

## Welcome to the February Newsletter!

This month we have been celebrating the success of our most recent launch– T.Y. Garner's *The Hotel Hokusai*– which has made us more excited than ever for all the Ringwood launches scheduled for this spring!

### Open Call for Volunteers



# Ringwood are recruiting volunteers!

**Interested in books and publishing?**

**Apply now to help with organising and running events, intern support and social media!**

We are currently recruiting volunteers! With a wide range of roles there is something for everyone.

We are looking for people to cover the following areas:

- Event Planning
- Social Media
- HR Support
- Treasurer
- Grant Funding

If you have an interest in books and publishing, and would like to join our line of volunteers then get in touch by emailing [donny.mcintyre.ringwood@gmail.com](mailto:donny.mcintyre.ringwood@gmail.com) or send us a message via our Facebook Page. We look forward to hearing from you!

### ***The Hotel Hokusai Debut***

By Annemarie Whitehurst



“The public are bloodthirsty bastards, aren’t they!”

So says Glasgow Boy Edward Hornel in Tony Garner's debut novel, *The Hotel Hokusai*, which received its launch on Sunday 18th February at Hillhead Library in a room packed with ~~bloodthirsty~~ *bookthirsty* readers. Megan Gibson, lead editor on *The Hotel Hokusai*, hosted the event, which included readings from the book by Tony and many questions regarding his writing process and inspiration, including the inclusion of the famous Glasgow Boys, the symbolism of eels, and larger themes of identity and assimilating into a foreign culture. Audience members also got a chance to ask Tony their questions, and the event concluded with personalised book signings.



If you did not get a chance to preorder a signed copy or you attended the launch and could not grab a copy before they were sold out, you're in luck! **We have some signed copies left in stock**, so head over to our site [here](#) to order your own.

*'The year is 1893. In Yokohama, a fatherless Korean teen arrives with a letter of introduction to the College of Christ's Soldiers in the East. But Han has been duped.*

*Instead of missionaries he encounters battered eel, loneliness, desire, a suspicious death, and a trio of Scottish painters sent to cash in on the craze for Japanese art in the salons of fin de siècle Glasgow.*

*Han is the only one left who can piece together a full version of the events...'*

Congratulations to Tony and the entire Ringwood team whose efforts made this book a reality.

おつかれさまでした。(otukaresama deshita. ~ Thank you for your work.)



You're warmly invited to

**Glasgow's  
Burning  
Book  
Launch**



McNeills, 106 Torrisdale St, Glasgow  
G42 8PH  
March 10th | 2pm

### **Glasgow's Burning Launch**

By Júlia Pujals Antolin

You're all invited to the book launch of *Glasgow's Burning*! The free event will take place at McNeills in the Southside on March 10th, where there will be complimentary refreshments. Everyone is welcome to join!

The author, Vince McGlennan, will introduce the book and his inspiration for it, and there will be some special guests featuring former members of the city's fire department that experienced the fires first-hand.

In *Glasgow's Burning*, Vince sets out to create an account of every fire the city has experienced from the 19th century onwards. It is a privilege for Ringwood to publish a book that showcases the author's passion to keep Glasgow's peculiar and fascinating history alive.

We're excited to honour *Glasgow's Burning* with some good company and a great atmosphere. So, come to grab a copy of the book (you can get it signed in person!) or simply to enjoy some drinks and hear about the journey of writing such a monumental piece of work.

