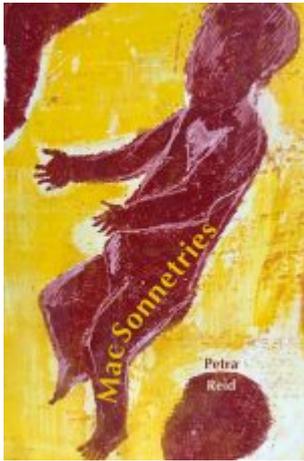
Scots-born writer and St Andrew's University graduate, Ali Bacon, sets her story mostly in mid-1800s Edinburgh and writes in a luminous, elegant prose that reflects her subject matter perfectly. In 1843, Edinburgh artist, David Octavius Hill, was commissioned to paint the portraits of 400 ministers who had broken away from the Church of Scotland. When he met Robert Adamson, an early exponent of photography, the pair found a way to facilitate the huge task that the artist had set himself, but between them, Hill and Adamson found so very much more: a way of turning the new science of photography into the art it would become. This is a glorious patchwork quilt of a novel. Structurally complex, it is accurate as to time and place, but above all wonderfully engaging and moving. Bacon climbs inside the minds of a variety of characters, especially the women in Hill and Adamson's milieu. All are brought satisfyingly to life, from the pioneering Jessie Mann, with her own passionate interest in photography, to Hill's beloved daughter, Chattie. Never far from the reader's mind is the notion that these women's lives are often circumscribed by the time and place in which they find themselves, and yet that notion is never allowed to dominate the novel. This is an important book about love and loss, about art and science, above all about friendship. The author wears her learning lightly, brilliantly handling a multitude of perspectives without ever losing her (and our) thread. Historical fiction at its best.



### ***Killochries* by Jim Carruth | Birlinn, 2018 (2017)**

— chosen by Brian Johnstone, poet, writer & performer

There has been a wide variety of nature writing available in recent years. A fashionable genre, much of it functions as a source of retreat from the pressures of modern life. Not so Jim Carruth's *Killochries*, a harsh take on a harsh environment. Also of the moment is the 'verse novel', a genre into which this book might be said to fit. It tells the story, over a single year, of a damaged, city-bred individual exiled - for that is the predicament he is in - to the isolated hill farm of a distant relative. This relative is an aged sheep farmer, caring for a bed-ridden mother and, more importantly, for a flock of Blackface ewes and a rapidly deteriorating farm. What is not particularly in the fashion, though, is redemption - through work, solitude, silence, self-denial. This is the redemption the exile finds through a gradual coming to understand the nature of the old shepherd's life. In a language as tough and unforgiving as the environment it evokes, Jim Carruth captures a way of life whose very extinction we are witnessing today. The level of understanding and empathy he is able to convey through the interaction of the two lead characters is masterful, and ultimately life-affirming. Reading this book-length sequence is an experience as close to the epiphany the young man undergoes as a year on the hill itself.



***MacSonnetries: The Buds of May be* by Petra Reid | Scotland Street Press, 2018 (2017)**

— chosen by Jameela Muneer, teacher, solicitor, writer, and would-be ukulele player

I loved Petra Reid's *MacSonnetries: The Buds of May be*, a witty sequence of 154 sonnets, with a contemporary postmodern twist. Each sonnet stands alone: the *May be* after the *Buds* suggests a joyful irreverence. Each poem is a response to Shakespeare's original. It employs the Golden Shovel method, maintaining the Bard's line endings in every sonnet. I did not immediately notice this at first reading: the structure is unobtrusive. Reid glides effortlessly over the social, political, cultural, and ideological mores of our times. The imagery of social media, computers and artificial intelligence, is juxtaposed humorously with Shakespeare's concerns over procreation, jealousy and mutability. One of my favourite lines from Sonnet 65 becomes 'Since jobs, nor shifts, nor hours, nor rising sea' — I laughed out loud, not resenting the liberty taken by Reid. Shakespeare's Sonnet 2 provokes the nonchalant feminist response that fillers can produce 'baby bum smooth skin'; seventy-year olds can look like twenty somethings nowadays. Elsewhere there are references to Rupert Murdoch and Jerry Hall: 'she will make him last for ever'. Madonna, Nigella, and domestic goddesses also get a mention. I relished the online dating advice: 'only post your happy' bits because 'bingo wings selfies so cruelly show', as well as 'how to drop that sinful extra stone'. Subprime mortgages, non-Doms in London, Kim Kardashian and Tinder with Toy-boys are all covered. Finally, Shakespeare's Sonnets 104, 105, rendered into Scots, reveal Reid's skill in this medium too. This erudite versatile collection offers the double pleasure of rereading Shakespeare, and Reid's responses, separately, or side by side.



