Mary Gladstone

Selected Writing, Reviews, Journalism and Publications List

Contents

Short Stories	3
Extract from “Largie Castle, a rifled nest”	21
Reviews	31
Journalism	32
List of Publications	48

Published in New Writing Scotland, 4

A VINDICATION

Dear D,
…. How should I begin, or should I be writing to him at all? I'm just one of the many he deals with; I doubt if he gives me a moment's thought from one week to the next…..

Dear D,
Your letter of the 6th inst. was received yester…. Good God! To think that I call myself a writer; it reads more like a bank manager's letter. Come on Rosamund, pull yourself together. Write one of your sensitive, literate letters to your publisher……

Dear D,
Thank you very much for sending me the proofs of my …. No, no, no; it's too obsequious. Who the hell does he think he is? He's just a scabby old editor, a writer manqué, a man who couldn't make it in a more competitive, less gentlemanly business, like a firm that produces underwear, gardening tools or maltesers …..

Dear D,
I got your proofs yesterday. Thanks for sending them….Now, what did I hear on the radio the other day? Yes, I remember; it was a talk by a professor of English language at an east coast university who admonished writers, and other people who should know better, not to degenerate and de-glorify our literary heritage by employing slang and contractions and all sorts of other heinous things in our writing. But what the hell! You can stand my breezy colloquialisms, can't you D? Wait a minute, though! I seem to recall that you're a stickler also for form and dignity. I remember we once had a lengthy argument about whether I should be allowed to keep the word 'shite' in one of my earlier stories. Had I used it in straight narrative, I would have probably left the 'e' off the end. But I wanted my character, a feminist, lesbian, single parent, to exclaim in the middle of the story, located in the seedy end of the New Town (somewhere between Broughton

Street and Canonmills) 'shite'! Somehow I felt the word with the 'e' on the end added an extra dimension to the story.
But dear old D, down there in his Bloomsbury office lined with leather-bound first editions, thought differently. You wrote that you were 'so sorry' (why do you always write that you're so this and so that?) 'but we' (royal, of course) 'cannot include the word "shite" in your story. You see, Rosamund, one has to realise that the word can still offend and one doesn't want to alienate the mass of the reading public, does one?' To which I wanted to reply with a letter containing one word, 'Balls!'
God preserve us from reasonable, liberal, understanding, sympathetic, but covertly autocratic, manipulative editors of publishing houses! But I'd better cool down. If I write a diatribe I'll be showing you, D, how much I'm at your mercy, that I hang on your every word, wait for your letters when the post comes each day, that I am a writer who has fallen on hard times, and hasn't much chance of getting away from them….

Dear D,
As an unknown writer…. no….. a new writer, a tyro, a beginner ….. no, no, I can't undermine myself like that. If I do it to myself, how can I expect anyone else to think well of me? What approach should I take? I mustn't be too conciliatory, but neither must I appear conceited.

Dear D,
…. this time I'll get it right! ....Thank you for sending the proofs of my story …. that's okay ….. I am pleased you have decided to publish my story, 'Dead Bricks', in your forthcoming anthology of New Writing. When I last saw you we discussed together the story so that you could edit it properly, and I told you I didn't care a jot what you did to it. I had moved on to other things, I said. I used the simile that my stories, essays and poems were like paper darts shot into the wind. Some landed on target; others didn't. But that wasn't entirely true, D. I was trying to appear unconcerned and nonchalant. I said I didn't care what you did to the story, but in my heart of hearts I did. I cared passionately. I was too frightened to say how strongly I felt about the way you had butchered my prose. You know the bit here in the proof, the bit you wrested from me, stirred around and regurgitated so that it resembled a thalidomide child. You bolted with my work. You said, of course, in your letter that you had to edit heavily my story to make it clear, to iron out the pieces of dialect that were incomprehensible, and the eccentric punctuation. Confound your metropolitan parochialism, D! Confound you in your leather-lined Bloomsbury haven. Those incomprehensible bits are the language of my home town. You said that no-one would have understood my

heroine if I allowed her to girn at the broo. And when she tripped in the close you thought I was writing Double-Dutch. Well, D, what about your Faulkner? Don't you, when he writes about rednecks and other Southern people, let him keep his vernacular? So, in that case why can't you let me keep mine?

You had another reservation about my writing, didn't you, D? You said it was essential that you lighten the load; my story was too dark and depressing for your kind of readership. You complained of the ending where my lesbian, separatist single-mother takes a nose-dive, pram before her, from the top of Arthur's Seat because she could no longer tolerate the fact that her lover had left her to marry the Lord High Advocate and settle down in a detached house in Davidson's Mains. My writing was too subjective and emotional, you said. But, D, being subjective is valid; subjectivity is merely a microcosm of the whole world, is it not? When I protested, you just grumbled about the arrogance of writers and tried to humour me which made me feel more impotent than I had felt before.

Do you remember when I first came to see you in your Bloomsbury sanctuary? Up until that point I addressed you as Mr T. Then you asked me to adopt that nice compromise between familiarity and formality, so I wrote to you as Dear DT. When you asked me to call you by your first name, I thought aha! This is it, I am at last admitted to the inner echelons of the revered world of letters even though I am a woman. How marvelous it is to live in the late twentieth century when one doesn't need to change one's name to George or Acton or Currer?

Do you remember, D, when you took me out to lunch? I won't forget those friendly, avuncular admonitions of yours: Miss F, you called me at the hors d'oeuvre stage but by the time the dessert came round you had started to use my first name. You lectured me on your firm's fine tradition of handling female writers; you said that they were good to have on your list particularly the younger ones who could boast a pretty snapshot on the end cover. But I protest strongly, D, my vagina is as intelligent as my brain is pretty!

To get back to your reservations about the darkness in my writing: 'Why must I dwell on the pain?' you remonstrate. 'Aren't there in life happy experiences and moments of joy?' Of course there are, D, but like the poet, Anne Sexton, I feel that pain engraves a deeper memory. It takes courage to write about those dark areas, 'it's dangerous in there, they say. 'It's wrong – even evil – to explore those skeletons.' But I want to explore so I may understand; that's why I fossick and exhume. 'Be a fool,' said Anne Sexton; that's what one must be, and that takes courage. Do you understand, D? I've always felt displaced and that I belong nowhere. I certainly don't belong in your galley of quasi-fools, DT: those who pander to commercialism and stick in the middle of the road. By you, D, I am simultaneously respected and reviled: you want what I produce (you applaud it wholeheartedly) but you're not so keen on supporting my vagaries, as you call

them; you think I am haughty, wayward and recalcitrant. Can't you see that I don't belong anywhere except perhaps with the mad or the bad, but ultimately with the fools.

I think it was you, D, who implied that there was something unwholesome in conjuring up the dark spirits: 'don't paint the devil on the wall', you said reminding me of an old German adage. Maybe you're right, D. Who knows? I mustn't, you intimated, engrave such obscenities on the human consciousness. I was even accused of conjuring them up from the ether adding more dirt to the ever-flowing pool of mud. But am I not merely reflecting our world but in an artistic form?

Grim though my writing may be, my preoccupation with misery and pain has a beauty of its own: as a writer once remarked when he first saw Calcutta, the city of the dreadful night, poverty is picturesque; the truly hungry assume almost balletic compositions; beggary is beautiful. The face of a friend racked in pain while he was dying had a poignancy as frightful and beautiful as the painting by Poussin of the 'Massacre of the Innocents'. I can picture you moving uncomfortably in your well-upholstered seat, D, the reasonable white liberal of North West London that you are.

Why should I not be allowed to pick my scabs and examine them? I have no need to vindicate myself; haven't those Christians for almost two thousand years flaunted shamelessly the model of the instrument of torture that murdered their leader, bejeweling it, hanging it proudly round their necks, placing it on graves and altars; is it not the most powerful symbol of the occident?

What I really want to say, D, is that anyone who enters new territory finds inevitably that he/she is alone and misunderstood. I may not be much of a harbinger, scout or whatever else you want to call an artist but I'm still up against that age-old problem besetting one of my kind: that what I choose to write about is generally thought of as an unfit subject. I am advised to clam up and let the skin grow over the unclean wound, but the purpose of my writing is to cleanse and purge. What's wrong with trying to gouge out the offending body, to let it be seen instead of hiding it away?

The trouble was, D, that you flattered me; at least in the beginning, you did. 'Write us a novel, Rosamund,' you said. 'I'm sure you could write an excellent one.' (no skin off your nose if it didn't work; no mention of a contract or money -- just write us a novel): 'You lucky woman,' I thought, 'being taken seriously by such a famous publisher, a firm that kept relics of many an author; the lock of Charlotte Bronte, Byron's sperm in a phial, the consumptive phlegm of Chatterton, and Southey's spittle.'

You wanted to snaffle me up as your prodigy while you played gallantly the nurturer, saviour and Svenghali to my Trilby. But, dear D, I'm not your race-horse

trained into running the Booker steeplechase, to leap over hurdles and perform literary gymnastics for you.

I'm like a bird, a bird in a cage, if you like (yes, it's not the most brilliant of similes, I must admit) but you see, D, writers are like birds. They have a song – their own particular one— which they must sing. Just like mediums who make their minds free and available for something (call it what you will) to come through them. If you clip their wings, or try to modify their song, they atrophy and sometimes even die. So be careful, D, otherwise my song which until recently, has been untampered with, will become clouded and out of tune. You saw what I had to offer, and tried to catch, encapsulate and make it into something marketable not realizing that it was as fragile and elusive as a cobweb, it needed to be treated with sensitivity to enable it to blossom.

Why is it D, that I like you in spite of our differences in opinion? What do you, as the male editor represent for me, the female writer? Who are you? Why do you have such a hypnotic effect? What is it that gets me to respond, acquiesce and accept your demands? With your editing sperm, you fertilise my writing egg and an embryo grows. You inject into me something that enables my fruit to gestate and become a child. You may not see it that way, though. Didn't you once refer to Mary Shelley in connection with me; you said that it was you who had given birth to me (a repetition of the distorted Jewish myth) and I was your new writer who, after being created, wouldn't comply and turned into a monster like Frankenstein's.

Somehow, D, you appear to be someone that you so obviously are not; your existence as an editor is purely quixotic; you're there to help people, to nurture promising writers, or so you say. So in my isolation and keenness to succeed I found it easy to lose myself in you (a classic female tendency in a world set up by men) because I had to have someone to write for, someone to pour out all my exuberance and enthusiasm; you, of course were my nearest port of call; if you thought my writing passed muster, then I was set fair for a good voyage.

