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Author/Interview subject: Liz Lochhead (LL)  
Interviewed by: Janice Forsyth (JF)  
Other speakers: Audience (Aud)

JF: Hello there. I'm Janice Forsyth. A very very warm indeed to Authors Live. This is the latest in our series of virtual author events which are organised by the Scottish Book Trust in conjunction the BBC Scotland. Now let me remind you - I know you know, because you're watching in schools and all sorts of places right across the country that sometimes with an internet broadcast your image might just suddenly freeze or judder, you know all that sort of stuff. You know what to do. Don't panic. It will sort itself out, so don't try switching anything off. Now there are tens of thousands of you watching in schools right across the UK online and on GLOW but we also have some really live particularly intelligent and very very good looking school students from three Scottish schools. They are from, they're vaguely cheering when I said that, they're from Girvan Academy, Oban High School and High Mill Primary in Carluke. Would you like to see them? You would? They're going to wave to you right now. There you are. Wave to the children. Aren't they lovely? They're fabulous. There you go. So, wherever you are I've got this to say to you; *fair fa' your honest, sonsie face*. Yes we're celebrating Burns today. It was Burns last night. I'm still slightly suffering after an overdose of haggis, neeps and tatties last night. If you don't know what that is you should because we're talking scots today. Who better to celebrate the work of Burns in this Burns week than Scotland's Makar, Liz Lochhead. Now I'm sure you know that Liz is a wonderful wonderful poet. Her collection have won several prizes through the years including the Saltire Society Scottish Book of the Year Award, and in 2011, big excitement, because she followed in Edwin Morgan's footsteps and became the Scottish Makar, the national poet of Scotland so we're really really delighted, especially the morning after the Burns Night before that Liz could be with us here today, so please here and out there and huge warm welcome to Liz Lochhead.

Aud: [Applause]

LL: Hello.

JF: Yes, it's Liz Lochhead, actually here.

LL: Hello Janice

JF: Hello to you.

LL: And hello everybody and thank you for coming. Thank you very much.

JF: How was Burns Night for you last night?

LL: Well it was very good. We had a wee family, not a Burns supper, but we did address the haggis and we ate it. Ate too much, as we know. And we listened to some wonderful Burns singers on the internet – that's a great resource. And you can also listen on BBC. There's a special thing that they did which has every single thing that Burns wrote so you can hear Burns alive and we did a bit of that and we just did a few poems ourselves. It was great.

JF: With so many poems to choose from I suppose it is quite difficult in the limited amount of time we have, you know we've got kids here, really into Burns and listening out there and watching too, is there a particular poem you'd like to kick off with that's a favourite?

LL: Yes. I'm going to start with the first ever favourite that I had. The first ever poem that I learned off by heart and I think, not necessarily leant off by heart, but certainly saying a poem out loud is a way of understanding it, and I'm going to start off with...It's still one of my big favourites...and I'm going to stand up at that microphone and do it. Is that alright Janice?

JF: Fantastic.

LL: The poem is called 'To a Mouse'

*Wee, sleekit, cow'rin, tim'rous beastie,  
O, what a panic's in thy breastie!  
Thou need na start awa sae hasty  
Wi bickering brattle!  
I wad be laith to rin an' chase thee,  
Wi' murdering pattle.*

*I'm truly sorry man's dominion  
Has broken Nature's social union,  
An' justifies that ill opinion  
Which makes thee startle*

*At me, thy poor, earth born companion  
An' fellow mortal!*

*I doubt na, whyles, but thou may thieve;  
What then? poor beastie, thou maun live!  
A daimen icker in a thrave  
'S a sma' request;  
I'll get a blessin wi' the lave,  
An' never miss't.*

*Thy wee-bit housie, too, in ruin!  
It's silly wa's the win's are strewin!  
An' naething, now, to big a new ane,  
O' foggage green!  
An' bleak December's win's ensuin,  
Baith snell an' keen!*

*Thou saw the fields laid bare an' waste,  
An' weary winter comin fast,  
An' cozie here, beneath the blast,  
Thou thought to dwell,  
Till crash! the cruel coulter past  
Out thro' thy cell.*

*That wee bit heap o' leaves an' stibble,  
Has cost thee monie a weary nibble!  
Now thou's turned out, for a' thy trouble,  
But house or hald,  
To thole the winter's sleety dribble,  
An' cranreuch cauld.*

