

**January Poetry Group  
report by Annie Clouston**

**New Beginnings**

A very broad theme to lift our spirits at this time of year.

We had some cracking contributions. *Fern Hill* by Dylan Thomas is an uplifting evocation of his “green and carefree” childhood that seems so alien to the experience of so many of today’s children. Robert Frost’s poem *The Road Not Taken* seems to urge an approach to life that is curious and riskier – although recognising that choice also can mean regret.

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –  
I took the one less travelled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

William McGonagall is my go-to poet for a good laugh, and improbable as it seems, there was never any sign that he viewed his poems as self-parody. His *A New Year’s Resolution to leave Dundee* is riddled with his self-pity as a misunderstood genius who is driven from his home town by derision.

Because the citizens and me cannot agree.  
The reason why? -- because they disrespect me,  
Which makes me feel rather discontent.  
Therefore to leave them I am bent;  
And I will make my arrangements without delay,  
And leave Dundee some early day.

I suppose I ought to feel sorry for him!

We had two poems by George Mackay Brown (1921-1996), a prolific Orcadian poet. *The Finished House* tells of a crofting community tradition of bringing the flame to the hearth, and *Summer and Winter*, a poem written for the National Schizophrenic Newsletter, reminds us that though in Winter ‘each one has thought then/ The bleakness and cold never-ending”:

Listen to the summer music! The sea is blue again, the grass is green.

Two members chose *Trees* by Philip Larkin, and the American Poet Billy Collins, made a second appearance in the group with *Today* “if ever there was a spring day so perfect,/ so uplifted by a warm intermittent breeze”. *Man and Tree* by R S Thomas is a poignant reminder not to write off the old:

Dumb now and sapless? Yet this man can teach.  
Even as an oak tree when its leaves are shed,  
More in silence than in youthful song.

We rounded off with the wonderful John Clare’s *First Love*. Can we recall that moment when struck “With love so sudden and so sweet”? It was so good!