You have decried me for being neurotic, fragmented, for not having that cool determination you associate with your male writers. You have no sympathy when I say that there are parts of me neglected because of my life as a writer; the desire for motherhood, for wanting to be both independent and cared for, of wanting both celibacy and a lover, of loving women because of their unfailing nearness to what is really important. You do not understand when I say that my writing is taking me away from being my natural self; in other words being a whole woman, a woman who doesn't want to be split in half; expected to be either clever or pretty, but never both, a eunuch – infertile being – or Earth Mother; Virgin Mary or Mary Magdalene. Woman is always seen in polarities; never complexities. She is ironed out into a caricature or seen as a two-dimensional personality purely for

man's simplistic comprehension.
I don't know why I come back to you time and time again, D? Maybe it's your manner, D; you're like a sympathetic surgeon or midwife when you stitch up my verse and round off my similes. Such an ingratiating man you are, D. Is it because you're tall, and slim and ever so aloof, D – the classic ex-public school type, D, that gives you authority and credibility with your educated, blase manner of speaking. Why didn't you go into politics, D, along with those other smooth Davids? Maybe you should have become someone's think-tank, D, instead of victimizing promising authors, D!
The trouble is I don't think you have a clue about writers; you compartmentalize you life; work goes in one box, playing in another and sex in another. You fail to understand that for me it is all the same thing: I am my work; my work is my libido, my play is my work and libido; I am all bound up in one complicated and incomprehensible ball.
Well, D, what shall I say now? I know what I want to say; oh, yes I do. You have ruined my story, D, through your crass insensitivity. You have turned it upside down, hoovered, homogenized and made it as bland and colourless as your boring Home Counties relatives who I talked to for half an hour at a cocktail party given in some writer's honour; of course, D, I know, and you know, that I'm not going to write to you (or send off) anything approaching querulousness. You, in your leather-bound haven know that, don't you, D, only too well…

Dear D,
I am so sorry I have taken so long to reply to your letter of the 6th. Thank you for sending the proofs of my story. I have read them over, and cannot find anything that I want to add. You wrote that you expected the anthology to be published sometime next year when I should receive the second part of my advance. I await happily the date of publication.
Yours sincerely,
Rosamund.

Broadcast, BBC Radio 3, 27 April, 1984. Repeat broadcast BBC Radio 3, 11 April, 1985.

THE FUNNY FARM

From my window I can see the cows walking towards the byre. They are drugged by sun and stuffed with grass, and look as docile as we do who swallow pills each day. Weighed down by huge udders which bump against their hind legs as they walk, these animals look more drowsy than the ones back at home. I should know; I know all about farming. I'm a farmer's wife.

The cows are now walking through the door. I count them. There's a small one at the end of the row. What's her name, I wonder? What kind of names do these cows have? I've no idea. I only know the names they give cows in the neighbourhood where I live.

Farming is rough; it's not as idyllic as many would think. But that is the life I chose and it would have remained quite pleasant if the accident hadn't happened. That was just over three years ago, at about this time of the year. The longest day had come and gone, and the river was swelling with the summer tide. We were making hay beside the saltings, and were hurrying to get it into the shed before the weather changed. I didn't realise that the children were so close when we loaded the trailer six bales high. I didn't see him behind the tractor. I didn't see him. It happened so quickly. I had no time to stop .....

Someone is calling for me to go downstairs for lunch. I move slowly because my head is confused; it must be the effect of the drugs. They make us take so many: yellow ones in the morning, red at night and a green one before breakfast. I try to tidy myself up. I pick up my brush and give my hair a few strokes which helps to make me look presentable. I try to take care of my appearance, and make sure that I wash each day. Each evening I wash my clothes: underwear, blouses, tights, even my pullowver and cardigan. Washing my clothes gives me something to

do. At home I'm used to washing things, especially the churns in the boilerhouse after the cows have been fed.

If I go on thinking about my home I shall start to weep again, and when the tears come they don't seem to stop. Pulling my thoughts away from that terrible scene is like yanking a stubborn bull from its cows. They will not budge. However hard I try to divert them, they always return to their original resting-place. Do I want to seek out the pain? Do I really want to punish myself over and over again?

The nurse is calling.
"Come on, Muriel!" she says, "come down for lunch."
I can tell that she is concerned; they all have their eye on me, because I am their most recent admission.

John brought me here, but I don't remember much of the journey. We cruised down to the city where we met the psychiatrist, who looked more like a butcher than a doctor. In his surgery stood a dark screen with a hunting scene carved on it -- a stag being torn to pieces by dogs. He asked if I heard voices, and I knew what he was trying to find out.
"No," I replied, "I do not hear voices." I wasn't going to fall into that trap. My mind is quite clear. I notice a lot. I notice, in particular, that we are treated like children, and if we are wise we respond to their orders like children.

When I arrived the sister said I had a kind husband. She is right; he is a good man, and they all said he was wonderful when it happened, but the accident has caused a rift -- a lesion -- between us. I am listless and uninterested. I don't care about our life together, and I don't sleep in the same room as him any longer.

Instead I have turned my attention to the animals. They are small consolation, but I still enjoy keeping our pet lambs; since the accident happened I have been keener to watch out for those frail ones who have been deserted by their mothers. They can be so weak, especially when the icy winds whisle up from the sea.

My life seems to be an extended nursery, a situation in which I find myself feeding, coaxing and providing. I like it that way., In winter there's nothing more satisfying than seeing all of the cows bedded down, some of them standing in their stalls, others lying on thestraw eating hay.

I promised myself, however, that this morning I wouldn't think about it. Not today anyhow, but my thoughts come back again to that day -- just before tea-time

-- when we had been laughing and joking, and the boys were playing "tig", and we were racing against the clock to get the last load of hay in.

The nurse is calling again.
"I'm coming!"

I walk down the corridor until I reach the stairs. As I go down the steps I hold on to the rail. The hall smells like a boudoir; in the centre is a round table, and placed on it is a vase of flowers: a huge arrangement of roses in a myriad of colours. The sister likes flowers, and when we leave we are expected to give her some. A rich person must have left for I have never seen such a posy of roses as this one: tight-lipped virginal ones, blowzy ones whose outer petals are about to drop, small round ones that look like frilled rosettes. And what a scent! It even blots out the stench of furniture polish.

I feel a momentary panic when I reach the door of the dining room and notice several heads turning in my direction. I'm not used to these people; I find them quite frightening. I select a table by the window where the Viennese diplomat's wife sits. She is good to be with; she smiles and says little. She is mountainous and always wears the same dress: it is made up in green tweed with satin trimmings. She wears court shoes and has a handbag to match. What has brought her here, I wonder? But I know better than to probe; here, it is tacitly agreed that we wait for our companions to disclose the reasons for their descent into this grey, nether world that we all inhabit; like prisoners our pasts are touchy and clandestine until we volunteer to reveal what is in them. Usually the disclosure comes in a torrrent, like the water gushing from a burst pipe after the ice has thawed.

She holds out my chair for me to sit down. She is so polite. I notice that her dress has a large grease stain on it, just above the waist. It makes me want to cry. How she would hate to be thought of in the salons of Europe sitting in this place like a homesick child in its first week at boarding-school, with a huge mark on her front.

"It's pork today," she says.
I say nothing; there isn't anything to cap such a remark; pork is pork, and I wouldn't care it it were beef or mutton or even chicken. She eats without savouring what she eats, while I pick at the flaccid, fatty flesh. At first we don't bother to talk to each other. What is there to say anyway? After all we're not in the Spanish Embassy entertaining the Russian attache, but in the funny house trying to get better.

There is, however, something between us. Let's not say it is a strong bond, but we do like each other, and our growing friendship is similar to those attachments often found in schools, offices, prisons or regiments: forced freindships, and quite ephemeral, but sometimes no less supportive than the bond of love or blood. I know that after we leave our paths will not cross; I shall go back to my sheep and cows and she to her embassy parties.

She begins to make conversation with me and I try to return her interest in my country by asking her about hers:
"I have never been to Vienna. Is it as beautiful as they say?"
She nods. It's true that I know nothing about Vienna but I have seen photgraphs of the Spanish Riding School with its famous white horses, whose necks bend like the curve of a Gothic window.
"It's not quite as magnificent as it used to be!" she says. She talks continuously of houses that crumble, things that fade, and of a world that looks as if it is veiled in thick gauze: a twilight zone full of muted colours, blurred images and dull sentiments. It is similar to the world which I live in. Yet they say I will recover. What did the doctor tell me when he admitted me? We shall look after you until you feel ready to take up the cudgels again.

But I can't stop thinking about the accident. I've gone over the events time and time again, especially at night when I've been trying to sleep. At home I would wake up early in the morning and go to the window to watch the swifts darting in and out of the eaves and in winter I would hear the coarse talk of the geese as they soared upriver in their neat squadrons. I used to love that time in midwinter when the sky was pink and the frost made the grass look as if it was a tangle of silver wire. The geese flew in to feed on the saltings; where did they come from, those strong birds? From Greenland or some other snowy waste? When I went outside to feed the ponies I would carry the child on my back. He wore a knitted cap and his cheeks were red from the cold air; I felt his hot breath on my back.

"Are you having custard with your pears, Muriel?"
That nurse has taken over my role of coaxer, feeder and provider. I don't mind. I don't care about anything any more. I tell her that I don't want any pears or custard.

When lunch is finished we are told to go to the O.T. room. The Viennese lady seems to have apointed herself as my guide.
"Come," she says, as she takes my hand. We sit beside each other and pull our chairs close to the table. I know I must pretend to be interested in making some-

thing; it's a black mark if I don't. The occupational therapist charts our progress, and after she has supplied two men with some cane from her cupboard, she comes over to me to ask if I would like to knit or sew or do patchwork or basket-making. But as soon as I see the others busily weaving with their cane -- quite adjusted to their vacuous lot -- I'm seized by a terrible panic. So this is it; here I am -- washed up, tossed aside, run down, and run into the funny house, swept into a siding, told to recoup, remodel, re-assemble
myself and glue together the shattered pieces. I try not to let the woman see my distress, but the Viennese lady has noticed. She comes to my rescue by telling the O.T. that I will make up my mind after she has shown me her crochet I thank her for her help by giving her a smile.