*But Mousie, thou art no thy lane,  
In proving foresight may be vain:  
The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men  
Gang aft agley,  
An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain,  
For promis'd joy!*

*Still thou are blest, compared wi' me!  
The present only toucheth thee:  
But och! I backward cast my e'e,  
On prospects drear!  
An' forward, tho' I canna see,  
I guess an' fear!*

And I wrote a wee poem in response to that, just for fun, it's just a silly wee poem and a lot of people write, a lot of people this week will be writing poems to say out loud at Burn's suppers. They'll mostly be a lot of rubbish, like this one is in a way but they'll be a response to what Burn's did and it can be a good idea when you're looking at a poem to write your own version of it, maybe from another point of view, so particularly for that reason I decided to write a poem in Burn's stanza, the same rhyme scheme as he used to write it, but instead of the ploughman talking to the mouse, I've got the mouse talking back to him. So this is not 'To a Mouse' but 'From a Mouse'

It's me. The eponymous *the moose*  
The *To a Mouse* that – were I in your hoose,  
A bit o' dust ablow the bed, thon dodd o' oose  
That, quick, turns tail,  
Is – eek! – a *livin creature* on the loose,  
Wad gar you wail.

Aye, I've heard you fairly scraich, you seem  
Gey phobic 'boot Mice in Real Life yet dream  
About Man-Mouse Amity? Ye'll rhyme a ream!  
Yet, wi skirt wrapt roon,  
I've seen ye staun up oan a chair an scream  
Like Daphne Broon.

But I'm *adored* – on paper! – ever since  
First ye got me at the schule, at yince  
*Enchantit* – wha'd aye thocht poetry was mince  
Till ye met Rabbie,  
My poor, earth-born companion, an the prince  
O *Standard Habbie*.

For yon is what they cry the form he wrote in  
An' *you* recite. Gey easy, as you ken, to quote in  
Because it *sticks*. I will allow it's *stoatin*,  
This nifty stanza  
He could go to sicc lengths wi, say sicc a lot in –  
Largs to Lochranza,

Plockton to Peebles, Dumfries to Dundee,  
If a wean kens ony poem aff by hert, it's *Me!*  
Will greet ower ma plough-torn nest, no see  
The bit o' a gap  
Atween the fause Warld o' Poetry  
An baited trap.

Get Rentokil! Get real! Wha you love  
'S the *ploughman* in the poem, keen to prove  
– Saut tears, sigh, sympathy – he's sensitive.  
Wee sermon:  
Mice, men, schemes agley, Himsel' above  
Cryin me *Vermin*.

Ploughman? That will be right! *Heaven-taught?*  
He drank deep o The Bard, and Gray, and Pope – the lot.  
I, faur frae the spontaneous outburst you thought,  
Am an *artifact*.  
For Man's Dominion he was truly sorry? Not!  
'T was all an act.

Burns, baith man and poet, liked to dominate.  
His reputation wi the lassies wasna great.  
They *still* dinna ken whether they love to hate,  
Or hate to love.  
He was '*an awfy man!*' He left them tae their fate,  
Push came to shove.

Couldnae keep it in his breeks? Hell's bells, damnation,  
I wad be the vera last to gie a peroration  
On the daft obsession o this prurient Nation,  
His amatory antics.  
He was – beating them tae it by a generation –  
First o th' Romantics.

Arguably I am a poem wha, prescient, did presage  
Your Twentyfirst Century Global Distress Age.  
I'm a female *mouse* though, he didna give a sausage  
For ma sparklin een!  
As for Mother Nature? Whether yez get the message  
Remains to be seen.

Aud: [Applause]

JF: That's wonderful. Thank you very much. And it's just so funny watching you and listening to you reciting both of those poems. They're poems that are absolutely meant to be said aloud. I think that's maybe an important thing to think about, especially with young people maybe reading and also writing poems. When I was at school I don't think we read the poems aloud very often.

