

Her Edit

QUARTERLY



Issue Twenty-three
Winter 2017

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thank you

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Front cover picture
Based on portrait by Mary Beale, c1670

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Welcome to Her Edit

Almost the end of another year and the fourth year of Her Edit. I can think of no better woman for our front cover than the 17th century author Aphra Behn. She epitomises the bold, inventive and creative women that have featured on these pages over the last four years.

This issue is no exception. Katy MacMillan-Scott writes movingly about the extraordinary adventure she's undertaken to come to terms with the death of her friend. Parv Kaur is founder of Bhangra band, Eternal Taal, and she talks to our team about the challenges she faced as a woman when she first took up the dohl.

We're also delighted to feature the fantastic charity Room to Read again and the incredible work they're doing to ensure refugee children can learn and experience the joy of reading. And of course read all about the amazing Aphra Behn in Claire Bowditch's article.

Thank you to all our readers, contributors and supporters for helping to make this another fantastic year for the magazine. Please share Her Edit and do get in touch with contributions and ideas for articles at jayne.phenton@heredit.com via Twitter, or post your thoughts on our Facebook page or [website](#).

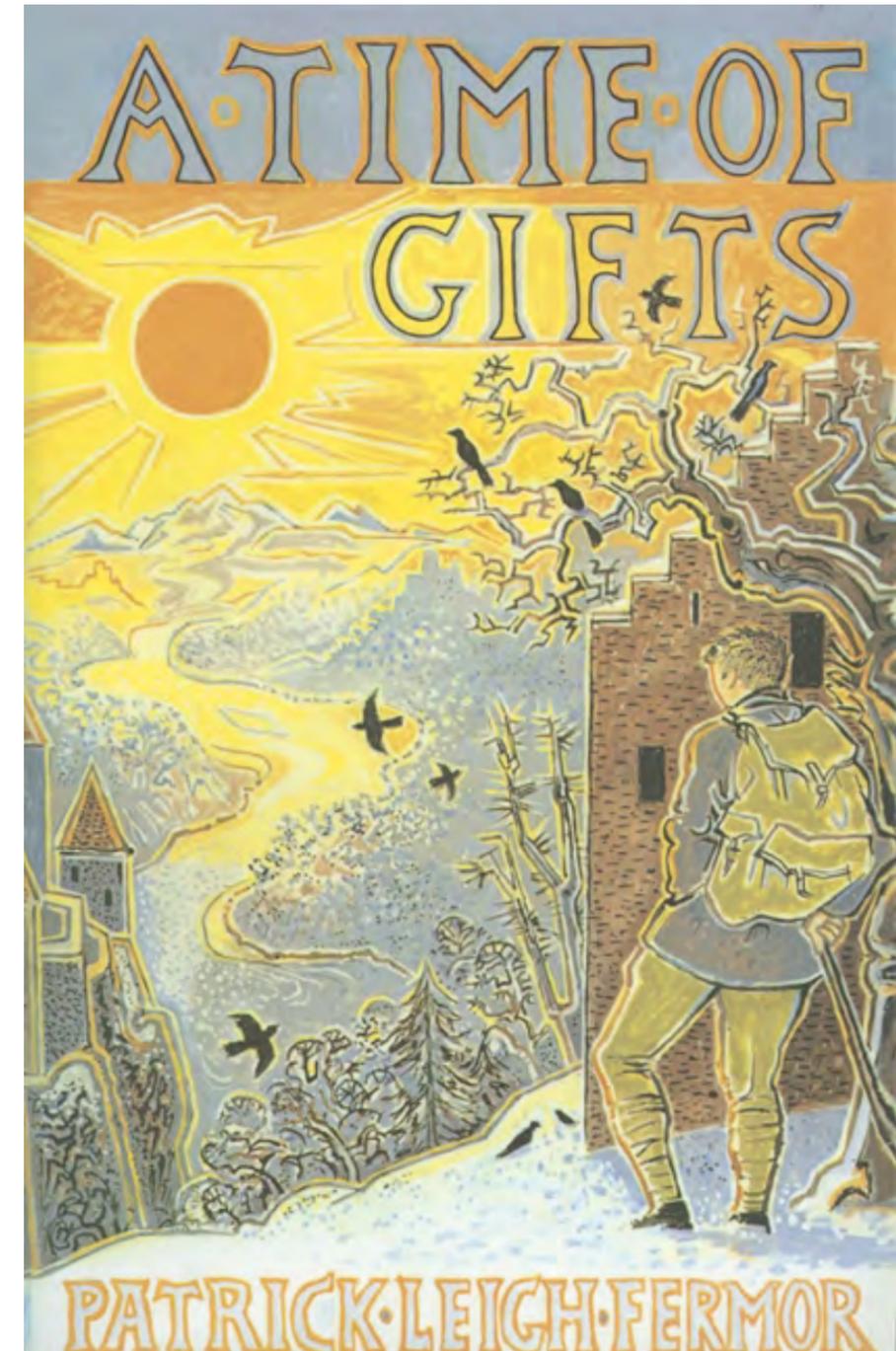
In the meantime, the Her Edit team hope you enjoy a joyous time over the Christmas holidays and wish you every happiness for 2018.