***The Mandelbaum Gate* by Muriel Spark | Muriel Spark  
Centenary Editions | Birlinn, 2018**

— chosen by Ajay Close, novelist, playwright and journalist

Deliciously observed characters, jewelled ironies, comedy, cruelty, the dark immanence of divine purpose: the classic components of a Muriel Spark novel are all present in *The Mandelbaum Gate*, but the trademark faint ticking of the watchmaker plot is drowned out by a beating heart. This thrillerish, thematically ambitious tale of geopolitics and identity may or may not be autobiographical (who knows?), but it has the meaty whiff of life. Barbara Vine is a Catholic 'half Jew' unsure who - or what - she is: Anglo-Saxon or Semitic, spinster or sexual wanton, pious convert or an apostate prepared to jeopardise her immortal soul by marrying a divorced man. Waiting to hear if Rome will sanction the match, she makes a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. It's 1961. The city is divided between Israel and Jordan. Determined to visit the Jordanian Biblical sites where her Jewish blood puts her at risk of being shot as an Israeli spy, she enlists the help of Freddie, a sexually closeted English diplomat, and the liberated Arab travel agent Suzi Ramdez. But no one in this novel is quite what they seem. Every character breaks out of their box - with the exception of Adolf Eichmann, encased in reinforced glass, parrying questions about the Holocaust with droning bureaucratise. The day Barbara spends watching his trial is described in five brief pages, but the questions raised about human capability cast a chilling shadow over this engaging, funny, profoundly serious book.

LOUISE  
WELSH

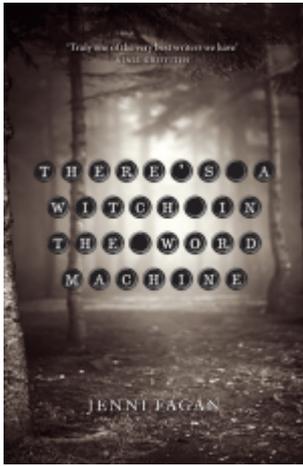


NO DOMINION

***No Dominion* by Louise Welsh | Hodder & Stoughton,  
2018 (2017)**

— chosen by Duncan Jones, Director of ASLS

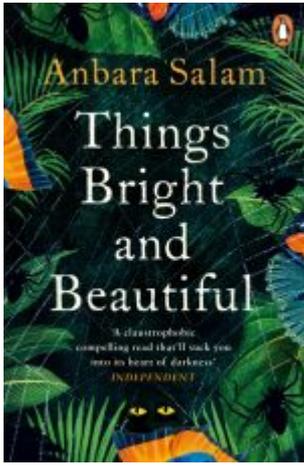
2018 offered a number of possible candidates for my choice for Best Scottish Book of the Year - not least James Kelman's new collection of anxious, angular short fiction *That Was a Shiver, and Other Stories*, and Kirsty Logan's shadowy, sea-born novel *The Gloaming*. My final choice, though, is *No Dominion* by Louise Welsh - the capstone to the harrowing and alarmingly plausible Plague Times trilogy. This trilogy is a modern classic of Scottish Post-Apocalyptic, a small but significant subgenre which descends from Ian Macpherson's *Wild Harbour* (1936). The first two novels in the series - *A Lovely Way to Burn* (2014) and *Death is a Welcome Guest* (2015) - both focus on the apocalypse itself, the global pandemic called 'The Sweats'. Each follows one principal character (TV shopping channel host Stevie Flint, and standup comedian Magnus McFall, respectively) through the emergency, which becomes a crisis, which snowballs at a frightening speed and without the slightest need for suspension of disbelief into the collapse of human civilisation. *No Dominion*, by contrast, winds the clock on by seven years, and we find our two survivors on Orkney, within a small community struggling to cope with life after the cataclysm. Heightening the split between the old, pre-plague world and the new reality are the island's few children - more fitted to this low-tech existence than the older generation, but also naïve, vulnerable, and lost. And then the outside world intrudes, and Stevie and Magnus must both return to a mainland changed in strange and dangerous new ways.