LL: And that's a big mistake because that's the only way at the beginning to understand them. I'm not saying you'll understand a poem the first time you read it out loud but first of all, y'know just try and turn it back into ordinary sentences

- i.e. don't stop at the rhyme word because that might not be the end of the sentence, but just try and say it, as if it was an ordinary thing being said, and that'll help you understand. I'm not saying it will get you all the way but it's a good start. And I think poems were written to be said out loud. When I'm writing down a poem, I'm writing down a sound, I'm not writing down something in black and white. That's how I feel about it.
- JF: I think also because our language is so rich, we heard it there in the Burns and in yours, all those brilliant brilliant words. You can't be lazy when you're doing those out loud. I mean it really is like a vocal exercise, isn't it Liz?
- LL: It absolutely is, in fact I was saying when I was getting ready and putting on my lipstick to come out, I was saying, oh my god this a really hard one they've given me today because I would love to do Burns's on the radio but it wouldnae be live so if I fluffed I would just do it over again, I would stop and say that line again and I might have to do that in front of you lot and if I do, well, you can laugh, but don't laugh at me, laugh with me. And I want to encourage you as well, that when you are saying a poem out loud don't let being too scared of making a mistake get in the road, cause it disnae matter, it's trying to say it out loud and trying to make it make sense that matters, y'know?
- JF: I'm sure Robert Burns made the odd mistake.
- LL: Absolutely. And part of the pleasure of Burns's for me, even when I was your age and younger, when I was learning 'To a Mouse' off by heart, part of the pleasure was learning the words that I dinnae know what they meant, you, and then I learned what they meant and then there was no problem, and I think if you look at Burns's on the page it can often be very very very daunting. That's why I'd advise you to get to that BBC resource and listen to them out loud. And I've got to tell you that some of them are pure filthy and so it makes them very funny and they're not even PG or anything. I mean Burns was an awfy man. They're very very funny some of these, and very rude and it's great hearing my friend Gerda Stevenson laughing and laughing at the filthy one that she's got to say.
- JF: Of course one of the big attractions of Burns is, as well as the sound of it, and all the amazing ideas that he's exploring, is the whole idea of telling a story, and I think storytelling is more important now than it's ever been. I think people realise that stories are very very important in helping people understand all sorts of aspects of your life, as well as being simply entertaining. But Burns was an absolute master at that wasn't he?

LL: He was, and probably his masterpiece, I think this is one of the two greatest narrative poems ever written. The other one, I would say is, The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner because that's a great story as well, but Burns, when he told Tam O'Shanter, you know the story of Tam o'Shanter

*As he frae Ayr ae night did canter,  
(Auld Ayr, wham ne'er a town surpasses  
For honest men and bonie lasses.)*

When he told that story which I can't possible tell you it all as it's a big long story but it's a great story and it's horrific and it's scary and it's very funny as well, and it's got great pace in it. If it were a movie it would be a movie with great pace and it's full of contrasts. First of all we get the indoors, we get Kate, Tam's wife, at home in her farmer's kitchen swearing about her husband having a good time outside and we get the inn, warm and cosy and convivial and then we've got the other place, we've go the outdoors, the real world, the night and all it's terrors and the supernatural. So -

*But to our tale:-- Ae market-night,  
Tam had got planted unco right;  
Fast by an ingle, bleezing finely,  
Wi' reaming swats, that drank divinely  
And at his elbow, Souter Johnny,  
His ancient, trusty, drouthy crony;  
Tam lo'ed him like a vera brither--  
They had been fou for weeks thegither!  
The night drave on wi' sangs and clatter  
And ay the ale was growing better:  
The landlady and Tam grew gracious,  
wi' favours secret, sweet and precious  
The Souter tauld his queerest stories;  
The landlord's laugh was ready chorus:  
The storm without might rair and rustle,  
Tam did na mind the storm a whistle.*

He dinnae mind while he was inside but

*Nae man can tether time or tide;  
The hour approaches Tam maun ride;*

*That hour, o' night's black arch the key-stane,  
That dreary hour he mounts his beast in;  
And sic a night he taks the road in  
As ne'er poor sinner was abroad in.*

*The wind blew as 'twad blawn its last;  
The rattling showers rose on the blast;  
The speedy gleams the darkness swallow'd  
Loud, deep, and lang, the thunder bellow'd:  
That night, a child might understand,  
The Deil had business on his hand.*

*Weel mounted on his gray mare, Meg--  
A better never lifted leg--  
Tam skelpit on thro' dub and mire;  
Despising wind and rain and fire.  
Whiles holding fast his gude blue bonnet;  
Whiles crooning o'er some auld Scots sonnet;  
Whiles glowering round wi' prudent cares,  
Lest bogles catch him unawares:  
Kirk-Alloway was drawing nigh,  
Whare ghaists and houlets nightly cry.*

*Before him Doon pours all his floods;  
The doubling storm roars thro' the woods;  
The lightnings flash from pole to pole;  
Near and more near the thunders roll:  
When, glimmering thro' the groaning trees,  
Kirk-Alloway seem'd in a bleeze;  
Thro' ilka bore the beams were glancing;  
And loud resounded mirth and dancing.*

And later on it goes on to describe the devil, the first time Tam sees him.