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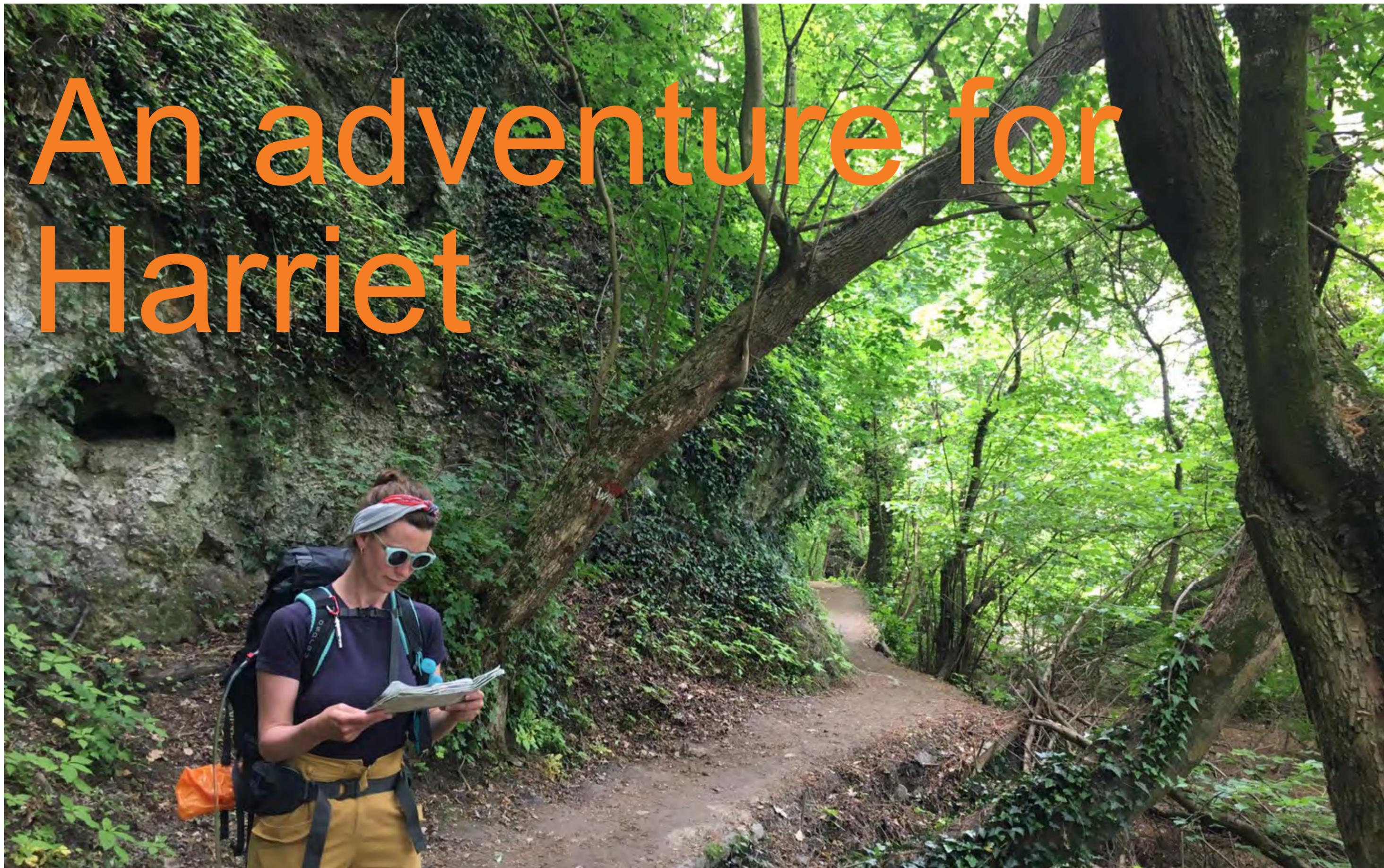
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Left to right: Parv Kaur;
the book which inspired Katy MacMillan-Scott's incredible journey.