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## **Reflections on *Poor Things***

By Matilda Eker

Early January saw the UK premiere of *Poor Things* (dir. [Yorgos Lanthimos](#)), reworked from Alasdair Gray's 1992 novel of the same name. Gray passed away in 2019, and as someone who came to Scotland that same year to study English Literature at the University of Glasgow, where Gray had previously taught, I can attest that the loss and legacy of Gray was felt deeply by both students and faculty members. Throughout my years at the university, Gray's work often featured on our reading lists, and *Poor Things* was studied and mentioned in relation to everything from paratext, with his fantastic marginalia and drawings throughout the book, to narrative theory, with the brilliant presentation of the novel as a found manuscript. One of my closest friends even wrote her undergrad dissertation on Gray's work, and for a few months the flat we shared was completely taken over by piles of every edition of every one of his books that she could find. When we found out *Poor Things* would become a movie we were enthralled. But as more and more details were revealed, the excitement seemed to fade, leaving a slightly bitter aftertaste. It turned

out it wouldn't be set nor filmed in Glasgow, and that there would be no Scottish actors in the main cast.

That Alasdair Gray is a truly Glaswegian author can hardly be disputed. As Robin McKie writes for the Guardian, '*Poor Things* reeks of Glasgow'. McKie also quotes Sorcha Dallas, custodian of the Alasdair Gray archive, who explains that "Alasdair is to Glasgow what Charles Dickens is to London or James Joyce is to Dublin." Now envision a film adaptation of the stories in *Dubliners* but with the 'small' detail that it is no longer set in Dublin— imagine the outcry. This is what many Glaswegians are feeling right now, like Glasgow and its people have been erased from a story that we have read and loved for years. I must say that part of my excitement on hearing of the *Poor Things* film was definitely the feeling that the eyes of the world would turn towards not only the talent of Alasdair Gray, but also towards Glasgow.

In 2011, Lanthimos visited Glasgow, and was shown around the city by Gray, who then gave Lanthimos his blessing to make the movie. Yet, despite Lanthimos' visit to Scotland, the only trace of Glasgow in the film is Willem Dafoe's Scottish accent. I can understand Lanthimos' hesitations in trying to authentically depict a place he had never lived in, and I also understand that adaptation is interpretation, and a filmmaker is well within their right to make adjustments to fit their vision, which sometimes includes changing the location. However, even if you make alterations in an adaptation, should it not capture the essence of the original work? In the *Poor Things* novel, Glasgow is an essential and integral part. I can't help but feel that the removal of Glasgow from the film can be nothing but a loss, regardless of how accurate Lanthimos gets other aspects of the novel.

Here at Ringwood, our mission is to highlight and promote Scottish Literature, so one might think that a Glaswegian author's book being turned into an eleven time Oscar nominated movie would be a dream come true for us. In some way, it might be. But the question remains— when Scotland is removed from the *Poor Things* film, can we really say that it spotlights Scottish Literature? Is the removal, or toning down - as is another common 'solution' - of Scotland really the price we must pay in order for Scottish works to reach a wider audience?

In one of Alasdair Gray's most quoted passages, from his 1981 novel *Lanark*, we read:

“‘Glasgow is a magnificent city,’ said McAlpin. ‘Why do we hardly ever notice that?’

‘Because nobody imagines living here. Think of Florence, Paris, London, New York. Nobody visiting them for the first time is a stranger because he's already visited them in paintings, novels, history books and films. But if a city hasn't been used by an artist, not even the inhabitants live there imaginatively’”.

Throughout Gray's life, his artworks, murals, and novels, gave Glasgow the artistic consideration he speaks of, but outwith Scotland his work has been fairly unknown. With *Poor Things* finally being presented to a worldwide, mainstream audience, there was a chance to make Glasgow into a place that people all over the world could visit in their imaginations, a place that people could dream about.

If nothing else, I hope this cinematic rendering of *Poor Things* turns people towards Gray's fantastic novel, and that many new readers get to visit Glasgow through the book if not the movie. This, after all, is a win for Scottish Literature— even if it's hard to not think of the potential effects of a *Poor Things* film set in Glasgow.

