

BritLit Update

In Santa's Sack

Welcome back to the real world after your oh-too-short break for the festivities. As you would expect, there isn't a great deal of news to report from December as most of us were staring glassy-eyes with exhaustion into middle distance, just like you. However, the hawk-eyed of you will have noticed a little extra present left by Santa in your virtual stocking over the virtual mantelpiece over the Christmas period in the form of a brand new kit.

'Genie-us' is the first of a new set of short BritLit kits. The story is one of those little gems (300 words, more or less) by Louise Cooper and the materials have been designed to be worked through in a maximum of two lessons – or just one if that's all the time you have. This BritLit Quick Kit is the first of three in the first batch, the other two being based on two equally short stories by master wordsmith Rob Butlin.



From 'The Colourful World of Calum McCall'

'Moses' Little Brother' and 'The Colourful Life of Calum McCall' are both from Ron's new set of short stories called 'No More Angels' (published by Serpents Tail).

All three kits have a pre-reading section which, as we have discovered over the years, is the most important part of the kit. There are also sections devoted to Context and

Language (Word Work) as well as the all important teachers' notes and key. There is also a recording in each case of the author reading the text as an mp3 file. Each of these sections is short, to the point and highly compact, but even then you have choice as to which pieces you might want to use. The follow up work that occurred in earlier kits has been eliminated.

And who wrote the kits? Why, Santa's little helpers, of course.

At the moment you can access the files from the sections on the website for Secondary and for Younger teens, with the Louise Cooper story being in the latter.

Levi in Italy



BritLit friend and poet ambassador Levi Tafari recently spent a few days in Italy as part of the BritLit project. He visited Naples on December 12 and 13, and then Rome on December 14.

On Monday he visited the “Ottavo Istituto Superiore” in the Colli Aminei area of Naples. Over 80 students were mesmerised by his words of wisdom and rasta beat. Students readily joined in with “Plastic Fantastic” and there were cries of “encore” as he performed his final poem. There was time for students to ask Levi some questions and for him to sign his books. So many students bought his books that he had to go back the next morning with more for those who had missed out.



Unfortunately, not all the schools interested were able to host a visit to their school, so the Naples British Council provided the venue in the brand new seminar room and teachers from the BritLit working group brought students to see Levi there. It was a sell out crowd and Levi produced his special kind of magic yet again, leaving students enthralled by his words and musical beat.

On the Tuesday he met staff, students and parents from the “Istituto Ghandi” in Casoria, a small town on the outskirts of Naples. He was warmly greeted by an audience of over a hundred. Everybody enjoyed his work and particularly appreciated the message in this line from his poem “Live the life you want to live”. Students had been working hard to prepare themselves for his visit and also gave performances of their own poems that they had written in English.



Wednesday saw Levi travelling to Rome for an evening dinner and performance of poetry with local publishers, to promote his poetry in Italy.

When asked about his impressions of the school visits, said Levi afterwards with a smile, ‘they seemed to want me to come back sometime’.

Retrospective of 2007

It is usual at the turn of the year for journals to indulge in a backward glance at the previous 12 months, so we thought we would do the same.

January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Second regional meeting of BritLit, in Naples ▶ Story teller, Jan Blake, tours Spain ▶ Author Romesh Gunesequera tours Italy
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Poet Levi Tafari visits Portugal, including Madeira ▶ BritLit reaches Mozambique at the MELTA teachers conference
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ A new 'Poems on the Metro' cycle is launched in Porto with poets Lawrence Sail and Menna Elfyn in attendance ▶ Hopeful applicants for BritLit NILE training submit requests for Comenius funding in Italy, Spain and Portugal
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Activity in Portugal dominated by the 21st APPI Conference in Lisbon, with children's author Tony Mitton in attendance ▶ Claudia Ferradas gives a Portugal reunion workshop in Aveiro ▶ Two new kits 'Down by the Cool of the Pool' and 'A Handful of Poems' launched (though the latter runs into a bit of bother)
May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ School reading groups hit new highs ▶ 2007 CDROM launched
June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ New kit 'Ullswater' based on a Romesh story launched in Italy and written by a group of Italian high school teachers ▶ BritLit becomes part of the distance MA course for YL at York University
July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ New author kit on 'Ron Butlin' launched ▶ Five 'old' BritLit kits get a facelift!
August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Teachers from Italy, Spain and Portugal meet in Norwich for 2 week BritLit course at NILE with Claudia Ferradas and Alan Pulverness ▶ Author Melvin Burgess offers a series of stories for the BritLit treatment
September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ BritLit Index project launched ▶ Poet Levi Tafari makes first visit to China, taking BritLit with him ▶ BritLit gets an extensive airing at APPI Seminar in Funchal ▶ Third regional BritLit meeting, in Madrid ▶ Author Romesh has his BritLit stories used for the International Reading Group for Teachers, and gets involved in some serious discussions on-line
October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ First MA diplomas for BritLit inspired course awarded at Alcalá University, Madrid, with poet Lawrence Sail in attendance ▶ 'Robin Hood' kit finally gets on-line ▶ BritLit at the APPI Bragança seminar ▶ BritLit kits available through the APPI website
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Performance poet Francesca Beard and baby Snow work in Portugal to prepare for forthcoming Chinese Whispers tour ▶ Author Ron Butlin tours Portugal, including Madeira ▶ New recordings of poet Lawrence Sail and authors Romesh Gunesequera and Louise Cooper reading their works made
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Three new types of kits – BritLit Quick Kits – launched from Portugal ▶ Levi Tafari tours Italy

From the British Council Literature Department

This month's *New Writing 15* website is now live. The theme for this month's focus is [Haunting](#).

From Shakespeare's Banquo to Casper the Friendly Ghost, stories of spectres, phantoms and apparitions have entertained for centuries. However, in the hands of Moniza Alvi, Anita Desai and Karen McCarthy, the traditions of the ghost story are manipulated, twisted and turned on their head, offering the reader a new interpretation of a classic genre. Desai maintains some of the conventions - a creaky house on a hill, spooky goings-on, a lone, intimidated heroine - but her ghosts are ambiguous and we have difficulty negotiating them. Alvi and McCarthy revisit the spectre of those once living, in Alvi's case Degas and his beautiful ballerinas, while McCarthy's grimmer ghosts are those who have perished in genocides across centuries.

Moniza Alvi pays homage to Degas and his models in a beautiful poem surveying the world inhabited by Degas and his models. Alvi's writing is evocative and resonant, capturing the essence of a specific time, a specific place.

Anita Desai's lingering and elegant short story tells of a woman's attempt to settle into her new home. She begins to feel less and less comfortable, especially when around the landing, and she realises that her longed-for solitude is proving elusive. A chilling and melancholy story where little is what it seems to be.

Karen McCarthy's shocking and disturbing poem investigates humankind's potential for extraordinary, systematic brutality, and the attempts that we make to explain and understand our actions. Inspired by exhibits at London's Imperial War Museum, she brings a personal response to the horrors of genocide.

The website, which can be found at <http://newwriting.britishcouncil.org/> has notes for teachers, notes for readers, author interviews and glossaries which we will be updating on a monthly basis, focusing on a wide selection of short stories, poems, novel extracts and essays.

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