An adventure for Harriet



Katy MacMillan-Scott



In May 2017, Katy MacMillan-Scott embarked on the first leg of an epic walk across Europe which will eventually take her 2,500 miles from Rotterdam to Istanbul, following the footsteps of travel writer Patrick Leigh Fermor.

Katy was inspired to do [this literary hike](#) following the death of one of her best friends, Harriet Clarke, from bowel cancer last year. So far, she's completed four weeks' walking through the Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Slovakia and Hungary.

With a full-time job in London, she is doing the walk in stages: this is a walking adventure that will take her several years to complete. She is fundraising for [Bowel Cancer UK](#) as she goes.

IMAGES

Clockwise from top: Harriet (centre) and Katy (left) with a friend at Katy's 30th birthday; Katy and Harriet on holiday in Madrid; Katy in Austria on the walk from Hainburg to Bratislava. All courtesy Katy MacMillan-Scott.

There's no manual for how to deal with the death of a friend. No perfect description for the hollowed-out numbness that follows. What hit me following the death of my friend Harriet, in March 2016, was nothing short of an existential crisis. One day she was there, newly married and glowing with possibility at the future ahead of her. Six months later, she had died of bowel cancer. Bereft doesn't cut it.

In the months after her death, I sought refuge in literature. Books drew Harriet and me together (we met studying English at university in 2001), and it was to the bookshelves I turned in the aftershock of grief. I found some comfort in Merlin's wonderful speech in T.H. White's *The Once and Future King* – 'The best thing for being sad... is to learn something. That's the only thing that never fails.' – but was left unmoved by the familiar classics. Another terrible thing had happened: I couldn't enjoy reading any more.

Then, one day, I bought a copy of Robert Macfarlane's slim essay *The Gifts of Reading*. I picked it up purely because of its title and the distinctive woodcut on its cover.

However, reading it was nothing short of an epiphany. 'This story, like so many stories, begins with a gift. The gift, like so many gifts, was a book...' Macfarlane's homage to *A Time of Gifts* by Patrick Leigh Fermor, which had been given to him by friend and fellow academic who later died of cancer, cracked something open.

The opening sentence had me hooked. By page 12, I knew with absolute certainty that I had

'Lots of people told me I was brave. Many thought I was foolish...I ignored most of them.'

to follow Paddy Leigh Fermor's route across Europe. By page 34, I was crying for the first time in months. I went straight to the nearest bookshop and bought *A Time of Gifts*.

This might sound like an impetuous decision but, in truth, it was the culmination of four months' upheaval and frantic activity. I moved house the week of Harriet's funeral, a few weeks later I launched a film club with friends; I had made a business trip to the Middle East, then the Brexit vote happened.