*A winnock-bunker in the east,  
There sat auld Nick, in shape o' beast;  
A towzie tyke, black, grim, and large,  
To gie them music was his charge:  
He scre'd the pipes and gart them skirl,  
Till roof and rafters a' did dirl.--  
Coffins stood round, like open presses,  
That shaw'd the dead in their last dresses;*

*And by some develish cantraip slight,  
Each in its cauld hand held a light.--  
By which heroic Tam was able  
To note upon the haly table,  
A murders's banes in gibbet-airns;  
Twa span-lang, wee, unchristen'd bairns;  
A thief, new-cutted frae a rape,  
Wi' his last gasp his gab did gape;  
Five tomahawks, wi blude red-rusted;  
Five scymitars, wi' murder crusted;  
A garter, which a babe had strangled;  
A knife, a father's throat had mangled,  
Whom his ain son o' life bereft,  
The gray hairs yet stack to the heft;  
Wi' mair o' horrible and awfu',  
Which even to name was be unlawfu'.*

That was always my favourite wee bit, that description of the things. I haven't got time to read the rest of the poem, but it's dead easy for you all to look it up on the internet and really enjoy it and I brought with me today, I'll show you in a wee minute... when I was talking about making this programme, way before Christmas, I was saying how I'd always been in love with this picture which is the witch, Cutty Sark, chasing Maggie, the mare, and Tam and grabbing her tail because something terrible happens to that horse's tail and there's lightning behind it, all the things that are described in the poem, and I used to love, even before I could read, I liked looking at this picture, and you'll that even though this is an old book, and precious, it wasne left up on the shelf, it's quite well known and quite...see that one Janice, what a fabulous thing, and you know, he's so illustratable, Burns, but the trouble is, if you made a cartoon of it, what would you do with the words? Because the words tell all the pictures already, that's the trouble.

- JF: Listening to you do it you can almost imagine a film, can't you? It's like a movie.
- LL: It's like an absolute movie – scenes close up, wide shots, it's all there, but if you did it then you'd be in trouble.
- JF: Storytelling, obviously key to Burns, but also something that you enjoy exploring in poetry.

LL: Yes, but maybe not quite at that lovely long rate. I mean to read Tam o'Shanter out loud would take, I think, I think it would take, gosh, I think it would take 15 minutes or more.

JF: And it's often done at Burn's suppers

LL: People learn it off by heart. I'm going to learn it off by heart. I know most of it already. It's really interesting that you can learn something that's that well written because the picture tell them the story and I'm looking for a wee story of mine that I did very very early on called The Choosing which became a sort of title poem for my new book with is a sort of selected poems. Where's the choosing? It's in here somewhere. Yes there it is. Page 24. I should have looked that up first

JF: I was just admiring the fact that you weren't having to wear glasses unlike me.

LL: Well, I've got my glasses there, but I think I actually know this one anyway, off by heart I've said it aloud so often but it's a kind of story and it kind of links in to the next and last Burns poem that I want to do. I'll go straight from that into – if you could look that up from me Janice which in page 482, I'm going to end after I do this on with a wee bit of *A Man's A Man For A' That*. But first of all I'm going to do a sort of story poem for me, and it's the first poem I ever wrote, almost and it just shows you don't necessarily get better as you get older. So 482, is it there?

JF: Is it poem 482 or Page 482?

LL: Page 482

JF: It's there I've got it.

LL: Have you? Fantastic. There we are.

Here's "The Choosing"

*We were first equal Mary and I  
with the same coloured ribbons in mouse-coloured hair  
and with equal shyness  
we curtseyed to the lady councillor  
for copies of Collins's Children Classics.  
First equal, equally proud.*

*Best friends too Mary and I  
a common bond in being cleverest (equal)  
in our small school's small class.*

*I remember  
the competition for top desk  
or to read aloud the lesson  
at school service.  
And my terrible fear  
of her superiority at sums.*

*I remember the housing scheme  
Where we both stayed.  
The same house, different homes,  
where the choices got made.*