Sources:

McKie, Robin (2024) <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2023/dec/31/yorgos-lanthimos-poor-things-interview-director-favourite-lobster>

Kermode, Mark (2024) <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2023/dec/30/bloody-nonsense-how-glasgow-was-cut-from-the-oscar-tipped-film-poor-things>

## **Describing Place and Story Settings**

Matilda Eker and Margaret Mitchell



Photograph of Glasgow by Donny McIntuyre

Regardless of whether a story's setting is a real place, or imagined as in futuristic or science fiction writing, a place always needs to 'ring true' and be an evocative and authentic space for characters to inhabit. In many ways, it is as essential for an author to have the ability to describe place



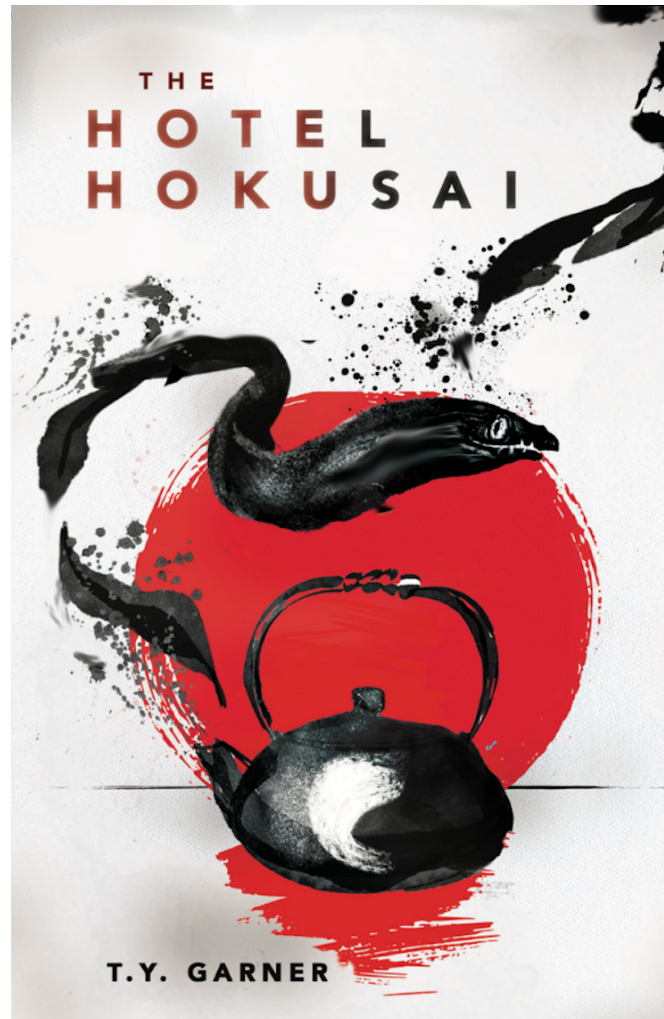
as it is for them to write plot and character. Here, we look at ideas and theories about place, and consider some of the places described in Ringwood publications.

Reflecting on Ringwood's own titles, Isobel Freeman (2023) can be as intrigued by the contexts of stories as much as by the stories themselves. Crime novels "tend to describe so much about the setting. Before I go somewhere I'll read a crime novel about that place. I really liked Leela Soma's *Murder at the Mela* (2020) because it told me about Glasgow, and reflected what I already know of Glasgow." She found this to also be true for Flora Johnston's story of the Covenanters, *What You Call Free* (2021), which is set in the Pentland Hills, and the narrow streets of Edinburgh. "The day after Flora presented at one of our outreach events, I walked in the Pentlands, a place I have been to many times, but this time I thought about the story, and the new perspective Johnston's descriptions of the place gave me." In *Bodysnatcher* (2023), Carol Margaret Davison's revisionist story of infamous murderers, Burke and Hare, Davison offers descriptions of Edinburgh's back streets to invoke the *feeling* of the places, as much as the places' other facets. Last June, as part of Ringwood's innovative outreach program, the places where the story took place were brought to life, through a walking tour of the streets and alleys of Edinburgh. This walk encouraged readers of Davison's book to step into 1800s Edinburgh and retrace the characters' steps while she read excerpts of the novel. Going beyond the psychology and social background of the characters, readers gained an "insider glance at Edinburgh's Old Town" and the true feel of the novel. What a brilliant way to bring 'place descriptions' alive!