I was unmoored, unsure of myself and the world around

me. I wanted something concrete to cling to, something that would allow me time to absorb my friend's death. A literary hike across Europe in her memory suddenly felt like the right thing to do.

Our last evening together had been spent at a talk about explorers and, afterwards, we'd sent each other the almost implausible biographies of female adventurers like Gertrude Bell and Freya Stark. My mind was set: I was going to go on an adventure for Harriet.

Over the next few months, I plotted out the first stage of my route from Harwich to Budapest. I decided to hand in my notice after 10 years at the same company, negotiating three weeks' leave the following May as part of my contract with my new employers.

Lots of people told me I was brave. Many thought I was foolish, warning me to be careful, not to get attacked, not to put myself in risky situations. I ignored most of them. Some recommended I read Cheryl Strayed's *Wild*, others put me in touch with other walkers and other writers – all of which

helped, but made me feel more inadequate than ever.

Strange worries dogged me, like losing toenails and running out of water. On the whole, however, I felt strangely calm. I threw myself wholeheartedly into planning.

It was an easy distraction and it felt like the first positive thing that had happened since Harriet's death.

And then, on an overcast day in April 2017, I found myself on the bus to Harwich where I would board the Stena Line ferry to the Hook of Holland.

By that time, I was buoyed by the enormous support I had received, not only from friends, but also well-wishers who had heard about my plans through the brilliant team at [Slightly Foxed](#), the literary magazine who had supported me from the moment I made my plans public, through an interview in [Stylist](#) magazine and through people who had read about it on social media.

I had never planned to make a big thing of this trip, but somehow the news had carried and complete strangers offered me bed and board across Europe.

One woman, recovering from chemotherapy, had offered to drive me home pillion on her Harley Davidson when I returned to the UK after the first

three weeks. She said reading about my story had inspired her to get back on her bike after cancer treatment. It was wonderful, but totally surreal.

Three weeks is not a long time, but those 20 days – walking across five countries, staying with strangers most nights – were truly life-affirming. I thought I would find time to grieve but, if I'm honest, I didn't do that.

'Paddy's journey might have started in 1933...but many of the fundamental things had not changed.'

Instead I found comfort in the escape from my life back home, the simple joy of setting out each day with a map and a pack on my back, and time spent with people who didn't know me, but had nevertheless offered me somewhere to sleep, company and a hot meal after a long day's walk.

We discussed European politics (I remember a certain tense evening in Coblenz watching the French election results come through), memories of England and, inevitably, a passion for literature.

We talked about Harriet, and what it was to lose a loved one. Paddy's journey might have started in 1933, before World War Two changed Europe forever, but many of the fundamental things had not changed.

So far, I have covered a mere 200 miles of Paddy's route, which runs 2,500 miles to Istanbul. It will take me years – perhaps a lifetime – to complete.

Since my first trip in May, I have already returned to Hungary to walk a few more miles through the Pilis Hills. I have made new friends, rediscovered old ones, swapped books and learnt more about myself, and what it is to be human, than I could have imagined.

It's a long road ahead, but the kindness and humanity of friends old and new, alongside the memory of my beautiful, determined friend Harriet, has given me a sense of promise for the future. To someone grieving, that is the greatest gift imaginable.

Find out more about how you can support the work of [Bowel Cancer UK](#).

Move to the beat of a different drum



Parv Kaur

Eternal Taal is a team specialising in female Bhangra Entertainment, established in 1999. With over 18 years experience, Eternal Taal teach Dhol Drumming and Bhangra dance classes on a weekly basis in Birmingham.

Their aim is to promote and perform Bhangra music to wider audiences and they have performed on some of the world's largest stages, such as the Glastonbury Festival, the Graham Norton Show at the LG Arena, BBC Comic Relief with Dermot O'Leary, Channel Four, Bollywood, West End and the House of Commons to name some.

Their hard work has been recognised. In 2009 they received an award from the House of Commons for their 'Contribution to Bhangra music in the UK'. They have also been nominated for many other awards including, 'Best in Arts and Culture', 'Best Dhol Group' and 'Best Wedding Entertainment'. Founder Parv Kaur talked to Ann Clark about Bhangra and how Eternal Taal came about.

