Edwin Only Helped

By The Unreliable Narrator

from *The Trouble With Women*, by Jacky Fleming (Square Peg, 2016)

Anyone who has read Jacky Fleming's *The Trouble With Women* will be familiar with Schopenhauer's theory of masculine "Genius Hair". Anyone who has looked at a picture of Hugh MacDiarmid – and witnessed therein a man trying, by force of will, to transform himself into a thistle – will know what "Genius Hair" looks like.

Scotland's achievement – in the heraldic sense – also has "Genius Hair": *Or, a lion rampant Gules, within a double tressure flory-counterflory of the same*. Although modern sensibilities might shy away from presenting Oor Rory not merely rampant but pizzled and codded to boot, there's no mistaking his prominent masculinity with all that mane force on display, rippling in the breeze. Or the fact that he never shuts his mouth.

Away with such vanity. In this issue of *The Bottle Imp*, we turn our attention to the distaff side, and in particular to the women writers of the twentieth-century

Scottish renaissance: the handmaids, midwives, mothers, mistresses, cooks, nannies, and skivvies to that literary revolution. Oh, and contributors, too. Let's not forget about their own writing! Again.

Those febrile inter-war years can seem strange, to we moderns. Those silent Edwardian tinkertoys tick-tocking their way towards the Somme may have given way to scratchy sound and smoother frame-rates, and eras are no longer named for their monarchs: but despite the knee-high hemlines, the attitudes of the age are still sunk in the patriarchal mire. Men must have their muses and amusements, their pipes and growleries; women must shift for themselves among the saucepans, and fight the sombre enemies of art alone. I know – it's scarcely credible, isn't it?

To outline this curious landscape, this edition begins with Jenni Calder's examination of **Helen Cruickshank: 'Bide the storm ye canna hinder'**. Cruickshank was at the heart of the Scottish literary and linguistic scene – writing poetry, helping to reinvigorate Scotland's cultural life, supporting and sustaining fellow writers – all while caring for her elderly mother and holding down a full-time job.

We should not forget that these women led inspirational lives. Magi Gibson rolls up her sleeves to tell us more about Valda Trevlyn Grieve and the choices she made, in **How I Came to Write a Poem about Hugh MacDiarmid's Socks** (you can read the title poem here), and Ajay Close reveals her research into Catherine Carswell, and the difficulties and dangers of fiction and history, in **Opening Doors: How I Wrote *What We Did in the Dark***.

Nan Shepherd is newly famous again, at least as the first female writer to feature on a British banknote – although now it's her mountaineering she's best-known for. Charlotte Peacock shows why Shepherd should be remembered as a key Scottish novelist, too, in **Quiet Pioneer: the novels of Nan Shepherd**.

Finally, in **Willa Muir: a Shetland Translator in Prague**, Michelle Woods looks at how Willa Muir navigated the turbulence of post-war Czechoslovakia, suffered – and recovered from – a fit of the scunners, and gave Kafka to the world.

Alan MacGillivray remembers Professor Douglas Gifford with his poem **"Statue"**, in *Upon Another Point* – and we have a backlog of **book reviews** to catch up with, too!

This has been a hard year. Here's health, and good luck to us all.

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