***There's a Witch in the Word Machine* by Jenni Fagan | Birlinn, 2018**

— chosen by Alistair Braidwood from the Scottish cultural website & podcast *Scots Whay Hae!*

2018 was a year of true diversity in Scottish writing in terms of style and substance. I have to mention Stuart Cosgrove's *Harlem '69*, the final book of his epic soul and civil rights trilogy, bringing matters to a fitting and satisfying conclusion. Helen McClory's short fiction collection *Mayhem & Death* was further proof that she is one of the finest and original writers around, and Robin Robertson's Booker shortlisted *The Long Take* pushed the boundaries of what can be done with storytelling and form. However the best novel of the year was Donald S. Murray's *As The Women Lay Dreaming*, his poignant and moving account of the 1919 Iolaire disaster, using it as a starting point to say much about Scotland as a whole. But my Scottish Book of the Year is Jenni Fagan's poetry collection *There's A Witch In The Word Machine*. Fagan's spell poems do their job as there's something magical on these pages, with an honesty and integrity at their core that makes you confront your own. The best poetry collections take hold in a manner similar to favourite albums in that you are compelled to return to them again and again, finding something new each time while also taking comfort in a growing familiarity. *There's A Witch In The Word Machine* is highly personal, yet its themes are universal, and no other book captured the cultural spirit of 2018 as it has.



***Things Bright and Beautiful* by Anbara Salam | Penguin, 2018**

— chosen by Caroline McCracken-Flesher, Professor in the Department of English at the University of Wyoming

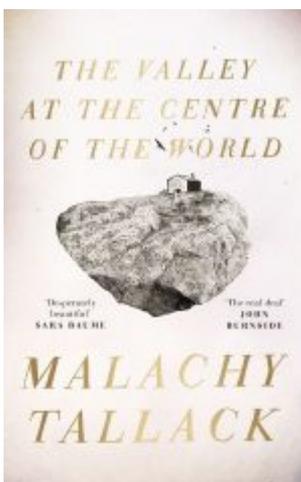
‘Beatriz knew it was wrong to hate a missionary’, Anbara Salam begins. And *Things Bright and Beautiful* gets only more challenging, intriguing, and even darkly funny, from there. Victorian literature is full of anguished considerations of colonial encounter. From Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* to Stevenson’s *The Ebb-Tide*, the invader stumbles blindly into complexity and guilt. Here, however, Anbara Salam has achieved a novel that embraces a world of difference. Beatriz is sister to Jean Rhys’s Antoinette/Bertha (*Wide Sargasso Sea*), or Doris Lessing’s Mary Turner (*The Grass is Singing*). Her missionary husband calls to mind Robert F. Young’s hapless priest, on whom the natives of a distant planet test his own crucifixion theology. But this is a story of a woman breathing in the wilderness as those around her fail under its touch. Bea finds ‘The tickling of ants stirring in the earth, the rain in the palms’ a blessed relief from a missionary discourse that grates in the ears. She nonchalantly picks ‘large curds of rat droppings out of the rice sack’, but sometimes misses them so that ‘a softened and mushy rat dropping would turn up in the supper’; she learns to ingest otherness in the undifferentiated greenery that is ‘hedge’. Like Bertha, Bea has led a life complicated by her origins; like Anbara Salam, who is Palestinian and Scottish and holds a degree in theology, she warms to a different world. Let the missionaries beware.