TEXT
Interview by Ann Clark

IMAGE
Previous page and right: courtesy Eternal Taal



What is Bhangra?

Whanga is the fusion of music and dance which originates from the North part of India, Punjab. It was mainly used as a celebratory folk dance which welcomed the coming of spring, which is widely known as Vaisakhi. Bhangra has evolved over the last 50 years and has been modernised by younger generations who listen to other genres. It is now recognised across the world and defined by unique Punjabi folk instruments like the Dhol (Indian Drum).

Can you describe the dhol and the part it plays in the music? Is it improvised music?

The Dhol is a double sided barrel drum played with sticks. Due to its size it is very loud, energetic and dominant when it comes to Bhangra Music. It is mainly played alongside other folk instruments like the Dholak (small indian drum) and Tabla (classical Indian drum).

What inspired you to take up the dhol?

My father and his brother started a Bhangra band in 1967 called the Bhujhangy Group. Every day was like a concert, playing music, singing, listening to instruments being played. Growing up I wanted to be just like my Father and started to pick up and learn various folk instruments. The Dhol drum stood out to me the most. As no other female was playing instruments I wanted to show various audiences that girls can play just as well as boys.

How difficult was it to set up an all female group, given it is a male-dominated world?

I faced many obstacles and hurdles when starting up Eternal Taal – UK's First female Dhol Drumming Team. The attitudes have changed somewhat over 20 years 1999. Until we actually picked up the Dhol and played it, nobody took

'Until we actually picked up the Dhol and played it, nobody took us seriously.'

us seriously. I had to battle to perform at events and prove that not only are we good, we also train professionals and work hard to ensure our performances stand out.

What has been your most exciting achievement?

All our stages are amazing, we have performed on such high profile platforms but my most exciting achievement has to be performing at Glastonbury Festival FIVE times!

The atmosphere, environment and type of music that was played was mesmerizing. 24/7 music was being played at the world's largest music festival.

People around the world came to see 100s of acts, Eternal Taal being one of them. Taking my Team to a festival, camping and getting no sleep

whatsoever was a dream come true. Glastonbury Festival opened many doors for us and we got many links to other stages and events from this.

Have different audiences changed your act?

When we first started, many of our events were Asian but due to the popularity of Eternal Taal and how we started to get recognised for our performances, our acts suddenly became more diverse. We perform at many non Asian events where we teach the audience how to Bhangra Dance and they LOVE IT!

What are your aspirations for Eternal Taal?

Our aim is to promote Bhangra Music to wider audiences across the world. I hope we continue to spread the love of music through our performances.

Read more on Eternal Taal's [website](#) and follow them on Facebook/Snapchat/Twitter/Instagram [@EternalTaal](#)

The right to speak our minds

Dr Claire Bowditch works in the Department of English and Drama at Loughborough University, UK. Since she first encountered Aphra Behn, as a second-year undergraduate student in 2006, Claire has been fascinated by Behn's complexity, frankness, and unfailing good humour. She is currently editing five of Behn's plays for the forthcoming Cambridge Edition of the Works of Aphra Behn, for which she is also one of the General Editors.

IMAGES

Right: Aphra Behn by Peter Lely, 1618-1680, Dutch
Yale Center for British Art, Bequest of Arthur D Schlechter



In 1929, 240 years after Aphra Behn's death, Virginia Woolf issued an instruction to the readers of her feminist polemic, *A Room of One's Own*.

'All women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn, which is, most scandalously but rather appropriately, in Westminster Abbey, for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds'.

Little is known of the first two decades of Aphra Behn's life. Born in 1640, she entered the public record only in the mid-1660s when she acted as a spy in the Low Countries (modern-day Belgium) for the newly restored King, Charles II. Three years after her return to England, she made her debut in the theatre with her first play, *The Forc'd Marriage* (1670).