I sit there mesmerised by the short, sharp movements she makes with her hook. A small girl, who never speaks, sits close to us knitting. A book lies on her lap,but I suspect she doesn't read because I never see her turning the pages. She is quite young. A tear falls on to a page of the book but she doesn't bother to mop it up. I have never seen anyone cry so silently. She turns towards me and says that I can borrow her book if I want to. I take it from her, and start reading. As far as I can see the story is of nurses who fall in love with doctors. The nurses are always pretty and the doctors are always tall, dark, handsome and clever. The nurses won't sleep with the doctors until they are married and, according to the girl, this kind of story always ends happily.
"Everything get ironed out in the end," she says.

My friend (I think I have the right to call her that) says I should go to the dining room to have tea with her. We sit there and look out of the window on to the farm, and the nuses give us salad to eat. She starts to tell me about the time when she and her husband stayed in Paris.
"We had beautiful food," and she enumerates sumptuous dishes which contrast with the food I cook at home; it is plain and simple.
With all those servants, I wonder how she spent her time in the embassy and, as if she can read my thoughts, she adds:
"I made up the seating arrangements. It is quite an art; you have to know who is in favour with whom."
I could imagine that she would make a good hostess.

In this place the hours before sunset are the most dreary: dusk comes slowly. We fill in time by playing Scrabble or by watching television. My Viennese friend asks if I would like to take a walk with her down to the farm. But I am too sleepy; my legs feel heavy and I want to go to bed. Sleep is like a delicious film of forget-

fulness that encircles my body: a nectar and a reprieve from the gods.

I tell my friend that I want to go to bed. When I reach the landing, I meet the same nurse who called for me to come downstairs to lunch this morning. She stretches out an arm but I dodge away from her. I don't like being touched, not even by someone who is friendly. I tell that I'm too tired to join the others; reluctantly she lets me go, and as I walk along the passage she gives me a look which makes me feel that I am like a shy girl playing truant from a children's party.

This house -- a slim Palladian mansion - is so elegant; its fine proportions cast a spell over the occupants, preventing them from indulging in the worst of excesses -- or so it seems to me. My room, which I share with two other women, is furnished in chintz, soft bed-spreads and table-lamps. An armchair has been placed by the sash window.

I walk over to the window, lean against the sill, press my nose against one of the panes of glass and look out on to the lawn. If I look into the distance I can see the farm buildings, which are flanked by a group of chestnut trees. With their branches lopped off, the trees remind me of mutants; I think of our own chestnuts back home, whose branches straggle and bend down generously to the ground.

I don't bother to draw the curtains before I undress, because I have lived in the country all my life I have no need to be so modest. I feel cold standing there in my nightdress. It is quite quiet outside, except for the occasional sound of pigeons chortling on the roof, and the moan of the milking-machine at the farm.

It is when I hear the dairyman shouting at his dog from across the field that it all comes flooding back.
On that evening the children were there in the byre nipping in and out of the stalls. He pleaded with me to let him go out to the field where they were about to bring in the last load.
I wanted to say no because it was late and he had to be up for school the next morning. But I gave in and took him there and let him play with the other children. They were chasing each other around the field, throwing bits of hay into the air, and pushing each other on to the ground. John was tired -- he had been working since dawn-- and he asked me to drive one of the tractors back to the barn. I remember I climbed up and sat down on the seat. I switched on the engine, put my foot on the clutch and shoved it in gear. But I had never really mastered the way those tractors worked and the gearbox was always stiff. Then

I placed my foot very gently on the accelerator but didn't realise until it was too late that I had put the tractor into reverse. How I didn't notice him there I will never know. But I didn't. There was a jolt when the tractor lurched backwards; I felt the impact of the trailer when it hit something. I heard a scream and then someone shouting. After that I remember nothing. My memory has chosen to draw a veil over the incident; it is kind to me, for however hard I try to recall what happened afterwards, my mind remains a blank.

I can't stop crying; the tears fall onto my hands, which are still resting on the windowsill. Through the screen of salty water I can see the cows coming out of the shed. This time their burden has been shed. Their udders are less bloated than they were this morning. I imagine that I can hear the machine sputtering to a stop as the dairyman switches it off, and can detect the familiar smells of sickly, warm milk and fresh dung. Then I notice the small cow taking its place at the end of the row as its companions file along the track towards the field. She looks more docile than she did this morning -- quite content with her lot, having milk tugged from her with monotonous regularity. She waits at the gate to be let out.

It is the sight of her, whose name I shall never know, that makes me break down finally into a sobbing that I cannot control.

Broadcast BBC Radio 4, "Morning Story" February, 1990. Repeat broadcast BBC Radio Scotland, "The Best of Scottish" August, 1990 . Published, "Under Cover", An Anthology of Contemporary Scottish Writing, Mainstream Publishing, 1993

THE INTERVIEW

For her interview Elizabeth decided to buy herself a new pair of tights. She found a pair in Safeway's for 55p, in the right colour. As she rummaged through the packets she made up her mind not to get 15 denier because they'd inevitably catch on her stripped pine chairs and then ladder. She realized that 20 denier was the right thickness.

She was pleased she had avoided the alcohol section, a cheap Riesling would have been fine even though it might have anti-freeze in it. Maybe that's what she needed to thaw her out, but today she felt anything but frozen. In fact, she could feel herself sweating freely. Remembering her friend Jennifer's advice to take deep breaths and be positive, she tried to think well of herself as she wheeled her trolley along the aisles. But it was easy for Jennifer with all that money. On £36. 70 a week, though, it's hard always to be positive.

A tall emaciated woman of about 60 walked past her. The figure had the look of someone who was sick, someone even who might be dying, Elizabeth thought, with eyes that were dewy but with none of the clarity you find in the gaze of youth. Her look was more akin to resignation – a resignation to The Final Act with no hope of a deus ex machina flying down from the gods. Elizabeth yanked her trolley to the left to avoid collision with the woman.

When she reached the check-out, the assistant tried to charge her 90p for mushrooms that were only thirty. A moment of panic; to find that 60p wouldn't be there at the end of the day, when she had successfully avoided drinking a half-pint in a bar, was too much for her, especially when she had eschewed a coffee at Tranent's, and even stopped herself from indulging in buying a book. How she had wanted it! The biography of Gwen John. The woman who had effaced

herself so much that she'd found salvation through her very self-neglect. In other words, thought Elizabeth, she had lost her life in order to save it.
Casting a last look at the alcohol section, she considered again the Riesling she'd seen for just under £2.00. She could have bought a bottle. She remembered the time not long ago when she'd buy one bottle almost every night from the Asian shop where the two brothers knew her as 'the woman with the wine'. To think of it, she mused, to be not the woman with the lamp, but with the wine! She laughed at herself and was pleased she could do that still.
A part of her identified with these Asians because she shared with them that feeling of not totally belonging. Her father had come over here from Poland during the War. She knew well why they tried so hard to fit in.
Anyway, she wouldn't think of the Asians – nor of the wine. Not at the moment anyhow, because it was the interview she was to consider. With the tights and her good cot and her shoes that were all right, she'd go up there to the top of the town quite confidently. Or would she? She wasn't so sure. Two years out of work. Two years!
What had she done to be out of work for two years? Of course, she wouldn't tell him the real reason. She couldn't reveal why she'd hardly stepped out of her front door for six months of those two years, how she'd lived like hermit speaking to no one except perhaps to the woman in the greengrocer's, the Asians and the Polish shoemaker off St. Denzil's Street. Perhaps it was because her father was a Pole that she was drawn to the shoemaker. He was always friendly and would rail against those who lived off 'the Social Security'. Elizabeth hadn't the courage to admit that she was one of those people.
When she went to the Post Office every fortnight to cash her Giro-cheque, she couldn't help feeling ashamed. On the one hand, she knew that her father – dead now for over two and a half years—wouldn't have liked to see her living off the government. He'd never begged or borrowed money – not even from his family and times had been hard when he was young. 'But not as hard as it was for those left behind,' he would often say, and then launch into the tale of the brother who'd been in the Resistance and ended u in Dachau. Elizabeth didn't want to think of the uncle in Dachau nor of her father who had died, not suddenly but in a hospice close to the sea on the outskirts of the city. She shuddered at the memory.
It was raining outside. A lorry hurtled by, sending up a spray of water that splashed her legs. If it continued to rain when she walked up the hill for her appointment, she would look a mess when she arrived. Umbrellas in this weather with a cruel, Forth wind provided little protection. Pausing at the traffic lights by the off-licence, she noticed the tall woman she'd seen in the supermarket, walking on the other side of the street, pushing a shopping-basket on wheels. Her step

was light, though she had a trace of a limp. Even from a distance it was noticeable that she was suspended from this sphere, removed from it, by what seemed a terminal pain.

Elizabeth took a considerable length of time unwrapping the tights. 'Some people wear gloves so they don't ladder their stockings when they put them on,' her mother once told her. Elizabeth would visit her occasionally, just enough to salve her conscience. She knew she should go more often, but if she did, she might undo the good of going at all by arguing with her mother. Pretending that she agreed with her was too much of a strain, so Elizabeth went little.

'Lipstick?' she asked herself Why not? A little blue on the lids? Her mother always put on too much make-up. Far too much, but then, her mother hadn't come to terms with ageing. She was almost seventy and she still couldn't let a grey hair stay on her head for more than a couple of days, and her little-girl voice that might have disarmed her father forty yersw ago, fooled no one today.

The door was large and imposing and she had arrived five minute too early. No time for a coffee opposite. She walked up the stairs carpeted in a hairy material and noticed the colourful posters on the walls. She asked to see the director, who she said was expecting her. A receptionist (ash-blonde and as slim as Elizabeth had always longed to be) told her to sit outside in the passageway and wait for him.

He arrived. 'Would you come this way, please?' he said.

She knew he was formal in a way that wasn't natural. She knew he wasn't her cup of tea. She knew she wanted to walk briskly out of his office down those hairy carpeted stairs back into the street. But she knew she wouldn't. She watched the long, thin man peruse her form. How do you hide two years of life that were, in effect, spent in hiding? How do you assume that confident, inside manner when you know only too well that if you don't get some kind of job soon, you'll slip inexorably outside this world that they call the world of the living?

The man wasted no time in coming to the point. 'I see,' he mumbled in a manner that reminded her of a judge preparing to pronounce a sentence on the defendant (defendant she certainly felt, defending her very life but with little effect), 'from your CV that you have a gap of ….let's see,' he squinted through his spectacles at the paper on his desk, 'two years.' He sat back and looked at her carefully. She knew she must explain why she had had two years out, and tried to fool him that she was relaxed by swinging her right leg over the knee of her left, leaning deliberately back in her chair. 'I decided I wanted to take time out to ….' She couldn't finish her sentence. What could she say when the reason would condemn her completely? 'I suppose you could call it a sabbatical,' she said eventually.

