

Newhaven by Gerda Stevenson

(honouring Greta Thunberg)

Heel-kickin hame frae a lang day at school,
lowpin ow'r the cobbles, like a wee whirlpool,
I breenge, I breel, and the willie-gous squeal,
gandigowsters blaw like a carlin's reel!

Herrin fur tea, then I lay doon ma heid,
tak oot a book, and hae a bit read
about Newhaven, the toon whaur I bide,
the mercat, lichthoose, harbour, and tide;

the white horses ride, ma een are closin,
nod-nid-noddin, doverin, doverin,
the blue saut watter croonin, dronin,
I'm driftin, sweemin, showdin, floatin

in a dwam on braid waves o sleep,
boats drift by on the Firth sae deep.
I hear a lanely sang o whales like ghaists;
nets in the moonlicht wave like lace.

Newhaven, Newhaven, sing tae me,
ma hame, Newhaven, wi yer dancin sea!

Fishin floats glent and drift -
tirlin globes like planets i the lift;
an auld wumman bendin
ow'r the net-mendin:
ma great grand-mither -
her darg niver-endin;

bairns playin peevers, lauchin in the street,
but when they faa, skint knees mak them greet!
They're stackin fish boxes tae mak play-huts,
Och - the clarty guff o deid fish guts!

Newhaven, Newhaven, sing tae me,
ma hame, Newhaven, wi yer dancin sea!

The tide rides in, and the tide rides oot,
sails they blaw and ships they hoot,
I'm nod-nid-noddin, doverin, doverin,
driftin, sweemin, showdin, floatin;

I see a braw ship – leamin, glisterin,
The Great Michael! – gowd decks skinklin,
a war ship built frae the forests o Fife,
its guns wud mak ye feart fur yer life!

Newhaven, Newhaven, sing tae me,
ma hame, Newhaven, wi yer dancin sea!

The Great Michael sails me intae the dawn,
ma tired een appen on a Newhaven morn;
news o faimilies drooned in the sea,

news o muckle men wha cannae agree;

news o wars, far, far awaa,

ile slicks spreidin on the oceans ow'r aa –

I dinnae want war, I want war tae cease,

a brave *new* warld that's a *haven* o peace,

Newhaven, Newhaven, sing tae me,

ma hame, Newhaven, wi yer dancin sea!

Daurk the sky, and cauld the wund blows

throu ma hert, like jaggit ice floes;

but I tak a bit paper, and I scribe a note,

float it in a bottle, like a bonnie wee boat –

tae the warld a message: tak tent o the young,

mind on oor lives, and this sang we hae sung;

mak the warld a new haven – hear oor caa!

a brow new haven fur ane and aa.

Note: *The Great Michael* was a carrack (a war ship) of the Royal Scottish Navy, built by King James 1V of Scotland from the oak forests of Fife. She was too large to be built at any existing Scottish dockyard, so was built in the new dock at Newhaven, and launched in 1512, the biggest and most heavily armed ship in Europe at the time.

NEWHAVEN -

a song for 2020: Scotland's Year of Coasts and Waters.

My song celebrates Newhaven, a coastal area of Edinburgh on the Firth of Forth, which lies between Granton and Leith. Once a small fishing village, it has a rich history. As part of the research process for writing the song, I visited Newhaven's Victoria Primary School, on Main Street, and enjoyed browsing round the exhibition there, which contains many fascinating objects and information about the locality.

My song begins with an upbeat verse, in the rhythm of a Scottish dance: a child, heading home after a long day at school in Newhaven, is enjoying the freedom of being out on the street. The pace begins to slow down – it's bedtime: she/he reads a book about Newhaven, and nods off to sleep. The child dreams of images from the past which appear in the book – children's street games, an old woman working at mending the fishing nets, the glass floats, the song of whales (Newhaven was a whaling harbour), and finally *The Great Michael*, Scotland's huge 16th century royal war ship built in Newhaven, the biggest dry dock of the period, and the only one which could accommodate ship-building on such an

unprecedented scale. In the morning, the child wakes up, hearing the disturbing daily global news from the media, and decides to send out a message to the world.

Like many songs from Scotland's coastal fishing areas, my own song (written to be sung by a children's choir including pupils from Newhaven), is in Scots, the language which can still be heard in this part of Edinburgh. Words like *willie-gou* – a seagull, and *gandigowster* – a sudden gust of wind, or *breenge* – to rush in, and *breel* – to dash about, are deliciously vigorous, like salt on the tongue.

Gerda Stevenson, writer/actor/director/singer/songwriter, works in theatre, television, radio, film, and opera, throughout Britain and abroad. Her poetry, drama and prose are widely published, staged and broadcast on BBC Radio. Literary festivals include Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Trinidad, Italy, UK and Ireland; visiting lecturer at the University of Glasgow, where her poetry and drama are studied on the Contemporary Scottish Literature course. In 2018, she gave the **Thomas Muir Memorial Lecture** at the Edinburgh Festival, and the **George Mackay Brown Memorial Lecture**, at the Pier Arts Centre, Stromness. Winner of the **Robert Tannahill Poetry Prize, 2017**.

Nominations: **Scots Language Awards, 2019** – Scots Language Writer of the Year, and Scots Language Performer of the Year; **MG Alba Trad Music Awards, 2014** – Scots Singer of the Year following release of an album of her own songs, *NIGHT TOUCHES DAY*; three times for the **Critics Awards for Theatre, Scotland**; commissioned in 2017 by University of Edinburgh to write an opera libretto, with composer Dee Isaacs, based on Coleridge's poem *THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER*. Publications: *IF THIS WERE REAL* (Smokestack Books, 2013), published in Italian, *SE QUESTO FOSSE VERO*, by Edizioni Ensemble, Rome, 2017; *QUINES: Poems in tribute to women of Scotland* (1st edition, 2018, 2nd edition, 2020, Luath Press),

reviewed by Jackie Kay in the Observer as *"Fabulous. A ground-breaker of a book"*; *INSIDE & OUT – the art of Christian Small* (Scotland Street Press, 2019), with an introduction and poems by Gerda, reviewed in The National as *"One of the most beautiful books ever published in Scotland"*; *EDINBURGH*, a collaboration with landscape photographer Allan Wright, with an introduction and poems by Gerda (Allan Wright Photographic, 2019), described by Richard Holloway as: *'A stunning tribute to that magnificent old hypocrite, the city of Edinburgh'*, and reviewed in The National as *"A stunning portrait of Edinburgh. Brilliant. Buy it."*