So how do writers 'write place'? They can visit, dig out photographs, or read how others have understood the place. They can even research the smells and scents of a particular place, as in the example below. Amanda Curtin, writing for the Scottish Book Trust (2021), believes all senses are needed in a description: sound, smell, touch and taste. As an example, she quotes from her own novel *Elemental* (2016), which is set in a small fishing village in early 20th-century Scotland. Bringing the place alive with her words, she writes: "[the] shore, the long stony sweep of it, and the soles of my feet are tingling. Everywhere, skinny children, barefoot on the shingle...The wind is a howl the likes of which I have never heard since.

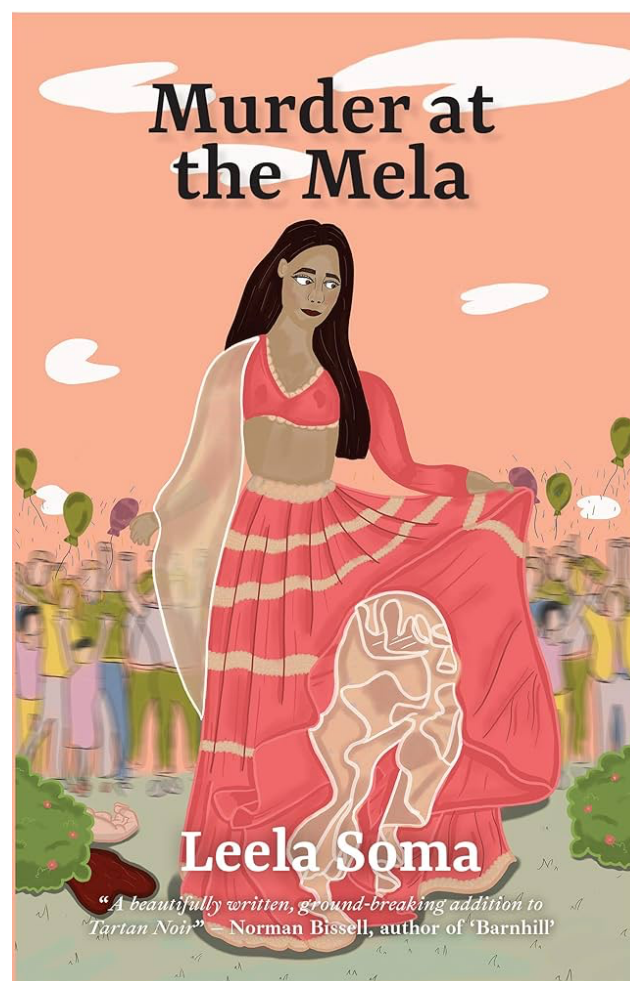
And in the air, a sea tang, fresh and sharp and rotten all at once, spiced up with old bait, fish guts, plumes from chimneys where the fish are hung to dry and smoke.” When describing a place, the writer tends to ask how the characters, and the readers, *feel* in this place.

While we were thinking about this topic, we came across the concept of ‘psycho geography’, which is essentially ‘the effect of a geographical location on the emotions and behaviour of individuals’ (Tate). It originated with the idea of aimless walking without hurry or purpose, so that details and elements not previously seen are noticed. Hannah Steinkopf-Frank (2021) writes: “Imagine going for a stroll, unencumbered by a phone, preoccupied by the glories of the world around you: the perfume of blossoming flowers, the heat radiating from sidewalks, the sound of wind as it moves through and bounces off towering buildings. You might notice a historical landmark you usually miss in the hustle of getting from A to B. Or spot the construction of luxury apartments where working-class housing formerly stood. Perhaps you realize there are fewer bird calls than there used to be.” To what degree could this type of observational examination be a way for writers to explore, from their writing desks, the imagined spaces and places their characters inhabit?