That play dealt frankly with concerns that would go on to be central to Behn's works over the course of the next 20 years: female desire; the dangers of male power; and friendships between women.

Having established her name as a professional playwright during the 1670s, helped considerably by her smash-hit comedy, *The Rover* (1677), Behn diversified into other genres from 1680 until her death in 1689: she published verse, novels, and both literary and scientific translations. Behn was a prolific author, attuned to public tastes and unfailingly witty.

Behn was neither the first nor the only woman writing plays and poetry during the second half of the seventeenth century, though.

But there was one thing that marked her out: she unapologetically earned her living in the arts in England for nearly 20 years at a time when biblical doctrine was used as evidence of the need to keep women out of public life. In 1687, she went as far as to declare,

'...she unapologetically earned her living in the arts in England...at a time when biblical doctrine was used as evidence of the need to keep women out of public life.'

'I value Fame as much as if I had been born a Hero'.

That Virginia Woolf thought it appropriate to credit Aphra Behn with earning women the right to speak their minds is understandable:

Behn railed against the dominant culture of her day that told women to submit themselves to arranged, financially advantageous marriages; she openly criticised what she called 'men's great advantage over women', formal and university education; and, throughout her career, she continued to interrogate

and highlight the suffering that women's financial dependence could cause.

While many of Aphra Behn's colleagues praised her wit and talent, a woman's prominence in the public sphere was not universally celebrated.

In 1673, Behn described overhearing a male theatre-goer telling his friends that they were 'to expect a woeful play [...] for it was a woman's'. Behn's humorous and frank response to this position was unmatched – at least in print – by any woman of her day,

'If I thought there were a man of any tolerable parts', she mused, 'who could upon mature deliberation distinguish well his right hand from his left, [...] yet had this prejudice upon him, I would take a little pains to make him know how much he errs'.

Presumably, however, Behn felt that this particular audience-member was beyond redemption. But the criticism did not stop her.

Room to read

Over the last five years 660,000 Syrian refugees have fled to Jordan putting local primary education under significant pressure. Charity Room to Read is working with local authors and illustrators to ensure refugee children have access to books and education.

Since its inception in January 2015, the Room to Read Accelerator programme has trained 14,000 people through partnerships in Indonesia and Grenada, as well as Tanzania, India and Nepal, where they also offer direct program implementation. Read here about how the programme is bringing the joy of reading to these vulnerable youngsters.

TEXT
Ann Clark

IMAGES
Previous page and right: Courtesy of Room to Read



Jordan has seen a massive influx of Syrian refugees over the last five years, totalling 666,000 registered by UNHCR, and causing the population of Jordanian primary students to double.

As a result, the local educational system has experienced a significant strain. To accommodate the surge in students, many communities teach in two shifts with Jordanian students in the morning and refugee students in the afternoon.

By training and collaborating with Jordanian authors and illustrators, Room to Read's Accelerator local language publishing programme has created sustainable partnerships in the Middle East for the first time. The book distribution in Jordan is part of the Reading Nation Campaign, which is an initiative launched in 2016 by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai.

The aim is to distribute five million books to children in refugee camps and to schools in need around the world. Dubai Cares has been selected by Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives (MBRGI) to be one of the main partners to manage and implement the campaign.

'Children need books that reflect and legitimise their experiences, as well as giving them possibilities for how to deal with such experiences by seeing how a character handles them,' says Alisha Berger, Associate Director of Room to Read's Literacy Program.

'These titles will offer this opportunity, specifically to refugees who are searching for home in a time of transience.'

The programme began in May this year with a series of workshops starting with the writers where each participant drafted two stories including some with themes of hope and carrying 'home' wherever you go. To inspire stories that resonate with local refugees, the Accelerator team welcomed four Syrian refugee university students to speak about their experiences. Zohour, one of the students, told the group,

'I really want you to join this workshop not just to discuss the struggles we go through as refugees, but because we want to show our strengths, the things we were able to turn into positive energy,

how we were able to overcome our obstacles and that we can have a normal life just like everyone else.'

