Rememoir this?

By The Unreliable Narrator

> *[…] memory and its fictions still revolve, as one by one*
> *the years climb to the attic and the thickening dust.*
>
> *Norman Kreitman, 'Clearing the Attic'*

If we Unreliable Narrators know anything at all, it's that memory is a fickle and fallible creature. In good faith we pack our bags to take an honest trip down Memory Lane only to find reminiscences running into one another like dye, all swirling colours and patchy conversation. Try as we might to pin it down, the past wriggles out of our grasp, leaving us to try and plug the gaps with half-faded whos, wheres, hows and whys.

It's the same, too, for memoirists, but herein lies the appeal of their story: the sense of doubt and wonder that emerges from the writer's revelations as they re-immerse themselves in lost time, trying to shape the past's meaning and its small and precise particulars. Because a memoir is not some lumbering birth-to-grave account, but rather a curtain that flickers open to reveal a few select places in the sprawling grounds of Life's House – the garden of childhood, the attic of grief – to which some part of the writer returns and remains throughout the years.

This is true, at least, of many memoirs published today. A centuries-old pursuit, the earliest forms of memoir-writing in Scotland mostly concerned affairs of the state, written by those in, or close to, positions of great authority. Diplomats, bishops and commanders-in-chief were among those to pen the records and divulge their thoughts on the hot topics of the day: kings and queens, war and union, political debates and machinations. Such memoirs were not documents in which to disclose the soft underbelly of the self but rather ones that opened the lid and peered into specific segments of society, their records immortalised as a slice of Scottish history.

Today, Scotland is in something of a Golden Age of Memoir, the nation's bookshelves heaving with diverse life-stories told by poets, musicians, journalists

and everyone else in between. Although the memoir form now invites the confessional in a way that some memoirists of yesteryear perhaps wouldn't recognise, these personal chronicles still seep into our country's social history. Whether relaying homelife in the Hebrides, motherhood in Motherwell, or mayhem and misspent youth in Glasgow's music venues, memoirs remain a way of memorialising particular people and pockets of time and place, in turn helping to shape Scotland's own story.

In this new issue of The Bottle Imp, we open our big Book of Lives to introduce the stories behind a selection of Scottish memoirs – the personal, historical, and fictional. With 2024 marking the bicentennial of *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, Gillian Hughes grapples with the tricks and turns of one of Scotland's most infamous fictional memoirists, Robert Wringhim, and the *Author's Life* of his creator in 'What can this work be?': James Hogg's The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner. In Born in Kyle: A Love Letter tae an Ayrshire Childhood, Billy Kay offers a guided tour through the stories, songs and Scots language of his boyhood, followed by Craig Lamont, who stays within the mists of youth to explore the early years of Dorothy K. Haynes and other writers in Haste Ye Back: Dorothy K. Haynes and the importance of childhood memory. Finally, in Memorialising Through Memoirs: Robert Forbes's 'The Lyon in Mourning' Manuscript, Leith Davis travels back in time to discuss how three narratives recorded by Forbes serve as brief but illuminating memoirs of those living at a crucial point in Scottish and British history. Whether you're in the mood for life-stories, lit crit, fiction or poetry, the *Bottle Imp* bookshelf is bursting with new book reviews, too.

Ne Obliviscaris!

> *[…] memory and its fictions still revolve, as one by one*
> *the years climb to the attic and the thickening dust.*
>
> *Norman Kreitman, 'Clearing the Attic'*

If we Unreliable Narrators know anything at all, it's that memory is a fickle and fallible creature. In good faith we pack our bags to take an honest trip down Memory Lane only to find reminiscences running into one another like dye, all swirling colours and patchy conversation. Try as we might to pin it down, the past wriggles out of our grasp, leaving us to try and plug the gaps with half-faded

whos, wheres, hows and whys.

It's the same, too, for memoirists, but herein lies the appeal of their story: the sense of doubt and wonder that emerges from the writer's revelations as they re-immerse themselves in lost time, trying to shape the past's meaning and its small and precise particulars. Because a memoir is not some lumbering birth-to-grave account, but rather a curtain that flickers open to reveal a few select places in the sprawling grounds of Life's House – the garden of childhood, the attic of grief – to which some part of the writer returns and remains throughout the years.

This is true, at least, of many memoirs published today. A centuries-old pursuit, the earliest forms of memoir-writing in Scotland mostly concerned affairs of the state, written by those in, or close to, positions of great authority. Diplomats, bishops and commanders-in-chief were among those to pen the records and divulge their thoughts on the hot topics of the day: kings and queens, war and union, political debates and machinations. Such memoirs were not documents in which to disclose the soft underbelly of the self but rather ones that opened the lid and peered into specific segments of society, their records immortalised as a slice of Scottish history.

Today, Scotland is in something of a Golden Age of Memoir, the nation's bookshelves heaving with diverse life-stories told by poets, musicians, journalists and everyone else in between. Although the memoir form now invites the confessional in a way that some memoirists of yesteryear perhaps wouldn't recognise, these personal chronicles still seep into our country's social history. Whether relaying homelife in the Hebrides, motherhood in Motherwell, or mayhem and misspent youth in Glasgow's music venues, memoirs remain a way of memorialising particular people and pockets of time and place, in turn helping to shape Scotland's own story.

In this new issue of The Bottle Imp, we open our big Book of Lives to introduce the stories behind a selection of Scottish memoirs – the personal, historical, and fictional. With 2024 marking the bicentennial of *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, Gillian Hughes grapples with the tricks and turns of one of Scotland's most infamous fictional memoirists, Robert Wringhim, and the *Author's Life* of his creator in 'What can this work be?': James Hogg's The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner. In Born in Kyle: A Love Letter tae an Ayrshire Childhood, Billy Kay offers a guided tour through the

stories, songs and Scots language of his boyhood, followed by Craig Lamont, who stays within the mists of youth to explore the early years of Dorothy K. Haynes and other writers in Haste Ye Back: Dorothy K. Haynes and the importance of childhood memory. Finally, in Memorialising Through Memoirs: Robert Forbes's 'The Lyon in Mourning' Manuscript, Leith Davis travels back in time to discuss how three narratives recorded by Forbes serve as brief but illuminating memoirs of those living at a crucial point in Scottish and British history. Whether you're in the mood for life-stories, lit crit, fiction or poetry, the *Bottle Imp* bookshelf is bursting with new book reviews, too.

Ne Obliviscaris!

(c) The Bottle Imp