In Ringwood's latest publication, *The Hotel Hokusai* (2024), place is a central theme, introduced to us at the very start, where T.Y. Garner's dedication reads "to all who've had to start from scratch in a strange country, wherever that may be". Garner explores this theme throughout the book when his main character, Han, is shipped off to late 19<sup>th</sup> century Yokohama, and describes arriving "young and alone ... in a strange city". We read: "First, you are stung by the jellyfish called panic. You think you are done for. Then you realise you are only paralysed, and slowly the effects of the sting wear off. Your body starts working again". As Han finds himself in this new, frightening environment, he is unable to make many observations about his surroundings, apart from the obvious fact - that it is not home. But what makes Garner's depiction of place so ingenious is the way it evolves throughout the novel, as richer, more evocative descriptions are introduced as Han begins to feel more comfortable in this new place. In other words, when his panic fades, Han is able to notice

more things about his surroundings, echoing Steinkopf-Frank's idea that details will become available to you once you slow down. Towards the end of the novel, when Han travels to a remote village, this time on his own terms, he calmly notices how "the sky was blue with trails of pink tinged cloud [and] the air smelt fresh", and even describes the "spiderwebs jewelled with droplets ... slung between low branches". In other words, Garner uses place to not only evoke a setting for his characters, but also to reflect his protagonist's emotional journey, emphasising the relationship between place and emotion.



Leela Soma, another Ringwood author, makes interesting use of place description in her 2020 novel *Murder at the Mela*, which shows that places, like people, tend to be dynamic. Throughout her novel, Soma gives us numerous evocative descriptions of Glasgow's Kelvingrove Park where the murder takes place at the multicultural *Mela Festival*. Early in

the novel, when a young woman named Nadia returns to the park late at night, Soma describes how “the skeletal trees swayed; the pale moon glimpsed in between the branches like snatches of light in the darkness. It was like being on the set of a horror movie, the atmosphere electric with nothingness.” However, this chilling description is followed by Nadia’s thoughts returning to what the park was like earlier the same evening, when the festival was still running, with “dancers with their bright orange and red clothes”, the place “a colourful spectacle”. As Soma ‘writes place’, she introduces interesting contrasts which allow the park that was once friendly and full of life to become a scary and cold place.

Similarly, another character on an early morning dog walk, sees “the streaks of light from the streetlamps [making] strange shapes on the ground”, and starts to reflect on the “colour, the music [and the] joyous festival” of a few nights before. However, now “a stale aroma of curry wafted over; paper bags and polystyrene boxes were strewn around with remnants of pakora, samosas and red sauces seeping through; a discarded mess”. Here, we are invited to imagine places that are just as real and dynamic as her characters, and to observe how her characters’ emotions shift in different ‘versions’ of the same place.

However, Edinburgh, the Pentland Hills, Kelvingrove Park, and Yokohama are only some of the many places one can visit through Ringwood’s publications, and others include places as far away as the Planet Mars, as described in Mark Gallagher’s *Saved From The Fire* (2021).

With ‘Gray Day’ just passed on the 25th of February, we conclude with a nod to Alasdair Gray, whose terse depiction of Glasgow (2015) shows that descriptions of place need not be lengthy to be highly descriptive and extremely evocative: “It had a smoke canopy over it, a kind of great pall over the city - almost like a physical roof.” You don’t need to have visited Glasgow to imagine what he means!

Sources:

Thanks to Donny McIntyre for mentioning the concept of psychogeography and for permission to use his photograph of an atmospheric Glasgow.

Mitchell, Margaret (2023) interview with Isobel

Freeman <https://www.ringwoodpublishing.com/meeting-the-managers-isobel-freeman/>

Curtin, Amanda (2016) *Elemental*, University of Western Australia Press, Perth.