Two months later in July, Jordanian illustrators and publishers attended an illustrators' workshop. Hala Hijawi of Dar Al Yasmine Publishing said,

'This is the best experience I have ever had as someone who works in children's books. Publishing houses and authors will now be able to produce better, high quality books, which is very important because we're still a developing country and in order for us to be a better, more developed

country we need children, who are our future, to be more educated in every way. Books are the best way to educate them.

'Jordan's publishing tradition is very different from the United States. Many authors also act as their own publishers, finding their own illustrators and then directing them with their art. Room to Read brought a new way of thinking about picture books to Jordan and the publishers expressed an

interest in continuing these workshops in order to establish a new way of creating books.'

One of the workshop facilitators, Julie Downing commented,

'The biggest gains I saw [from the workshop] were conceptual. For many of the illustrators, the idea of letting the pictures tell half of the story was a new concept. Traditionally, authors tell the artists what to draw. In the end, they create books with pictures, not picture books; many were able to think about and design the book differently. The illustrators got their first taste of artistic freedom and were able to think creatively about their own vision for the book. The results were some wonderfully creative solutions. As a result, most of the artists accomplished what we hoped they would in just five days.'

For Julie,

'This experience was one of the most interesting experiences I have ever had. And in the end, what affected me the most were the people I met.

'The publishers opened their hearts and their homes, the illustrators gave it their all and I came away feeling that we had made a difference, not

'The aim is to distribute five million books to children in refugee camps and to schools in need around the world.'

only to the millions of Jordanian children who will get to read these books, but we also made a difference to the writers, illustrators, publishers and designers. And they, in turn, gave me an even bigger appreciation as to how the Room to Read Accelerator Programme shares our organisation's expertise and resources with partner organisations through the training materials, workshops, periodic support and monitoring, and technical assistance.

'All of this is done to maximize the quality of implementation and, in turn, replicate our work in eradicating illiteracy through high quality instruction and learning materials.'

Original Room to Read Arabic books have now been delivered to The Collateral Repair Project, where Iraqi, Yemeni, Sudanese, Palestinian and Syrian families attended for a storytelling session and received copies. The Jordanian Minister of Education, Dr Oma Al Razzaz attended the Book Launch event in Amman and spoke about the important role books play in teaching tolerance and co-existence from an early age.

This one-year project serves the children of Jordan, 90,000 of whom are estimated to be out of school. Thirty thousand copies of each book title will be distributed to inspire a love and habit of reading among the children of Jordan.

Every public school in Jordan will receive four copies of these books with the remainder going

to local refugee camps and disenfranchised communities. The total number of books to be distributed, by Dubai Cares, by end of the year, totals 600,000.

Twenty original children's book titles were developed by Room to Read in partnership with over 40 local authors and illustrators and in collaboration with three Jordanian publishers - Dar Al Yasmine Publishing, Jabal Amman Publishers and Majdalawi Masterpieces. This one-year project serves the children of Jordan, 90,000 of whom are estimated to be out of school.

Thirty thousand copies of each book title will be distributed to inspire a love and habit of reading among the children of Jordan. Every public primary school in Jordan will receive four copies of each book title with the remaining copies distributed to refugee camps and disenfranchised communities throughout the country.

This project is also helping to bolster the local book publishing industry. Twenty original children's book titles were developed by Room to Read in partnership with over 40 local authors and illustrators and in collaboration with three Jordanian publishers—Dar Al Yasmine Publishing, Jabal Amman Publishers and Majdalawi Masterpieces.

For more information about Room to Read's Accelerator programmes visit <https://www.roomtoread.org/room-to-read-accelerator/>

This year give a gift that grows beyond the box. This season, let's give joy, hope, opportunity and our life-changing educational programs to 100,000 more young girls and boys in Asia and Africa.

All donations made to Room to Read through December 31st will be MATCHED - up to \$1,000,000 - by our friends at IMC. Join [Room to Read](#) to give the gift of education here.

Her Edit

HER ISSUE, HER VOICE

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