The man looked at her skeptically. 'Two years?' he asked incredulously. By

some form of miracle or flash of inspiration, she found herself making up a story about why she'd not worked for so long and said, 'I thought I would try my hand at becoming a ….' (she wasn't sure why she hesitated yet again)'…. a painter.' She murmured something about self-expression and wanting to 'know herself'.
'I never sold anything,' she added for precaution, 'but I got a few favourable comments on my ….water colours.' She began to like her story and only wished that she remembered to say gouaches instead of watercolours, then realised she might have been sailing a little close to the wind when she had no idea what gouaches were.
'Most irregular, I'd have thought. To give up the promising career tht you had,' was the response.
He asked another question and then several more until she found herself feeling not unlike an onion being peeled right down to its core – that's if onions had cores. He wanted to be sure she was reliable, he said, that's why he was grilling her. After all, after two years of being out of the system she might not be able to teach. She had to convince him of her stamina, reliability and adequacy.
How could she show him she was now more adequate than she'd been before? Anyone who had been through what she'd been through and emerged intact had more than enough ability to do what this man required of her. Elizabeth began to wonder if she wanted to be part of his establishment anyway. The money would be pleasant, but money wasn't the only thing she wanted and there was always £36.70 for her to subsist on each week, plus sunshine and walks in the Botanics. Never mind about buying books about Gwen John. She would be Gwen John. , she thought, with wild bravura, then quickly came back to earth, realising she had the talent neither for painting nor for poverty.
The man's face was cold and disinterested. Elizabeth couldn't be bothered to try and win him round – to seduce him with fluttering eyelids, hunched shoulder and coy smiles.
'Well, Miss Tadeuska, thank you very much for coming in,' he said briskly. 'I have enjoyed talking with you. If we need any extra help this summer, we'll let you know.'
She found herself standing outside the door on the hairy carpet. She walked quickly down the steps and didn't care where she went so long as she could be in the street without being noticed. There was a comfort in being unknown.
She followed a party of Japanese sightseers all gazing up at the castle in a uniform expression. She carried on walking down to Tranent's for a coffee; what the hell, she could afford it this once! Lounging in that cavernous room with the gentle background hiss of the coffee-machine intermingling with the douce whispers of women taking a break from their afternoon's shopping, Elizabeth noticed that by listening in to their chatter, she could live vicariously for a while;

this was compensation for her own lack of engagement with the world. Elizabeth wiped her mouth with a red paper serviette, stood up from the table and straightened her grey flannel skirt. As she climbed up the steps to the pavement, she was surprised to see again the woman she had almost bumped into earlier in the day in Safeway's. She was looking in the window of the florist's next to the coffee-house, where displayed in all their splendor was a bouquet of gardenias, with a dozen lilies and roses. She paused momentarily, gazing up at the window, then quickly moved on down the street towards the West End.

It must have been the effect of the interview that did it; the layers that had been exposed couldn't immediately be restored to their original position. Elizabeth was impelled to walk up the steps and go into the shop to ask the assistant if she could buy the bouquet. What was more, she didn't even ask the price, which turned out to be all of £18. 00, more than half her weekly allowance. Quickly paying for them, she ran out of the shop with the flowers and followed the woman, whose presence had dogged her all day.

Catching up with her, Elizabeth tapped her on the shoulder. The woman turned round and looked her straight in the eye. Noticing that her expression had the authority and lack of temerity only found in those resigned to their fate, Elizabeth was certain the woman was dying. She'd seen that look so clearly once before, back in the hospice two and a half years before, when her father lay there waiting for death. Elizabeth held out the bouquet to the woman, who scrutinized her closely. Without a word, she accepted the flowers, whispering her thanks afterwards. With a detached regality, she departed down the street.

As soon as she returned home, Elizabeth removed her tights, not with gloves as her mother had once advised, and soaked them in warm water in the wash-hand basin. After making herself a cup of coffee, she sat down in her armchair, and thought about her day. It had just been another day, nothing more and nothing less.

LARGIE CASTLE, A RIFLED NEST

Angus Macdonald died twice, once by drowning, after his transport was torpedoed by the Japanese in WW2, and again in the press 10 years later, when a survivor published his version of the tragic event. Years after spending 26 days in a lifeboat, the survivor revealed the cannibalism of others, but admitted only to innocence and authority for himself. Sixty years on, Mary Gladstone revisited the life of her uncle Angus and found it admirable and the survivor's story questionable. The full story is told in Largie Castle, a rifled nest, to be released by firefall-media in hardcover March 2, 2017, the 75th anniversary of her uncle's death. With scant evidence, due to Angus's restraint & love of solitude, Mary succeeds in this tour de force, of giving her uncle a living place in the British narrative.

Born in a castle, sharing rooms with the pagan Broonie & the Archbishop, and, though a second son, destined to inherit an ancient Scottish name & a large property, influenced by his Crabbe and Lockhart ancestors, trained to be an effective agent of Empire through his classical, sporting education, which included Oxford University, where he rowed, flew, and became a student of history, Angus Macdonald looked forward to a bright future. He joined the Argylls and embarked on a military career that put him on the front line in Malaya, in WW2, as Chief of Staff to various Commanders, where he lived in tents, out-ran tanks in his baby Fiat, and escaped, only to die at sea in uncertain circumstances.

By recreating her uncle's life, Mary confronts her mother's distress around his death. Her quest though is like that of her Lockhart ancestor who rode to the crusades with the heart of King Robert the Bruce. In the years after WW2, Largie castle, roofless through neglect, was reduced to a rubble of stones & with it the author's own sense of self & family. Gaining full understanding, she ends the book with an inspired disquisition on the British Empire, that nicely defines its evolving and layered character.

Angus Macdonald's second death began with Corporal Walter Gibson and his ghost-written book, The Boat. Following is an abridged excerpt from Mary Gladstone's book, which goes into fuller detail and explores subsequent events as well:

GIBSON WAS KNOWN for his braggadocio, as a way to compensate for his 98 lbs and small size. Angus measured 6' 4", and was from an old Argyllshire family. Gibson was reputed to be 'a Mossbank boy,' which meant he'd been to Borstal, a reform school for young offenders. In 1929 Gibson joined the

Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders as a piper boy and sailed to China to join the 2nd Battalion. In 1937 Angus joined the 2nd Argylls in India. The two soldiers' paths crossed, when both served in Malaya. Gibson was employed in the intelligence section, and Angus was adjutant and Chief-of-Staff of the Brigade. They worked closely. When the Japanese invaded on 14 December 1941 Gibson's unit fought the length of the peninsula in retreat, hoping to prevent the invaders from capturing the country, especially Singapore island. From the start of hostilities, the Argylls were in continuous action but it wasn't until the battle of Slim River on 7th January, that they reached breaking-point. Gibson was among 300 officers and men separated from their Battalion and lost in the jungle for six weeks, where they suffered from all manner of privation: many died of malarial attacks, dysentery, 'jungle sores,' exposure, starvation, and exhaustion. Others were taken prisoner by the Japanese. Their diet was unrefined tapioca which, when boiled, tasted like potatoes, unripe bananas, and 'jungle stew' consisting of bamboo shoots with slugs. They made progress by night, slashing their way through the undergrowth under cover of darkness. The Malays and Tamils were unreliable and would sooner betray them than help.

The other soldiers who reached Port Dickson with Gibson were a fluent speaker of Malay and Chinese, Captain Douglas Broadhurst from the Straits Settlement Police and attached to the Argylls, and Lance Corporal Jock Gray. On February 13th two days before the British surrender in Singapore and the day before Angus departed the island, Gibson and his companions emerged from the jungle six miles north of Port Dickson. Thanks to Broadhurst's language skills, they acquired a Chinese sampan and sailed it to Sumatra where at Rengat they met Brigadier Paris's party, which included Angus. By this time, Sergeant Willie or 'Toorie' MacDonald, one of the Battalion's best NCOs and badly wounded at the battle of Dipang, joined them. They reached Padang on 21st February.

Five days later, they and 500 passengers and crew boarded the Rooseboom. After that, we have only Gibson's account of what happened. In 1949 with the help of a Scottish journalist, Gibson wrote an article infused with heroism, murder, pathos and self-sacrifice about the 26 days he spent on a lifeboat adrift in the Indian Ocean. Shortly afterwards, his dramatic story appeared in *The Reader's Digest* and in 1952 on the 10th anniversary of the night when he was cast into the sea, Gibson published a widely-translated book The Boat, about his trials after the Rooseboom sank.

As a 1,000 ton KPM steamer with a crew of Dutch officers and Javanese seamen, the Rooseboom plied coastal runs between Sumatra and Java. During the final week of February 1942, the ship, en route from Batavia to Ceylon, received orders to pick up passengers at Padang. Soldiers of all ranks, officials, policemen, traders, miners, planters, also women and children crammed on to

The Rooseboom, which lay perilously low in the water. Departing at dusk the Dutch vessel headed west towards the open sea, looking out for enemy aircraft. After two nights, the Dutch captain told the evacuees that the ship was now out of bombing range and they were relatively safe.

In his book, Gibson introduces some of the passengers, such as Brigadier Paris, Captain Mike Blackwood and Angus. Florid in his praise of the first, he also admires the second whose yacht, he claimed inaccurately, was used by Paris's party to escape Singapore. Angus, he narrated, was 'a member of a famous Argyllshire family, heir to a £200,000 estate.' Gibson also mistakenly states that these officers 'were involved in hand-to-hand fighting on Singapore island.'

On their 3rd evening at sea, Paris invited the officers to toast their safe arrival in Ceylon expected to be 48 hours later. Within five hours of their celebration at 23 hours 50, the torpedo struck. Gibson was sleeping on deck next to Sergeant Willie Macdonald who was killed instantly. Chaos was immediate, the din deafening: screams, the hiss of escaping steam, the gush of water rushing into the craft and the frantic bellowing of a bullock in the hold. Gibson's collar-bone was broken and a piece of metal lodged itself in his shin. Within minutes the ship sank, but before it went down the corporal managed to throw himself into the sea and find a chunk of debris to cling onto. Then he saw the lifeboat, the only one out of four on board that the crew managed to launch. It was 28 feet long and 8 feet at its widest part but its bow had a gaping hole which the captain and officers repaired. After letting three women (no children managed to escape the ship) and five wounded on board, 80 survivors including Gibson clambered into the boat, built to hold a maximum of 28. Each person stood shoulder to shoulder with no room to change position or sit down. In the water, their heads bobbing, were more survivors. Most gravitated to the life boat so that it eventually held 135 persons, many of whom remained in the water clinging to the outside of the vessel.