<https://www.scottishbooktrust.com/articles/five-things-creating-a-sense-of-place>

Definition of Psychogeography, Tate. <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/p/psychogeography>)

Steinkopf-Frank, Hannah (2021) <https://daily.jstor.org/walkers-in-the-city-and-everywhere/>

Fleischer, Evan (2015) (<https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/how-alasdair-gray-reimagined-glasgow>).

Description of Carol Margaret Davison's walk in Edinburgh

in <https://www.ringwoodpublishing.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Ringwood-June-Newsletter.pdf>

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## Ringwood in Rouen

By Eve Clark

# Soirée littéraire

A l'Hôtel Littéraire Gustave  
Flaubert  
Le 7 février à 19h

*Evènement gratuit avec inscription*

Présentation  
du livre\*  
**RAISE DRAGON**

Par son  
autrice  
L.A. Kristiansen



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Rouen à travers  
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\*Il n'est pas nécessaire d'avoir lu le livre pour participer à l'évènement

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Ringwood's first literary event in France was a success!

The mediaeval city of Rouen welcomed Ringwood author, L.A. Kristiansen, from the 6th to the 8th of February, with the interview on her novel *Raise Dragon* taking place at Hôtel Littéraire Gustave Flaubert on the 7th. The dialogue between L.A. Kristiansen and Ringwood intern Eve Clark was translated into French by Nathalie Née, who acted as interpreter.

Ringwood worked in partnership with ABC bookshop, an English language bookshop in Rouen, whose owner, Paul Billington, was instrumental in helping to organise the event. The celebrations are double, given that ABC bookshop is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year. Ringwood is delighted that they could play a part in the bookshop's festivities.

The interview at Hôtel Flaubert lasted one hour and there were around 25 attendees. During the interview, one of the most loved responses was to a question about L.A. Kristiansen's favourite character to write about: "King Philip IV because he is so deliciously devious."





After the interview, the audience – some of whom already came book-in-hand – had questions ranging from the use of violence in historical fiction, to how difficult it was to write about the Scottish Wars of Independence. They were particularly interested in the parts of *Raise Dragon* that are set in Rouen, and wanted to know when the second book *Revenge of the Tyrants* would be released. The answer (readers of

Ringwood's newsletter who are also fans of *Raise Dragon* will be happy to know) is Spring 2024!

The next day, L.A. Kristiansen went to ABC bookshop to chat with readers and sign some books before catching her return flight home to Norway, whose history also features in *Revenge of the Tyrants*.

Everyone came away with smiles and with a solidified understanding of the kinship, marked by the Auld Alliance of 1295, between Scotland and France.

Wondering what all the fuss is about? You can buy your ebook copy of *Raise Dragon* on the Ringwood website [here](#) just in time for the release of *Revenge of the Tyrants*.

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### **Get to Know Our Interns: Matilda Eker**

By Margaret Mitchell



**Please tell us about your background**

I grew up in the south of Sweden and moved to Glasgow in 2019 to do my undergraduate in English Literature. I wanted to study literature and wanted to study abroad, and Scotland seemed like a great option, even though I had never been before. In hindsight I can say I am so happy with

my choice! At University, I knew I wanted to get involved with student publishing so spent two years working at the Queen Margaret Union Magazine *Qmunicate*, and one year at the Glasgow University Zine Society, which produces its own zine *PITH*. Working at these publications really enriched my student experience, and I met a lot of talented and creative people through it. It also made me even more sure that publishing would be the right path for me. So, when I saw an ad saying that Ringwood was looking for new interns, I jumped on the chance.

### **What have been your roles at Ringwood?**

I think the Ringwood internship is fantastic, and partly so because you are not restricted to just one area, but you can dip your toe in many different aspects of publishing. I've been very lucky to have had the chance to do a bunch of different things here. I've been the lead editor of the Newsletter since October, and worked on a season of the Ringwood Publishing Podcast. I've also chaired and helped organise several events these past few months, and I worked on marketing for *The Hotel Hokusai*, which launched on February 18<sup>th</sup>. I'm also the e-book and audiobook manager, which means me and my team work on both the more technical things like e-pub file conversions and Print-On-Demand, and also on the marketing side of things, where we try to find new ways to sell our e-books.