*I don't know exactly why they moved,  
but anyway they went.  
Something about a three-apartment  
and a cheaper rent.  
But from the top deck of the high school bus  
I'd glimpse among the others on the corner  
Mary's father, muffled, contrasting strangely  
with the elegant greyhounds by his side.  
He didn't believe in high school education,  
especially for girls,  
or in forking out for uniforms.*

*Ten years later on a Saturday —  
I am coming home from the library —  
sitting near me on the bus,  
Mary  
with a husband who is tall,  
curly haired, has eyes  
for no one else but Mary.  
Her arms are round the full-shaped vase  
that is her body.  
Oh, you can see where the attraction lies  
in Mary's life —  
not that I envy her, really.*

*And I am coming from the library  
with my arms full of books.  
I think of the prizes that were ours for the taking*

*and wonder when the choices got made  
we don't remember making.*

And I'm going to end up with a tiny wee bit of Burns because you couldn't not and it kind of links in with that poem of mine in a way because it's a kind of democratic poem that one of my mine I think and this in a big democratic poem and we had a woman singing this poem, accapella, without music, at the opening of the Scottish parliament, and I'm only going to do a few verses and last night, I'm please to say, that our friend Douglas did this at our table. Oops lost it again – found it.

*Is there for honest poverty  
That hings his head, an' a' that?  
The coward slave, we pass him by --  
We dare be poor for a' that!  
For a' that, an' a' that,  
Our toils obscure, an' a' that,  
The rank is but the guinea's stamp,  
The man's the gowd for a' that.*

*What though on hamely fare we dine,  
Wear hoddin grey, an' a' that?  
Gie fools their silks, and knaves their wine --  
A man's a man for a' that.  
For a' that, an' a' that,  
Their tinsel show, an' a' that,  
The honest man, tho' e'er sae poor,  
Is king o' men for a' that.*

*Then let us pray that come it may  
(As come it will for a' that)  
That Sense and Worth o'er a' the earth  
Shall bear the gree an' a' that!  
For a' that, an' a' that,  
It's comin yet for a' that,  
That man to man the world o'er  
Shall brithers be for a' that.*

JF: Fantastic. Thank you very much. That must have been performed a lot over the last 24 hours.

LL: And should be performed every week, really.

JF: And it's amazing actually because as well as the immediacy of telling a story it's the ideas that continues to be relevant now. You not going to do your 'men's Talk.

LL: No I'm not going to do that. I think that's plenty poems because now maybe we've got some questions to get. I want to meet you.

JF: Exactly. We've got questions from people here and also from out there. So let's start with our first question. Who's going to ask our first question? We're going to have a microphone come to you so we can hear you loud and clear. Tell us what school you come from.

C: I'm Callum and I come from High Mill.

JF: Hi Callum. What's your question?

C: What was the first poem you wrote and what inspired you?

LL: The first poem I ever wrote was about a visit to the mental hospital, a geriatric ward, an old people's ward in a mental hospital with the youth fellowship and the idea was just on the way home on the bus from it the first four lines were ringing away in my head. I got them for free. They were -

*We did not really want to go  
Not very much  
But he said it was our Christian duty  
And anyway he'd already booked the bus*

I often used to wee lines running through but I never used to finish the but I got the flu and I think I'd read every book in the house and I started mucking around and try and find the rest of it. And that's how it is with a poem. You might , you don't usually get as many as four lines and the lines that start it might end up in the bin by the time you're finished but you've got to work hard to get all the rest, unfortunately. Not much of it comes through a divine inspiration.

JF: Were you still at school when you wrote that?

LL: Just leaving school, just in my first year at art school. When I was at art school I was meant to be drawing all the time and I started writing all the time, and when I

was meant to be studying at school, and studying for my higher and writing essays I was always drawing. I think artists and writers are contrary people.

JF: And had you, until that moment when you got the flu and all those circumstances came together for you to write that, had you been thinking I want to write a poem?

LL: I'd scribbled wee odd lines. I must have wanted to, but I didn't know I could, and I still don't know I can. You know people as what's it like to be a poem and I say I'll tell you new time I write a poem. You only are a poet for a few days after you've written one. Actually I wrote on after the New Year so I still feel like a poet but by the end of January that'll be going away. I'll need to write a something else or I don't deserve the title.

JF: Great question Callum thank you.

LL: Great question.

JF: Second question form here?

D: Hi, I'm Dylan from Girvan Academy. What did you intend to show about women in the role of society in Mary Queen of Scots got her head chopped off?

