

## NOTEBOOK

**A Book of Blues by Courttia Newland, £8.99, published by Flambard Press, [www.flambardpress.co.uk](http://www.flambardpress.co.uk)**

Courtia Newland's first novel *The Scholar* was published when he was 23 and he has since become an acclaimed author, screenwriter and playwright. The former musician also adds to his portfolio the title of 'literary activist' which almost certainly adds to his cool credibility.



His latest collection of short stories, *A Book of Blues*, is a study of human relationships threaded together by music. These are compelling and heartfelt stories taking the reader into the lives of a wide range of characters, whether located in Kenya or England.

The 37-year-old from London was named as 'one of Britain's most important young novelists' by *Time Out*. **Changeling by Clare Pollard, £8.95, Bloodaxe, [www.bloodaxebooks.co.uk](http://www.bloodaxebooks.co.uk)**

Clare Pollard's poems take us from the Pendle witch-trails in 17th Century Lancashire to the violent gangs of modern day east London.

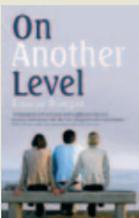


Her fourth collection is steeped in folktale and ballads and she cleverly relocates the traditional ballad *The Twa Corbies* to war-torn Iraq.

*Changeling* is described as a 'collection about our relationship with the Other: fear and trust, force and freedom'.

**On Another Level by Louise Rought, £10.99, Vanguard Press.**

*On Another Level* tells the story of a successful woman engaged to be married whose life is turned upside down when she meets a young waitress. The couple embark on a passionate love affair as they struggle to come to terms with their sexuality and the prejudice of others.



This is the debut novel by 36-year-old Louise Rought, a North East teacher.

**The Red Bird by Finn Shay Millar, £10.99, AuthorHouse**

The debut book by Finn Shay Millar, who lives in Weardale, is a cryptic look at the power of storytelling.

Orlando de la Tour is a storyteller apprenticed by Rosa, the red bird.

Rosa breaks the storyteller's cardinal command: 'never believe your stories are real.'



Rose becomes lost in her own tale and Orlando must find her.

# Intimate relations

The dark secrets of friends are unravelled during an evening at a country house in Guy Mankowski's debut novel. **Laura Fraine** meets the author of *The Intimates*.



Some guys have all the luck. The day before Guy Mankowski, pictured, left his job as an assistant psychologist, he won a commission to write his debut novel.

The result is *The Intimates*, an intoxicating story of a dinner party between old friends in which each character is pushed to their limit.

The book is unusually stylised for contemporary fiction, set in a glamorous, affluent world that seems to be decaying from within.

"The idea came to me when I was 21, on holiday in Florence visiting plazas with old, lovely, decrepit fountains," says Guy, who lives in Newcastle.

"I was struck by the thought that things which are slightly eroding can be more beautiful than those that are pristine."

His cast of 30-somethings are people of great privilege and considerable talent, yet each has failed to live up to the promise of their youth.

Essentially, this is a story about growing up and accepting yourself, as those who fail to do so go mad seeking revenge or chasing after their moment of glory.

While he chooses to write about brilliant failures, Guy appears to be the reverse. He was brought up on the Isle of Wight and taught by monks at Ampleforth College in York. Guy studied Psychology at Durham University and after graduating flirted with life as a singer-songwriter when he formed

an indie band called Alba Nova.

The Durham-based band's first EP *The Beautiful Way to Fall* was well-received but Guy moved to London to work as a psychologist at the Royal Hospital before heading back to the North East.

He is studying for a PhD in Clinical Psychology at Teesside University and writing his second novel.

"It's really hard to leave your writing at home on a Monday morning and come back to it on Friday night," he says.

His background in psychology has a strong influence on his writing, which is rich with thoughtful, self-analysing dialogue.

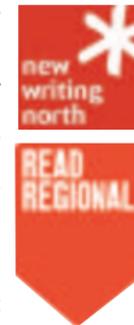
"In psychology there's a lot of people talking about their feelings and working things out through speaking," he explains.

"Meeting a patient, you sit in the same place and they sit in the same place and yet things develop and you go on a journey."

Add to this dialogue, the hothouse atmosphere of high emotions in the enclosed, opulent setting, and *The Intimates* is crying out for dramatisation.

You can catch Guy reading as part of the 2011 Read Regional project, this month.

\* For information on New Writing North's Read Regional visit [www.readregional.com](http://www.readregional.com). Guy can be found at [Guy-mankowski.blogspot.com](http://Guy-mankowski.blogspot.com) and on Twitter @Gmankow. *The Intimates*, £7.99, is published by Legend Press, [www.legendpress.co.uk](http://www.legendpress.co.uk)



## Is pen mightier than sword?

THE Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy has lamented the axing of Northumberland's well-respected Flambard Press.

In her poem *A Cut Back* she criticised the Arts Council funding cuts to literary organisations across the country including those to three small publishers:

'Three little presses went to market, Flambard, Arc and Salt; had their throats cut ear to ear and now it's hard to talk.

They remember Thatcher's Britain. Clegg-Cameron's is worse.

Deathbyathousandcuts.co.uk, the least of which is verse.

Flambard was established by Peter and Margaret Lewis, who live near Hexham, 20 years ago.

The independent press has published more than 120 books of poetry, short fiction, novels and non-fiction by authors including Sean O'Brien, John Murray, Val McDermid, Sid Chaplin and Peter Bennet.

Last month the company had its grant cut and regrets that it is likely to close next year.

Managing editor Will Mackie says: "It is very disappointing not to have been given the opportunity to step up to the next stage of our development.

"We've been so heartened by the words of appreciation and support from writers,



Margaret and Peter Lewis's Flambard Press is to close next year

publishers and readers and being included in a poem by our brilliant Poet Laureate is hugely encouraging.

"Small companies like Flambard can make a really valuable contribution to the arts by supporting new writers and reaching new readers. Our legacy is a very fine and high quality list of books."

An Arts Council England spokeswoman said: "We are in conversation with Flambard to support them through this transitional year and help look at other options to support their work."

## The call of a curlew

A collaboration between writer Ann Coburn and the Bellingham community has produced an epic prose poem for the Hexham Book Festival, as **Tamzin Lewis** discovers.

Ever come across sheep who 'stare and stare with mascara eyes'? Or pigs with 'short hair, three-day stubble and hairy backs like a rug'? Or even sheepdogs that 'smell like old coats.'

These are the wonderful lines thought up by 11 to 13-year-old children at Bellingham Middle School.

The schoolchildren were working with North-East writer Ann Coburn on *The Song of Bellingham* as part of the Hexham Book Festival.

Ann said: "The idea was to look at the local area and the balance between farming, cultivation, National Park and forestry.

"I decided to do a shared piece like a stained glass window where lots of bits came together to give a picture of Bellingham."

Ann also worked with the Over-50s Lunch Club in Bellingham, where people shared memories like keeping pigs in their gardens.

She then gathered together prose and poetry written by the participants and shaped them into a long "universal but personal" prose poem.

*The Song of Bellingham*, will be performed by the children in a piece directed by Sue Mitchell at Queens Hall, Hexham on May 9 at 6pm.

\* The Hexham Book Festival runs until May 17, [www.hexhambookfestival.co.uk](http://www.hexhambookfestival.co.uk)



Writer Ann Coburn