***Three Kinds of Kissing* by Helen Lamb | Vagabond Voices, 2018**

— chosen by James Robertson, a poet, writer of fiction, editor, and co-founder of the Scots language imprint Itchy Coo

It's odd to be welcoming such an accomplished first novel that is, sadly, also a last novel. Helen Lamb, a poet and short story writer, completed *Three Kinds of Kissing* shortly before her death in 2017, and the sadness is that she did not see it in print, in the very fine paperback edition produced by Vagabond Voices. Set in a small town in central Scotland in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it is short, written without fuss or frills but packed with incident, a page-turner yet also a closely observed coming-of-age story that rings true over and over again. Grace and Olive, the two girls at its heart, are desperate to escape the suffocating constrictions of their small town but also in need of an emotional security that is lacking in their relationships with parents and neighbours who are otherwise preoccupied. When Olive goes missing, Grace has to face up to the secrets they shared. There is darkness and cruelty in what is revealed but also humour and humanity. *Three Kinds of Kissing* is a wonderful novel and I hope it gets the readership it deserves.



***The Valley at the Centre of the World* by Malachy Tallack | Canongate, 2018**

— chosen by Lin Anderson, author, screenwriter, and crime-writing creator of forensic scientist Rhona MacLeod, who most recently appears in *Sins of the Dead* (2018)

Shetland: so far northeast of the Scottish mainland that the BBC puts it inside a box and drags it back into view. Shetland, often paired with Orkney, yet as

different as Glasgow and Edinburgh. Orkney, lush and fertile, a predominantly farming community who fish a little. Shetland, a fishing community who sometimes farm. Both have been affected by the discovery of oil, but Shetland arguably much more so. In Malachy's book we find ourselves in a farming valley in Shetland. A valley with a history that is still alive and functioning despite change in the outside world. The valley is not an adage to that world but the very centre of it, to those who live there. Settlers and locals alike. The work of the land by its people is told with a lyrical deftness that transforms what might appear to be harsh grind into a poem of man's connection to the land. The chapters written in the Shetland tongue were my favourite. David, patriarch of the valley now that its oldest inhabitant has passed on, regards it as both a child to be wrestled with, and to be kept safe and nurtured for the benefit of the next generation, who are themselves still unsure what they seek from life. Some passages made me weep, others smile for joy. The valley at the centre of the world will stay with you, both the landscape, the life and its people, long after you finish it. Highly recommended.



***We Shall Fight Until We Win: A Century of Pioneering Political Women The Graphic Anthology | 404 Ink & BHP Comics***

- chosen by Michael Dempster, National Scots Scriever, musician and comicser

When A wis asked tae gie ma best buik o 2018 A wis that gled the medium here taen precedence ower the airtform. This graphic anthologie pult thegither mair'n twinty o the maist impressive comics creators in the gemm tae luik at wummin exercisin political poer in public spaces fae the 1918 representation o the people act. The nineteen biographies boont athin Kirsty Hunter's weel wrocht cover sprachle wi monie themes includin sufferage, social activism, ethnicitie, trade-unionism, cyberbullyin, an hou wimmen deal wi baith exclusion an inclusion. Staun-oots in storiellin fir me wis Fionnuala Doran's uiss o colour, Denis Mina's uiss o fitnotes an Jenny Bloomfield an Grace Wilson pappin theirsels intae their storie tae hae a wee blether wi Mhairi Black about her choices. The inclusion o naitural Scots in the mooths o Scottish spikkers wis guid tae see. The artistry o

Hannah Berry, the new Comics Laureate expertly serves her storie as dis Hari Conner's. An Kathryn Briggs' uise o Scottish iconography is jist grand. Comics the noo is birlin aboot fechtin ower haein better representation. This thematic anthologie's nae symbolic cypher, hit's a smashin guid read, check it oot.

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*(c) The Bottle Imp*