LL: That, really. The story was the story. In Mary Queen of Scots got her head chopped off it's the story of Mary. It's about a particular time in history when we've got twa queens on the wan green island the wan and it's spit into twa kingdoms, but not equal kingdoms, nobody in the right minds would insist on that, so it's a terribly relevant old play, in a way, but at that time there was Queen Elizabeth on the throne in England and there was Mary on the throne in Scotland and they were obsessed with each other, and they never met each other. And when wrote their story without trying to do anything different to their story it talked about things that are relvent today, because Mary wanted to be both a woman and a ruler and be in power whereas Elizabeth choose to act like a man to keep her power. I wasn't saying...you don't write messages...Norman MacCaig, the great Scottish poet, used to say if you want messages go to the co-operative. You know, so you write to write a story but if you write a story relevant to human beings at anytime it'll be relevant to our time.

JF: Can I ask a question – we were talking about a play there and we're mainly talking about poetry today – is it more difficult to write a play, because it's longer, and you've got the audience there and you've got all the structure to think about, or can writing a beautiful shorted poem be more challenging?

LL: it's just different I think. When we're cooking with gas feel great and each one of them when you're trying to work them out can feel quite despairing. With a play, once it's alive it great because you know you're going to get a good six months when you know you're going to working on this thing whereas a poem you might get it finished in a week or a couple of weeks and then what'll you do? You'll have to wait for the next idea, so it's all great fun when you're working and it's all awful when it's not working.

JF: But don't give up.

LL: But don't give up, no, and enjoy it. Don't give up at the bad bit. If you gave up at the bit where you were stuck or where you weren't enjoying it then I wouldn't get anything finished much.

JF: I suppose a lot of people what this, they've got books of poetry and think that poet knows how to write poetry and they've done it all in a oner and they can do it because they're bright or whatever but it's actually a struggle.

LL: Dream on.

JF: Dream on – there you go. Okay – we've got another question from here. Who's going to ask the question? Tell us your name and where you're from.

F: Flora from Oban High School.

JF: Hi Flora

F: How long does it take you to write a poem?

LL: How long's a piece of string, Flora? It totally depends. In a way. That play, Mary Queen of Scots got her head chopped off, I think of it as a long poem in a way. It only really took about 2 months writing it, but there were 2 years not writing it, writing loads of bit that were not in the play so I don't know what the answer to that is. Some poems – only occasionally have I written a poem in an afternoon. I usually, a week, a couple of weeks. Not constantly, but going back to it and it and working on it for an hour or two every day until it feels right but you might change it later on. It's never really finished, anything that you do I don't think.

JF: Thank you very much Flora. Now we've got lots and lots of questions that have come for across Scotland. We won't be able to get through them all but we'll try and get through as many as possible. Some great questions here Liz.

LL: I'm scared now.

- JF: Don't be scared. This comes from Anna, hello Anna, who is in Primary 7 at St Mary's Primary in Hamilton. She says, two questions actually – why did you become an author and is poetry a hobby for you or do you do it for a job?
- LL: I don't know... it's not a hobby, but it's not a job either. It's a life, y'know. It's what I do. I feel rotten if I've not written anything in a long time. It's just a way of getting through my life is to try and wring things, and if I'm not writing things I feel pretty bad indeed.
- JF: You have to do it.
- LL: Might as well.
- JF: Thanks very much for that. From the same school, I think this might be from Olivia – what is your most favourite subject to write about and Olivia in with a double question, they're cheeky, this lot and do you write about your own experiences.
- LL: I think every writer writes about experience. What else could you write about and I think that's true about Science Fiction writers, they're writing about their own real experiences, but of course the incidents, the incidents that happen, you know are absolutely not what happened.
- JF: What about the one that we just heard about Mary on the bus?
- LL: That's a true story, in a way, though there's a few lies in it. I didn't see her on the bus with her husband. I'd heard she'd go married, but that's probably as near as it go to a real incident. And there's a couple of them that are quite personal in that way but they've all got to be true in emotion and what you've noticed in the world. When Alistair Gray wrote a big thing called Lanark, which is a fantastic thing, is also a picture about his own journey through life. What else can you write about except your experience?
- JF: Thank you very much, and we have this from Declan and Matthew - what got you interested in poetry? And I'm wondering if Burns was a factor there.
- LL: A poem, yeah. To A Mouse and I really Loved a Border Ballads. The best poet in the work isn't anon, or even Shakespeare or Burns. The best poet in the world is Anon, and she was a woman! No! Anon, you know these poems that people learned by saying out loud. I loved them. Whenever I heard, when I was about your age