The next morning senior officers took a tally of their food and water; much had floated away as the boat was launched. They had a case of bully beef (48 12 oz tins), two 7 lb tins of fried rice, 48 tins of condensed milk and 6 Bols gin bottles filled with fresh water. Each person received one tablespoonful of water at sun up and a spoonful of milk and water at night. A tin of bully beef was to be shared between 12 people daily. The wife of a Dutch officer produced a tablespoon as a measure and shared out her thirst-quenching tablets.

Paris stood in the boat's stern and told the evacuees that the captain was in command while he was responsible for discipline. He tried to reassure them, that since the Rooseboom was expected to arrive at Colombo the following day, a search party would soon be sent to find them. He expected they'd be rescued within four days. Paris then ordered each uninjured man to spend four hours a

day clinging to a lifeline in the water. On the first day sharks approached but the survivors scared them off by yelling at them. A fish stung a soldier in the water and he died in agony an hour later.

The three women on board were Mrs Nunn, wife of Group Captain R. L. Nunn, director of Public Works in Singapore who, after pushing his wife through the porthole of his cabin, went down with the ship, the wife of a Dutch officer and Doris Lim, a young Chinese woman who had worked for British Intelligence in North China and escaped from Tientsin before the Japanese occupation. They sat close together surrounded by sweating, groaning Jocks, Cockneys, and Javanese. Half the occupants were 19 to 20 year old conscripts of the 18th Division, sent just before the Japanese invasion to bolster Malaya's defenses.

Towards dusk, Lieutenant Colonel Douglas of the Indian Army Ordnance Corps swam from a raft floating one hundred yards from the boat. He was at breaking point. With him on the raft was a white woman whose leg had been blown off, lance-corporal Jock Gray, and Angus, who had carried from the ship a flask of what he thought was water but instead was brandy. He had spent the day on the raft drinking from it.

"Angus Macdonald is raving mad," jabbered Lieutenant-Colon-el Douglas "I had to leave him. He was trying to push me off the raft." Douglas's voice rose excitedly, and as darkness fell he shouted one sentence in English, the next in Urdu, in a crazy, high-pitched babble. He struck out wildly. "Put him over before he tips the boat up!" screamed a number of voices. Colonel Douglas struggled as they ejected him, presumably as Angus had. He gripped tightly the gunwale, but they fended him off with an oar. In the blackness, he slipped away, shouting Urdu oaths.

From the second day, hunger, thirst and the cramped conditions began to tell on the survivors. Their skin blistered, especially that of the far-haired Dutch. Many tore off their clothes, dipped them in the sea and put them over their heads to keep cool. All on board were subject to hallucinations. They imagined they saw ships on the horizon. Some had vivid dreams of food, drink, and friendly gatherings. Many of the young drank sea water and those who swallowed a lot fell into a coma and never emerged from it. Gibson gargled with salt water and each morning he cleaned his teeth with it and by the end of the first week he started to drink it in very small quantities. On the third day, some drank their own urine, but it tasted acidic and failed to quench their thirst. Suspicions arose as people disappeared during the night. The following night, they heard screams and shouts, and in the morning 20 people were missing. Then they realized a murder gang was on board. At this time, their rations were cut. A tin of bully beef was shared between 20 and the water ration decreased to one spoonful a day.

At the end of their first week, Brigadier Paris collapsed into a coma and died. Throughout those terrible days, Mike Blackwood had shared his water ration with his superior. The following day Blackwood collapsed and drowned in the bilge water lying at the bottom of the boat. Before his death, Blackwood told Gibson, according to Gibson, that the brigadier wanted to recommend him for a Distinguished Conduct Medal, an award presented to other ranks in the British army for gallantry in the field. At this time one of the engineers stabbed to death the Dutch captain and a number of suicides occurred. Invariably before the individual threw himself into the sea, he tried to grab the rations and fling them overboard as well.

Gibson now took charge of the water bottles, only two were left. The Javanese crew began quietly to take over the boat. All the Dutch officers were gone (either drowned or committed suicide) and all the senior army officers had expired, so Gibson saw to it discipline was maintained on board. On the 7th evening they ran out of water. Just as critical was that the murder gang in the bow became more powerful. The rest of the boat realized they had to kill them, so Gibson led an onslaught on the group and rushed them overboard but not before they killed Drummer Hardie, Colonel Stewart's batman. Hardie's courage was legendary. At no time was he ever known to run, not even under threat from the Japanese. Along with Colonel Stewart, Hardie was the last soldier to cross Singapore's Johore Causeway before the sappers demolished it.

One of the high points on the lifeboat was a cloud-burst which lasted for three minutes. As the rain fell into the boat the survivors knelt down and lapped it up, filling their bottles with water. On another day when a dozen gulls landed on their bows the people pounced and caught seven after which they tore them to pieces and devoured the raw flesh. But the most horrendous occurrence happened on the penultimate day at sea when four crew members (all Javanese) struck repeatedly at the head of a gunner, weakened with thirst and starvation, with a rowlock. Using a tin as a blade they slashed his body, dug their hands into the wound, and extracted chunks of his flesh.

The following morning the survivors saw land. It was Sipora, part of the Mentawis, a chain of islands running north to south 60 miles off the west coast of Sumatra. The living numbered five: Gibson, Doris Lim and three members of the crew although one drowned in the surf trying to reach the shore. As soon as they reached dry land, the non-Europeans quickly disappeared. In 26 days they had drifted 1,000 miles across the Indian ocean andfetched up 100 miles from the port at Padang. After receiving food and water from the islanders and resting for six weeks, Gibson and Doris Lim were handed over to the Japanese who sent them to a prisoner-of-war camp at Padang. They arrived on May 18th, 79 days after they had set off on board the Rooseboom.

This is Gibson's story, as we have it. In his book he explains why he was the only white man to survive. Having been a regular soldier in foreign service for 13 years, he was thoroughly acclimatized to the east. When the torpedo struck and Gibson suffered from a broken collarbone, he realized it was a blessing in disguise, because senior officers ordered him not to go into the water but remain in the boat. He adopted a mood of passivity, which helped him save valuable energy and he had a dogged determination to survive. Also, he insisted, his daily ritual of cleaning his teeth with seawater raised his morale.

TUCKED BEHIND St. Giles' Cathedral off the Royal Mile in the medieval part of Edinburgh is the Court of Session which deals with civil matters. The building is often referred to as Parliament House because, before the Act of Union (1707), it was the seat of the Scottish Parliament. It was to this address that Simon Macdonald on 11th June 1949 presented a petition to determine the death of his older brother Angus. Simon had had to wait until 1949 before he could obtain legal confirmation of that fact. Under an Act of Parliament, a person may be presumed dead if he or she has not been heard of for seven years. In order to inherit the Lockhart property of Lee and Carnwath, left in trust to Angus by Sir Simon Lockhart in 1919, Simon was obliged to go through this legal process.

After a war it was not unusual for relatives of a serviceman killed in action to bring a petition to the courts. But Simon's plea involved an old Scottish family with a large fortune. Angus's inheritance of £200,000 in today's currency amounted to several million pounds. (In late 2015 Angus Macdonald Lockhart, Simon's eldest son who inherited the Lockhart estate, died and left £18,000,000 in his will). The public benches in the court were filled with journalists, notably a reporter from The Scotsman and Macdonald Daly, a popular Scottish writer and radio (later television) broadcaster. He was also editor of The Scottish Sunday Express. Undeniably, the family fortune drew the hacks who, that day, must have believed that all their Christmases had come together.

Crucial to the hearing was a 35 year old Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders corporal from Paisley: Walter Gardiner Gibson. Ever since January 1946 when the War Office in London sent his statement to the Casualties Department of the Colonial Office, Gibson was known to be the Rooseboom's sole European survivor. Before the judge, Lord Sorn, Gibson stated that he had served with Angus and together on 26th February 1942 he and Angus embarked at Padang, Sumatra on the SS Rooseboom with others being evacuated to Colombo in Ceylon. On 1st March, a Japanese submarine torpedoed the ship and almost two thirds of the crew and passengers went down with her. In spite of receiving a wound in the head and shoulder Gibson managed to escape from the ship. Only one lifeboat was successfully launched but at least 135 passengers and crew at-

tempted to cram themselves into it. One of these individuals was Walter Gibson himself. Those who failed crowded around it clinging in the water to its sides. At about midday on 2nd March 1942 a raft with four people on board drifted close to the lifeboat. Lieutenant-Colonel Douglas from the Indian Army Ordnance Corps swam from it to the boat and climbed on board. He stated that the other occupants of the raft were Major Angus Macdonald, another British officer, and a woman. He told them that Angus, "as a result of the heat, thirst and exposure was not in his proper senses". Lieutenant Colonel Douglas died about 24 hours later and on the morning of the 3rd, the lifeboat occupants saw that the raft, which had remained close to them, was now empty. They assumed that Angus and his companions had died during the night. Gibson stated that, at the end of his 26 days adrift in the lifeboat, only three people and himself had survived the ordeal. Thanking the corporal for his evidence, the judge said, 'You had a remarkable escape.' He summed up the hearing by telling the court that he had arrived at the conclusion that Angus had died on the night of 2nd/3rd March 1942.

I would like to have know what was in the mind of 53 year old Gordon MacIntyre (Lord Sorn) when he told Walter Gibson that he had had a remarkable escape. Three generations of MacIntyres, incidentally have entered my life since that date. In the 1970s I knew Bobby, Sorn's son and in 2013 Gavin, Bobbie's son, as a student of a course I taught at Edinburgh University. I make this observation because it illustrates how Scotland was, and in many respects still is, a small, largely rooted, cohesive society. Wasn't there a hint of irony or even of suspicion in Lord Sorn's comment to Gibson? Perhaps. I'm sure the judge would have at least got wind of the confusion surrounding Gibson's rank. Writing in January 1946 in response to Gibson's statement on what happened after the Rooseboom sank, the War Office advised the Enquiries and Casualties Department of the Colonial Office that 'it is unlikely Gibson will be confirmed in his commission so if you have occasion to write to him he had better be referred to as Corporal!' The Court petition, however, referred to the Argyll soldier as a sergeant and The Scotsman report on the court proceedings on 13th June 1949 claimed he was a lieutenant.

