

Title of the Book: *The Devil and Michael Scot: A Gallimaufry of Fife and Beyond*.

Author: Tom Hubbard, Publisher: Ochtertyre Grace Note Publications, 2020, ISBN: 978-1-913162 10-8, Price: £7.99.

Energising a Cultural Renaissance in Fife and Beyond

Kenny Munro

This is what makes Tom Hubbard such a rewarding guide: a man steeped in the places and tales of the Kinrick who doesn't get run over by them, rather he manages to unfold fresh visions, partly because – as a cosmopolitan traveller and translator, all human efforts lie before him.

The international vision of Fife and Scotland expressed by Tom Hubbard in his recent compelling compendium, *The Devil and Michael Scot: A Gallimaufry of Fife and Beyond*, is crucial reading, especially at this time of social restrictions due to the pandemic lockdown.

The book opens our eyes to Fife's distinctive communities, its historic connections and encourages us to get outdoors to explore and discover the many cultural personalities and aspects of landscape and architecture which offer a creative catalyst. Chapters offer innovative guidance for tackling many coastal and inland walks across the 'Kingdom'. It is a companion to his previous works, *Slavonic Dances* and *The Flechitorium*. Both these books present aspects of Fife in a European context and now that we reluctantly engage with the negativity of Brexit these publications, also by Grace Note, and together with the new title, offer a refreshing reminder of the essential bonds and exchanges with other nations.

Offering further inspiration to reinterpret and create our own impressions is his *Fringe of Gold* (Birlinn 2008), the marvellous anthology of poetry and prose co-edited by Tom with his friend and mentor Duncan Glen. (We will refer later to the significance of Duncan Glen and his wife Margaret who ran an innovative publishing house, AKROS, for several decades and latterly from their home in Kirkcaldy).

The Devil and Michael Scot is punctuated by Tom's powerful artwork, by drawings which vividly illustrate various chapters, and I feel that his portrait of Joe Corrie (p. 114) is so strong that it deserves to be in a public collection for all to see. A former miner, Joe Corrie wrote poems and plays which have been presented to great acclaim by The Bowhill Players.

It is also poignant that this new book about Fife is represented in the *Gitanjali and Beyond* magazine. One of the Bengali sage's anecdotes, and one which is ripe for expansion, is the fact that Rabindranath Tagore's favourite childhood book was *Robinson Crusoe* based on the dramatic life of Fife's own Alexander Selkirk from Largo.

That statement surely resonates, in its expression of a mix of adventure, exploration and survival by living in harmony with nature. Tagore's deep friendship with Patrick Geddes was often expressed in a shared belief in unity and diversity, and indeed *Think Global Act Local* is a Geddesian motto with which other artists like Joseph Beuys, Richard Demarco and George Wyllie were in accord. Tom highlights the fact that Patrick Geddes undertook an extensive urban survey of Dunfermline in 1904. Despite its ground-breaking scope for a 'peoples' university' in a 'green-township' as a form of biopolis, the scheme was not adopted.

Moreover as we delve further into the book Robert Louis Stevenson, Herman Melville and of course the central figure of Michael Scot are revealed. At the centre of the book Tom has laid out an exciting and viable script for his play *The Devil and Michael Scot*, subtitled 'A Faustian tale of a Scottish magician and polymath'. In reality, we are led to believe that Scot was a Sauntering Sage as he travelled across Europe in the thirteenth century, translating scientific knowledge from Arabic into Latin. He was an accomplished astrologer and speculated with predicting destiny and fantastical theories interpreting *multiple rainbows*.

Might this breadth of appreciation of the human role in the cosmos have influenced Adam Smith's creation of his *other* significant book on mutual respect and human ecology; *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*?

Anyway Tom's insightful and often comic play possibly asks more questions than it answers as the range of characters weave a spell in the plot full of intrigue, offering a delicious interpretation of Scot's influence. It would indeed be great to see this performed as a complement to the previous play composed by musician and writer Willie Hershaw, and also available from Grace Note.

Kenny Munro studied sculpture at Edinburgh College of Art and The Royal College of Art, London. He also took part in the Oslo University Summer School in 1976 which was established by Philip Boardman, a student of the 'evergreen' Scot Patrick Geddes. For 40 years Kenny has been engaged as a practitioner of Public Art with exchanges in France, Germany and India which has spawned a film on YouTube entitled *Patrick Geddes: Discover a Living Legacy*. Kenny first met Tom when he worked as Librarian of The Scottish Poetry Library in the 1980s. Independently they have gone on to explore international exchanges but share a passion for the current significance of Sir Patrick Geddes's philosophy. They have also collaborated on various projects, such as co-presenting a lecture linking *John Ruskin and Patrick Geddes* as part of Tradfest in Edinburgh, printing a series of poetry cards and most recently creating granite poetry stones for Markinch with fellow artists Willie Hershaw and Sheena Berry. A poetry stone memorial can be found in Revenscraig Park for Duncan and Margaret Glen, also one for Charles W. Berry. Also in Kirkcaldy at Beveridge Park is a large ring of poetry stones, as a carved haiku, commemorating Tagore's Nobel Laureate centenary in 2013. Kenny is currently the Chair of The Sir Patrick Geddes Memorial Trust.