Lastly, I'm the lead editor for a new book by Kirsten MacQuarrie (working title *The Rowan Tree*) which tells the life story of poet Kathleen Raine and her close relationship with fellow writer Gavin Maxwell. It's a fantastic novel and I'm honoured to work with Kirsten and to be part of this reclaiming of Kathleen's story. Apart from my tasks here at Ringwood I also work at a patisserie here in Glasgow! I get to go from reading manuscripts on my laptop in the morning to serving people coffee and cakes in the afternoon.

### **What has been your favourite thing that you have worked on here at Ringwood?**

I must say my favourite job so far has been editing Kirsten's book. I really,

really love the book and I believe in its vision. It's just so exciting to get the chance to read a novel in its manuscript form, and then watch it evolve into its final version. I can't wait for the day I get to hold a copy of the printed and published book in my hand!

I've also enjoyed the writing workshops I have had the chance to host together with fellow intern Annika Dahlman. We've done both a short story seminar and a general writing workshop, where we invited some of our authors to share their advice, and then we concluded the events with writing exercises. Making art, writing, and even reading is usually such a solitary experience so it's wonderful to hold events and workshops where you get to meet other people who also like books.

That is another great part of working at Ringwood— all the people you meet through it. I have learnt so much from all my fellow interns and from all the managers and volunteers who have supported me and shared their expertise.

### **What are your favourite books and genres?**

It's hard to give you a short answer! I mean, like any literature student I do love my classics but I usually read more contemporary stuff like Jennifer Egan, Maggie O'Farrell, and Zadie Smith. And, of course, to remain true to Ringwood I shouldn't forget my Scots writers— Muriel Spark, Alasdair Gray, Ali Smith. I think Ali Smith might be my favourite author. The way she plays with language and literary reference, while engaging with contemporary UK politics, particularly in her Seasonal Quartet, is just phenomenal.

I'm also a big fan of comics, or graphic novels as some call them, probably because I've always loved art and I've always loved reading, so in comics my two interests come together. I wrote my undergraduate dissertation on comic book artist Gareth Brookes. He makes the most wonderful comics using art forms such as embroidery, linocut and pyrography— all of them art forms that are rarely seen in comics. There are so many creative and imaginative comic book artists out there, and I think it's a form that lends itself well to experimentation, which I find very exciting.

## What would you like to see more of in Scottish Publishing?

I think I would just like to see more of it. There's a really amazing literary scene in Scotland with small presses and publishers, like Ringwood, independent book shops, and literary journals like *From Glasgow To Saturn* and *Gutter*. All of these have really enriched my life here in Glasgow these past few years. I love living in a place where there's always a launch event or open mic to go to and where you constantly see new zines and publications pop up.

But, the reality is that it's really hard to find a job in publishing up here, and many people find themselves having to relocate to London. In the future, I just hope to see more of the same, you know, more opportunities, and more jobs up here in Scotland.

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## Thank you Christine

Before we conclude this issue of the newsletter, we would like to take a moment to extend our heartfelt gratitude to former Executive Director, Christine MacCrosson, who has recently decided to step down from her role. Christine's contributions to Ringwood have been immense, ranging from recruitment, grant funding, working with festivals and prizes, to providing invaluable intern support, and doing essential policy work alongside Donny McIntyre and Margaret Mitchell. Thank you for all your contributions Christine, you will be missed!

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Until next time,

Matilda Eker & Megan Gibson (Editors), Jiyuan Li, Margaret Mitchell & Rebecca McGuire (Assistant Editors), and the entire Ringwood team!

*Want to share this with your friends and family? The Ringwood Newsletter is also available from our website [www.ringwoodpublishing.com](http://www.ringwoodpublishing.com).*

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