With the help of Macdonald Daly, Gibson wrote an article about his experience on the lifeboat. Its serialization in late 1949 in *The Scottish Sunday Express* provoked anger within the Regiment, which prompted General McMillan, Colonel of the Regiment to write on 15th November of that year to Daly stressing that Walter Gibson, a corporal in the Argyll & Sutherland Highlanders had never been granted a commission either by Lieutenant- Colonel Robertson (one-time commanding officer of The Argylls) or Brigadier Paris. It's significant that Gibson named these two senior officers and not Colonel Stewart as they were

killed in action and were unable to refute the claim. As for the moment, when shortly before his death on the lifeboat, Captain Mike Blackwood allegedly confided to Gibson that Paris was going to recommend him for a Distinguished Conduct Medal, this also could never be verified as both officers died on the boat. In his letter to the newspaper editor General McMillan emphasized that Gibson was discharged from the army as a corporal and that in a War Office missive dated 25th January 1946, AG (Adjutant General) officers categorically refuted his statement that he ever held a commission.

Gibson's colleagues in the 2nd battalion regarded him more with amusement than with indignation or anger. Major Eric Moss remembered him strolling around the barracks modelling himself on his superior, Lieutenant-Colonel L B Robertson. At the end of the war, Moss was released from captivity. When he reached Rangoon he found Major Gairdner, the Argylls 2nd in command, in hospital. From his bed Gairdner advised Moss that if he saw Corporal Bloody 'Hoot' Gibson, wearing two pips on his shoulder, he should get them off him. But Moss never caught up with the Corporal, who was 'swanning around' as a 2nd lieutenant. When, after their long voyage home, the released Argyll captives arrived at Southampton and gathered in the transit camp, Moss leafed through a visitors' book and saw the name, Captain W. G. G. G. Gibson. 'Every time he promoted himself he added another 'G' to his name!' said Moss. He next heard that someone had seen Gibson in a railway carriage in Glasgow with the MC (Military Cross) ribbon and three pips on his shoulder.

A month after the Japanese interrogated Gibson and Doris Lim in Padang, the former made a journey of 900 miles lasting five days by lorry with 1,600 British, Dutch and Eurasian captives to Medan on the north coast of Sumatra, where they were imprisoned for two years. With Gibson was planter John Hedley, a Johore Volunteer Officer commissioned as a lieutenant in HM Forces General Service stationed with 1st Mysore Infantry in Singapore. Hedley confirmed that on arriving in the prisoner of war camp in Padang, Gibson claimed he was an officer, which aroused the anger of a number of Australian prisoners who gave him 'a sound drubbing,' and not the light-hearted play he referred to in his books.

Doubtless the reason for the corporal masquerading as a commissioned officer stemmed from his desire for self-promotion and aggrandizement. Notwithstanding the disrepute officers and men of the battalion held him in, Gibson in the account of his lifeboat experiences, strikes a note of megalomania or, as Eric Moss suggested, psychopathology. While testifying in court, however, under oath and chastened by the solemnity of his surroundings, his responses to questions posed by Counsel and Judge were cryptic and restrained.

Nevertheless, in not needing to expatiate on the occurrences in the boat,

the witness gives an incomplete picture of what actually happened. Gibson refers to Lance Corporal Jock Gray as a British officer, which is untrue. Gibson claims that Lieutenant-Colonel Douglas died 24 hours after he clambered on board the lifeboat but, after being pushed off within hours, he died quickly in the dark.

It is understandable that Gibson failed then to divulge Angus's drunkenness or the volley of oaths Douglas uttered as he fell into the water. Opposite page 16 of the British edition of 'The Boat,' however, is a sketch of the author wearing a Glengarry with its double dice pattern around the rim and a large Argyll badge pinned on its side. Gibson holds a pipe to his mouth above which grows a resplendent handlebar moustache. The American edition has a photograph of the soldier in an identical pose. In each, he is mean to be seen as strong, manly, managing, and accomplished. But the way he holds his pipe to the jaunty manner in which he wears his Glengarry, Gibson appears thoroughly theatrical and phoney, in his attempt to impersonate an army officer.

Gibson promoted himself in all circumstances as a leader. In The Boat, he explains how, after Slim River when he accompanied Captain Lapsley in the jungle, the officer appointed him as his right hand man because he read maps so well. On the lifeboat, Colonel Acworth put Gibson in charge of ensuring survivors received the correct measure of rations. Gibson also claimed that Captain Mike Blackwood asked him to help look after the brigadier. At all times, Gibson gives the impression that he is in the centre of things and in charge. He writes that it was he who took over discipline on the boat after the officers died. In his War Office statement, he explained how they collected the rain water on the boat and, as the sole surviving officer, he rationed it out.

Many asked how the corporal survived while all, except three others, did not. His wounds, he admitted. helped prevent him from having to spend time in the water clinging to the side of the boat. In court, he explained that when the torpedo struck he received an injury to his head and shoulder but omitted to mention his other wounds such as his shin damaged by a piece of metal that had lodged in it. This begs the question, that if he had admitted to any more injuries in court, the judge might have asked how he could have survived at all. It's possible that from the very beginning, Gibson feigned his injuries so that he could receive better treatment on the boat.

When reading Gibson's account, we learn that the detail in *The Scottish Sunday Express* and *Reader's Digest* articles is fuller than what was revealed in court but the book published in 1952 has much more information in it than the articles.. This points to the fact that the author embroidered and embellished his story step-by-step from the court testimony to the articles and finally the narrative of The Boat. But memory in general, is usually fuller at the outset of recall. One must take into consideration that Gibson was writing at least seven years

after the event took place and after he had experienced unimaginable trauma: a brutal trek through the Malayan jungle, 26 days on the boat, and four days' interrogation by the Japanese after his capture on Sipora island. His captors flung him in an empty cell without food for three days, punched, pummelled, and forced him to kneel for hours on a block of wood three feet long, four feet wide, and two feet thick. Shortly before the end of the war when Gibson was a passenger on a cargo steamer, the Americans torpedoed his vessel conveying Gibson and other prisoners of war from Sumatra to Thailand.

The Times reviewer wrote that *The Boat* was 'sensational on the face of it' and certainly it played to the lowest possible denominator. Gibson refers to the Japanese as pederasts. In his attitude towards the young Chinese woman, Doris Lim, Gibson is also unabashed. He admits to being attracted to her, "I was seized with a male urge towards the girl as she lay in my arms. I began to fondle her." "Please let me die in peace," was her telling rebuff. The reader might well wonder if his approach was as decorous as he described. Among other feats of bashing other occupants over the head and pushing them overboard, he may well have felt entitled to forced sex. Gibson explains that he and others on the boat rushed 'the murder gang' off the boat but who is to know which group or person did the killing? And if he was in charge of the rations, who could stop him from grabbing them for himself? It's my guess that if he established himself as alpha male, the woman had no other option but to submit. In such circumstances, it's not the virtuous but the most ruthless who survive. When members of the Javanese crew on the boat, slashed a dying soldier and plunged their hands into the wound and drew out some flesh, which they ate, who's to know if Gibson also joined in? If the Javanese were the wolves, Gibson may well have been the hyena. Even his peers in the Battalion suggest he was capable of such an act. "Do you know," suggested Eric Moss, "what most of us think happened to that wee Chinese girl who was in the boat with Gibson. We think he ate her! " As the saying goes, many a true word is said in jest.

REVIEWS

REVIEW OF "A VINDICATION" IN "NEW WRITING SCOTLAND 4" BY ISOBEL MURRAY, THE SCOTSMAN, 22 November, 1986

"The writer as subject is entertainingly presented in Mary Gladstone's "A Vindication", where a woman writer makes several attempts to write an honest letter of resentment to her somewhat old-fashioned male editor. It is entertaining because we find ourselves amused not only at the stereotyped male publisher, but also the crusading, liberated author, whose central character is – naturally – a feminist, lesbian single-parent!"

REVIEW OF "THE MODERN MARINER" PERFORMED AT THE TRAVERSE ON 29TH MARCH, 1985 BY CATHERINE LOCKERBIE IN THE SCOTSMAN.

One of the most memorable verses in Coleridge is "And the many men so beautiful / And they all dead did lie; / And a thousand, thousand slimy things / Live on, and so did I." At the start of Mary Gladstone's play The Modern Mariner, the young woman feels like this: isolated, surrounded by physical and spiritual death. By the end of the play, the men in the audience may well share Coleridge's sentiments, for the male sex and all its works have been verbally slaughtered.

The storyline is the slenderest of hooks on which to hang a bleeding carcase of thoughts. A mother takes her apparently mad daughter to a psychiatrist. He says some of the expected wrong things and some of the ineffectual right ones. The mother talks of a need for compromise, but reveals at moments her own tearing at the bars of her cage. The daughter of course is mad: and so the playwright has instant licence to make her the mouth-piece for woe-man, for all female hurt, anger and hope.

The production at the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh, is distinguished by two factors: the performance of Ann Lacey as the daughter, and the wealth of literary and artistic references in the writing, giving what could have been mere diatribe poetic and intellectual depth.

Sometimes the targets are too easy, sometimes the metaphors are too mixed, but there is no doubt that the play is an eloquent product of a great deal of thinking and reading and feeling. With this kind of intelligence at her disposal, Mary Gladstone's future work should prove interesting. Know Alternative Theatre is to be congratulated on promoting her work.

JOURNALISM

Travel feature in The Weekend Scotsman, November, 2001

Catalan elan

Tucked away in the north-east corner of Spain Mary Gladstone discovers an idyllic village untouched by time – until the surveyors moved in next door.

We never knew Marina. She left Madremanya before we had the chance to meet her. Now the former doyenne of the village is settled in nearby La Bisbal D'Emporda, a town only 20 minutes' car-ride from the Costa Brava.

On our first evening in the village, my sister, Janet, took us for a walk in the wood past Marina's old vegetable patch (hort in Catalan). All that was left were a few straggling vines whose stems crept across the path. The peaches on the unpruned tree were the size of walnuts now and a mass of weeds covered the well, from which trailed a perforated water pipe.

When my sister and her husband arrived a few years ago it was 78 year old Marina who saw them right. She advised them to close their shutters in the morning so the room wouldn't be like an oven in the evening: sound advice when temperatures soar into the mid-thirties in mid-summer.

Years of hardship made Marina good at seeing what the countryside around her could yield. When she noticed an ugly-looking fungus protruding from the bottom of Janet's fruit tree, she told my sister to eat it. Although happy to present the family with regals (gifts) of beans or courgettes from her hort she never revealed where in the wood the wild asparagus grew.

Coming from a generation for which conservation was never a serious issue, the old lady told Janet to kill the dragons which, though ominous-looking, are harmless lizards: they destroy your bed linen and clothes, she warned. Neither Janet or her husband, Ronnie, took her caution seriously. They should have.