*Last night as I was walking by alane,  
I heard twa corbies makin a mane;*

*The tane unto the ither say,  
"Whar sall we gang and dine the-day?"*

And it was a story about a murder, something that could have been in the red topped tabloid and I like that. And I loved John Keats when he wrote as if he was anon and did '*La Belle Dame Sans Merci*' which I think is my favourite poem ever. That would be my desert island poem – a poem that's a story about being taken away with the fairies. Another great narrative poem.

JF: Thank you. This comes from St Columbus High School, Class 1 in Dunfermline, hello there, and this is from Lewis – would you like to see one of your poems – and this is interesting given what you were saying about Tam O'Shanter and tured into a film and what would you do with the words - turned into a graphic story and if so which one, and why?

LL: I haven't thought about it. Gosh that's a great question, and it does link up so much with that Tam o'Shanter thing. If I stick to the Tam o'Shanter question. You could absolutely make a fantastic cartoon of Tam o'Shanter, but then the words would be superfluous and the words are the fun, so it's the same with me. I try and put all the pictures into my words but I would love to see what someone did. I hadn't though about that but I suppose what I'd like to see if it happened. I would like to words to disappear. The words had gone into the imagination of the person making the graphic novel. I'll give you a challenge, Somebody could maybe do it. Do a Choosing as graphic novel. It could be somebody's art project. That would be good fun, Yes sometimes I've seen some fantastic things that people have done. Somebody made great visual resources to go with a poem of mine called Revelation and they let me see it. It was this fantastic English teacher who was good on the internet images that coincided with the words and I though that it would be good to do the poem out loud with it, but then I realised that you would want the words to be read. I don't know about that.but what a great thought.

JF: It is a great throught. We're running out of time. I'd like to say hit to P7/P6 in Tarbet Academy who asked a question you've already answered really about the first poem you wrote and could we hear that, so good question. Thank you very much. Just finally, very quickly, if you could answer this form **Rachel, Ruth, Tom**. She says I'm a massive fan of the play *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off*. How important do you think history is to the creation and enjoyment of Scottish Literature? Big question, short time to answer it.

LL: Wow. Our history is very important to us because how do we know who we are if we don't know who we've been in the past? I would like to write more things

about Scottish History. I'm ashamed of myself that I've only really done *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off* but I was picking up a particularly great story because everyone loves a story about a tragic woman. A beautiful woman getting her head chopped off? Everybody loves that. No wonder they've made so many operas and films and terrible stories.

JF: I suppose it comes back to storytelling

LL: Storytelling. History's got great stories. That's a great question because I take that as more than a question. I take that as a message to me. Find a great historical story Liz, and get on with it. So I've taken that not as a question but as a challenge, so thanks for that.

JF: You to do that and someone else to do a graphic story based on your work. That's all we've got time for. I'm so sorry we haven't been able to answer all your questions but I hope we've been able to dip into enough themes to interest you and inspire you to get reading, and indeed get reading poetry aloud and indeed writing your own poetry. Do have a look also up the learning resources for Liz's work and Robert Burns work on the Scottish Book Trust website. Let me also remind you that the next author's live event will be with Francesca Simon. I'm sure you know about her, the creator of the Horrid Henry series and that event will take place on World Book Day which is Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> March which sounds like it's far off but it'll be here in no time. Now that particular event will be aimed at pupils in P1 right up to P4, so that's 4 to 8 year olds but anyone who wants to watch it can. I'm sure you'd be welcome to join in. if you're school or bookgroup would like to join in or indeed Horrid Henry fan club, if there's any of those around just sign up [Scottishbooktrust.com](http://Scottishbooktrust.com) and of course because this event is online you can watch it again as well as all the previous ones on the website, so that's BBC Scottish Learning, and Scottish Book Trust websites. Liz also mentioned that brilliant BBC archive too of all of Burns' poems read by all sorts of people, lots of famous people you'll know from movies and all the rest of it and telly. So thank you very much for watching, thanks you for our wonderful people here today – Have you enjoy it?

Aud: Yes!

JF: Yes you have. Now show you appreciation for the fabulous Liz Lochhead!

Aud: [Applause]

LL: Thanks very much. Thanks to all of you