It wasn't only the dragons that were on Marina's hit list. One day my sister saw what looked like a skeleton high up in the fig tree. Marina told her blithely that it was a fox she had ordered the neighbouring pages (small-holding farmer) to kill. "It's up there to scare away the birds!" she said in her strong Catalan, a language which is an ancient mixture of French and Spanish, with its harsh sound where the stress often falls on the final syllable. It is the mother tongue of at least seven

million people, spoken not only in north-east Spain but in the Balearics, Sardinia, Andorra and Roussillon in France. It is hard to learn and the only one of Janet's family to be fluent in Catalan is Zoe, her nine-year old daughter, who goes to the local school.

This rural pocket of Catalunya is some 110 km north of Barcelona, just off the A7 motorway which zips from south to north through the mountains and into the South of France. I was struck by the beauty and bounty of the place: as early as late July you come across bramble and elder bushes gravid with fruit; grapes ripen on rows of vines; the odd unpicked lemon or orange hangs from a tree behind a wall; aromatic thyme, rosemary and wild fennel splurge over the verges. It's a soft, moist landscape much like the heart of Dorset or the Cotswolds and the soil is a thick russet clay (perfect for tile-making and ceramics). Small green meadows interrupted by strips of oak and pine woodland are reached by a network of winding tracks. This is the land of piggeries, apple and plum groves, fig and pomegranate trees and the occasional abandoned Romanesque chapel lost in a field of sunflowers.

One of its more bizarre natives was the artist Salvador Dali, who spent his last years here. Down past Marina's hort, up over the hill, is the medieval castle he converted in the 1970s for his wife, Gala, at Pubol. Castell Gala Dali is open to the public, who may gawk at the paintings and at Gala's "haute couture" dresses, at the garaged Cadillac, the murals, the surreal furniture and the elephant sculptures in the garden.

Before they arrived in the mid 1990s, Janet and Ronnie imagined settling in a wilder, less-populated part of Spain. As they drove east from the port of Santander in the shadow of the Pyrenees towards the Mediterranean coast, they realized that sophisticated, self-governing Catalunya was where they wanted to be. They found Madremanya and loved its narrow streets, whose paving stones bore deep grooves scored by the wheels of the farmers' old carts.

Who wouldn't be charmed by the houses, with their shuttered windows, vaulted covered archways, the wrought iron grilles, and the odd doorway framed by bougainvillea, whose riotous, purple blooms drop in the heat to carpet the cobbled streets?

Today these dwellings no longer come cheap. Like the 16th century artisans' houses in nearby Monells, property in Madremanya is rapidly being gentrified. The rich from Barcelona, expatriate Brits, Swedes or Germans snatch up these buildings and convert them.

Luckily the pound was strong when my sister bought her three-storey house in a street that had seen little change in 300 years. All that was needed was to find a job, a mortgage and ship over the furniture. Before giving the walls a lick of paint, they added a couple of windows in the kitchen and the upstairs lounge.

Spanish houses are designed to keep out the heat, so traditional homes are often quite dark. In typical Catalan fashion, you enter the house on the ground floor through large, barn-sized doors into a cool, cavernous series of rooms where, in the old days, the horses and other domestic animals were billeted.

After our walk that first evening we sat out in the garden: "Enjoy the view while you can!" Ronnie said, handing me a glass of vin negre. "And the peace and quiet!" Janet added. "For tomorrow the digger comes." Someone had bought a plot of land in the next field and were going to lay the foundations for a new house.

But all we could hear for now was the whirr of the garden sprinkler and a cacaphony of tin sheep bells clanking. A flock was being led back home by the pastor whose job it is to lead his beasts to ungrazed pastures.

"They want to build 20 houses in that field," said Ronnie, waving to the pastor's cheery "Hola!". Janet and Ronnie first got wind of the plans one spring morning before Marina left the village, when they spotted a man in a grey suit in the field with a tape and tripod. Within weeks all of Madremanya knew about the plans for a development on their doorstep. Petitions and protests followed but the local government was keen to encourage local business and cash in on the region's prosperity. The houses were needed for local people, they claimed.

The plans, however, revealed that these new homes were for the wealthy incomer, not for the average Catalunyan family on a moderate income. It was the threat of an influx into the village that tipped the balance for Marina; for her, it was time to go. "There's too much uprootedness these days," she told Janet. "And transplants don't grow well. You should leave the migrating to the birds!"

Full page feature written when David Cameron became leader of the Conservative party. Published in The Herald on Wednesday December 7th, 2005.

Married to a Cameron

It was the late sixties and I was still in my teens when a party was given for me at Granny Cameron's flat. She lived somewhere in London's select SW7 district and her daughter, Frances (my future mother-in-law) planned the event so I could meet the family.

I remember the aunts, uncles, friends and cousins filing in to welcome me into the fold. They were friendly but different from my folks, who milked cows and sold eggs on the Solway. The family I was marrying into was far moresophisticated and urbane than my farming relatives.

One or two people warned they'd be late: Mary Cameron was one. Her two young sons had to be tucked up in bed before she came. They were Alex, who was four (now a London barrister) and twelve month old David, who this week has become the leader of the Tories.

Was I aware I was marrying into such a high-achieving family, who one day would spawn a prominent politician and possible prime minister? Not really! Proud of their humble Scottish roots, the Cameron's claimed their money came through the efforts of hard-working businessmen. I don't think they were lying. When I look at my ex's family tree I find little blue blood there: no hereditary peers, no baronets and certainly no connections to royalty. However, the ambitious often marry "up", clever men taking higher-born brides. This is what some Cameron men did like David Cameron's father and grandfather. The new Tory leader is fifth cousin to the Queenthrough the woman who married Donald Cameron, the new Tory leader's paternal grandfather.

I'm not particularly familiar with the family today because I'm no longer married to David Cameron's cousin but when I was, I found out a thing or two about them. They seemed to me to be a normal upper-middle class bunch with a distant ancestry of Highland crofters, many of whom emigrated to Canada and America.

The Camerons' line is finance, stock-broking mainly. It all began with Sir Ewan, a founder member of the Hong Kong Shanghai Bank, now the HSBC bank. His son, Allan, followed him in business making a tidy sum on the London Stock Exchange. Then came Donald, grandfather of David Cameron.

Presumably Ian, David Cameron's old man has done nicely in the City too. Business is in the Cameron genes. Even the new Tory leader has turned his hand at it. After leaving Oxford University he was taken on by Carlton Communications. Generally speaking Cameron women don't have careers, their remit being to look good, be good and do good; to breed and simmer casseroles in their aga ovens. There are exceptions and Rachel (David Cameron's great-grandmother) was one. Physically strong (living well into her 80s), she had a mind of her own. Although her three sons went to Eton, she was more interested in the innovative teaching methods of the German philosopher, Rudolf Steiner.

I'll never forget Rachel's eyes. They were intense, very brown and unbelievably alive in a woman so old and she was utterly fearless (an attribute inherited by one of her sons). One day when my ex and I were driving along a multi lane road in London, a very old, lady brandishing a walking stick, stepped off the kerb.

"Good God!" exclaimed my ex as several cars, including our own, screeched to a halt. "That's Granny!" Rather than be late for her meeting at the Theosophical Society, Rachel preferred to hold up four lanes of traffic.

Rachel (nee Geddes) hailed from Haugh of Glass on the old Aberdeenshire/Banffshire border near the Deveron. When she died in 1969, many Camerons travelled up from the south of England to bury her at Wallakirk, her short wake being held in the Gordon Arms at Huntly.

Rachel and Allan had three boys and one girl. It's difficult to comment on Donald, their eldest who died in 1958. David Cameron's grandfather wasn't talked about

much. He worked hard becoming senior partner of his firm and apparently played hard. My mother-in-law kept photographs of Uncle Donald in uniform so he was in the army during the Second World War.

The Camerons liked Enid Levita, Donald's first wife, even after their marriage broke up. Until I came to write this piece, I never knew Enid was so posh; it's through her family that David Cameron is related to the Queen. All I knew about her was she had Jewish blood and was a good mother. But the Camerons were like that; they played down their smart connections.

Enid's father was Arthur Levita and her mother the grand-daughter of James Duff, 5th Earl of Fife. He was married to Lady Agnes Hay who was the daughter of the 18th Earl of Erroll. He, in his turn, was the husband of King William IV's illegitimate daughter by Dorothy Jordan.

Donald and Enid had one son Ian, who was born with a disability in both legs. Enid was devoted to Ian, giving him the encouragement he needed to live a normal life. Without a trace of self-pity Ian Cameron became tough, clever, accomplished and now the father of a possible future prime minister.

Doctors warned Enid very early on that when Ian grew up his legs might not be

able to support the upper part of his body. And they were correct. About twelve years ago, Ian Cameron had to have both legs amputated and he now walks with the aid of artificial limbs.

Ian's early life can't have been easy; apart from his disability he was theoffspring of a broken marriage and an only child until his father married again, to Marielen, an Austrian with whom he had a daughter, Caroline. Only children often compensate when they marry by having large families themselves. Ian and his wife, Mary (nee Moat) have four children: Alex, David, Tanya and Clare.

Family ties meant a lot to Ian, the eldest of the Cameron first cousins. When my ex and I planned to marry Ian wanted to give us a good present. But his choice clashed with ours. A nice set of dinner plates or a nest of le creuset pots was his while ours (incipient rebels that we were) was two sets of thermal underwear or a portable typewriter. Having no plans to follow the family tradition and commute daily to the City, my ex and I wanted to lead "the good life" in the depths of the country, to keep a goat and write the proverbial novel. I too respect Ian, David Cameron's father but I won't ever forget my altercation with him. Ian managed a financial Trust fund for my ex, from which he was only allowed to receive income and no capital. When my ex asked Ian if he could borrow a sum of money from the fund, he agreed on condition we hand over as security the title deeds to our Glasgow flat bought with my money. Being very thorough, Ian also insisted we have the flat surveyed. From his Home Counties perspective Ian was none too impressed by the report and was alarmed to learn that we lived in a tenement, a mode of living unheard of for a Cameron. When our marriage broke up, I asked Ian to hand back the title deeds but he refused until every borrowed penny was repaid.

Donald may have served his time in the War with no great distinction but the same cannot be said of younger brother Sandy. A Lee Marvin look-alike he was action man personified winning two DSOs and two MCs in the desert campaign in North Africa during the Second World War. One DSO should have been a VC had Sandy's valour been witnessed by another officer (it involved pulling a man out of a burning tank under heavy gun-fire).

Ewan, born in 1914, (David Cameron's great-uncle) was the youngest and suffered from depression (possibly brought on by an attack of malaria while out in the Far East). The medical profession's savage solution was a lobotomy. He married, converted to Roman Catholicism and outlived all his siblings, dying at the ripe old age of 88.

Apart from my ex, the Cameron best known to me was Frances, my mother-in-law although the family called her Pixie. She looked a bit like one: tall and painfully thin she suffered from TB in her youth. Pixie liked me and I liked her in spite of her arbitrary likes and dislikes. Tom Jones, cigarettes and cats were a

positive, left wing prime ministers like Harold Wilson were not. She had strong political views, so strong they would embarrass some of the younger members of the family today, especially her great-nephew, David Cameron. If his lean to the left of centre, hers fell well to the right. As a young woman she travelled with a friend around Aberdeenshire in a horse-drawn caravan "living like a gypsy".
Recently widowed when I first met her she lived in a pretty cottage on the edge of the Sussex downs. Sometimes she lapsed into Scots (presumably the Buchan dialect) when she was feeling relaxed. Early affluence and some idyllic years in Kenya as a young wife were followed by poor health and a happy but far from wealthy marriage.
Glyndebourne was next door to Pixie's home but she wouldn't have been seen dead attending an opera there; she preferred to see the latest release in the local flea-pit. She was determined, youthful and as unconventional as her mother, Rachel. A debunker of the pretentious, she liked all sorts: gays, gypsies, the posh and humble equally.
All the older generation has now gone: Donald, Pixie, Sandy and Ewan. No doubt I was a disappointment to them, particularly to Pixie. Her son and I never gave her a grandchild. If any Cameron felt a grievance against me, they never voiced it, not even my mother-in-law.
The Camerons are undoubtedly advantaged and have bought the best education their children can get. Some have even married into the gentry or aristocracy but thrown in with all the privilege is a cruel hand of fate that hobbled Allan in the Great War,forced Ian to endure considerable physical disadvantage and has now come to haunt David and Samantha Cameron's three year old son, Ivan who suffers from cerebral palsy and epilepsy.
I'm not at all surprised David Cameron has won the Tory leadership. With a grandmother like Enid Levita and a father like Ian Cameron, he's probably learned from an early age all about courage, determination and the will to fight against all the odds.

What about J M Barrie's Scot on the make, then?

Earlier this year, Vicky Featherstone, founding artistic director of the National Theatre of Scotland, left for the south. However, under her successor, Laurie Sansom, NTS' reputation hasn't dimmed; during this year's Edinburgh International Festival, no fewer than 6 of its productions were nominated for awards. Although Sansom plans larger scale touring shows than before and promises main stage classical productions, he has kept at its heart NTS's hallmark of championing experimental work and unconventional versions of the classics, played in unconventional venues.

NTS's new artistic director recognizes the need to embrace the independence debate. So, early next year the company will tour "Rantin" with The Arches and Kieran Hurley. Up and down the country, the show will encourage discussion on the independence debate and prepare the public for a follow-up NTS production of sketches, songs and rants called "The Great Don't Know Show", navigated by two well-known Scottish theatre men, playwright David Greig and the veteran actor-musician, David MacLennan, who co-founded the 7:84 Company. Cast and audience will have a chance to consider national identity as well as the independence debate itself.

A National Theatre is the most suitable and able of arts institutions to stage a public debate on Scottish identity and independence. Perhaps another discussion should be encouraged on how much art (be it theatre, literature or the visual arts) should be identified with nationality.

Some time before Vicky Featherstone left to take up the reins at London's Royal Court theatre, the old guard of the Scottish literary establishment criticized her "programme choice", claiming she was neglecting the Scottish canon (which was hardly surprising when Scottish Calvinism forbade any theatre for over 300 years).

As the inhabitants of this country prepare to vote on whether to be or not to be part of the UK, it conjures up a sense of déjà vu. In the late 19th century, Norway was poised to become an independent country. However, its national playwright, Henrik Ibsen, (although influenced by nationalism in his early life), wrote his main body of work about domestic issues, age-old moral problems and timeless, universal concerns. Likewise, Ibsen's compatriot, Edvard Munch, painted scenes of a profoundly personal and visceral nature. Did these geniuses

whinge about the Danes or Swedes getting top jobs in the arts and dismiss them as "settlers" and "colonists"? Great theatre transcends party and national political issues and is too big to be purely interested in race or gender.

With the run-up to the independence referendum, some hateful sentiments are being expressed but as many of us are aware, anglophobia isn't new. When Vicky Featherstone expressed the sad fact that she felt "paralysed" by the criticism leveled at her because of her Englishness or lack of Scottishness, it begs the question why she was subjected to such an "attack". Was it an excuse for her critics' artistic mediocrity? Would a truly successful, dedicated artist care about an artistic director's nationality or bother if he was oppressed or discriminated against? Max Beerbohm, the early twentieth century English essayist, claimed that the true artist was always "in too much of a hurry" to worry about anything other than completing his art.

It is irrelevant if the artistic director of the NTS comes from south or north of the Scottish/English border. Outsiders to a community often enrich and throw valuable light on to it. Take the Taiwan-born Ang Lee whose direction of the 1995 film version of Janet Austen's "Sense and Sensibility" brought an unexpected breadth to the early 19th English author's novel. There's screen-writer and director, Richard Curtis, born in New Zealand of Australian parents, whose minute observation of a narrow sector of English society, is exquisitely depicted. And it works both ways; when the occasion presents itself, Scots will do a bunk south or across the pond. As Scots playwright, J.M. Barrie, wrily expressed, "There are few more impressive sights in the world than a Scotsman on the make." So, if the last Westminster government consisted of a bevy of Scots on the front benches, why shouldn't one or two of our arts institutions be run by the English?

POETRY

Published "Fresh Oceans", an anthology of poetry by Scottish women, Stramullion, 1989

MISS CURRER BELL

Your wren frame
and rib cage
(brittle as the picked bones
of a baked capon)

trod slimy flagstones
in flimsy shoes
where you shivered
in churches expiating
not *your* sin but
the cant of others

You saw them all die,
including the profligate
brother

from consumption, bad water
and cold kitchen floors:
Ellis, with her heath-wanderings
and intractable will and
Acton, docile and willing
to give herself to her Maker.

Your fame never cooled
your rage,
but in a snowdrop dress
you gave yourself to a
clod whose possession
killed you.

Published Chapman 46, 1986-87

MEMENTO MORI

On 11th February, anniversary of Sylvia Plath's death

My pen stabs those who let you die
My pen melts the ice that froze you
My pen splits the apple that damned you
My pen explores your wound and heals it
My pen as wand wakes you from your sleep
My pen as staff is St. Christopher to your Christ
My pen as scepter anoints you as queen of rhymes
My pen as taper lights the candle in your remembrance
And without those two letters as suffix
My pen is saying to you on this your death-day

LIVE! LIVE! LIVE!

a word in line saves nine	a stitch in time saves nine
a word in line saves	a stitch in time saves
a word in line	a stitch in time
a word in	a stitch in
a word	a stitch
a	a

COMING HOME TO ROME

For ‘Rome’, read ’home’
ROME SWEET ROME
ROME IS WHERE THE (HE)ART IS
NORTH, SOUTH, EAST, WEST / ROME IS BEST
ROMEWARD BOUND!
ROME AND DRY
ROME COMFORTS

For ‘home’, read ‘Rome’
ALL ROADS LEAD TO HOME
HOME WASN’T BUILT IN A DAY
WHEN AT HOME, DO AS THE HOME ONES DO!

COMING HOME TO THE ROMANS: VERGIL, CATULLUS, PROPERTIUS, HORACE, OVID, TIBULLUS

rein
reign
rain

Wear it in

silk

satin

sackcloth

t h r i f t
t h r i f t
t h r i f t
t h r i f t
t h r i f t
t h r i f t
t h r i v e

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

A BIOGRAPHY (350 pages +60 photographs, maps and illustrations)
Finding Angus
An account of the life and death of Angus Macdonald, who was killed in South East Asia in March, 1942. Published by Hamish Macdonald Lockhart.

SHORT STORIES: A selection of short stories published in magazines and anthologies, and some broadcast on radio.

JOURNALS

Chapman 50	The Sisters and the Serpent
Chapman 46	The Moor Mother
Northwords 4	The Master Baker's Apprentice
Over 21	The Exeat
Lilley Today 1990	Dead Heads

ANTHOLOGIES

New Writing Scotland 4	A Vindication
Tales to Tell *(ed. David Campbell)*	St Magnus
Under Cover *(ed. Colin Nicholson and Jane Ogden Smith)*	The Interview

BBC RADIO

Radio 3	Dead Heads
Radio 3	The Funny Farm
Radio 4	Morning Story
and repeated on Radio Scotland "The Best of Scottish"	The Interview

POETRY

Chapman 46	The Wedding
	Old Sir John
	Memento Mori
	On Viewing Hopetoun House
Fresh Oceans Anthology	
Stramullion 1989	Miss Currer Bell

PLAYS

Lyceum: A Reading with Edinburgh Playwrights' Workshop of "The Modern Mariner" (1984)

Traverse: Performances with Fourplay Theatre Co. "The Modern Mariner" (1985)

Pleasance: Performances at "Women" Live Spring Fling. "The Modern Mariner" (1985)

Assembly Rooms: A Reading with Edinburgh Playwrights' Workshop. "New Town Scenes" (1986)

LITERARY AND POETRY CRITICISM

Chapman 42, 43/4, 45, 46, 47/8, 49, 50, 64

Cencrastus No 28 1987/8

Harpies & Quines Feb/Mar 1993 "Poets, Priapism and Pints" (with Lesley Riddoch)
A profile on the Scottish Woman Writer with an emphasis on the early nineteenth century Edinburgh-based novelist, Mary Brunton, a contemporary and rival of Jane Austen.

JOURNALISM

Over a period of thirty years some 200 reviews, features and interviews in print journalism and a number of interviews, reviews, talks and programmes on radio

Most recent feature/profile articles include

The Scotsman: full-page travel feature CATALAN ELAN

The Herald: full-page feature on David Cameron (his family background)
half-page feature (historical) on the origins of Dickens' Scrooge

Artwork: in-depth interview with Maureen Hodge (commissioned to weave a tapestry for the new Scottish parliament building)
Ian Hamilton Finlay (artist)
Tapestry exhibition at French Institute, Edinburgh

RADIO PROGRAMMES

"A Mug a Minute" (1980)
"RSAMD Days" (1989)