

# Review

*The Short, The Long, and The Tall*  
by Andrew McIntyre  
(Merilang Press, 2010)  
£7.99, 164 pages  
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Reviewed by David Gardiner



**A**ndrew McIntyre was the writer of two of the best short stories ever to appear in *Gold Dust* magazine, *Dirty War* and the equally dark sequel *Snuff*. The two appear together in this collection, which at first glance seems to squeeze no fewer than thirty-four stories into its hundred-and-forty or so pages. This, however, is somewhat deceptive, as many of the stories might be more accurately described as sections that follow on from one another to constitute single narratives. Another stylistic oddity that readers of the collection will need to get used to is McIntyre's refusal to use quotation marks or any other form of separation between dialogue and narration. As a technique this is no longer all that unusual and I found that I adapted to it quite quickly, but it does produce rather large, dense single paragraphs which can be daunting on the page, and it requires you to read more slowly than usual, which may be a deliberate aim of the author. I have yet to be convinced that the format yields any positive advantages, but am keeping an open mind.

The recurrent theme of the collection is war and armed conflict, mostly under the tropical sun in far away places. McIntyre's central characters are typically hard-bitten chain-smoking Westerners, thoroughly disillusioned former idealists, we suspect, cynically playing whatever role they have slipped into in the local attempt to realise Dante's *Inferno*. The over-riding message seems to be that war attracts or where necessary creates the vilest monsters that can exist in human shape.

What we get from these tales is a thoroughly jaundiced yet strangely compelling view of the human race as a bickering, mean-spirited pack of predators driven by a need to dominate and subdue. There isn't really anybody to like in McIntyre's stories, and this I think may constitute their only weakness. We long for contrast, light and shade, angels to counterbalance the devils, and they aren't really there. But aside from this it is extremely difficult to find anything to criticise in the way these tales are told or constructed. They are nicely-paced, highly atmospheric, and have a good balance of narration, description and dialogue. It's easy for the reader to enter imaginatively into the world of each story, and enough space is left for us to interpret things in our own way. The characters are rounded and believable, extreme at times but never caricatures.

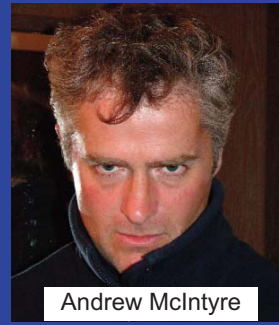
There is a brilliant creative mind at work behind these offerings, and if you have a strong enough stomach to survive them it's a collection that will engage, repel, fascinate, and live on in your imagination long after you have turned the final page.

Gold Dust

Gold Dust

# Andrew McIntyre

## Interview



Andrew McIntyre

**What was it that inspired you to take up writing, and how long ago did you start?**

I attended the Downs School, Colwall, where they encouraged creative writing based on W.H. Auden's teaching there in the 1930s. He developed *The Badger*, the school's magazine, and there was tremendous competition to be published. A couple of decades later, after years of traveling, during a rather difficult time, and with numerous anecdotes in my memory, I decided to write as a mode of survival. I worked on some stories and, about 10 years ago, I started submitting to magazines for publication.

**I see from the Publication History section at the back of this book that you have been successfully finding homes for your stories in magazines and anthologies for at least the last ten years, and that coincidentally we both had a story in the 2002 anthology of Fish Prize winners. Is this the first collection you have had published, and if so, why did you wait so long?**

This is the first collection of stories I have had published. It has been a matter of time. I estimated that a collection required about 100 to 150 pages to be suitable for consideration. Many of my stories are quite short, and I wanted to have every one in the collection published at least once, with reprints if possible. It has been something of an addiction, something that has kept me going. I also wanted to have some of the stories interacting with each other. Working 5 days a week, along with submitting, it has taken a while to achieve this, besides the lengthy research needed to seek a publisher who will accept a

short story collection.

**What is the background to your obvious fascination with military life, and what comes across as your sadness and disgust with the way men act when you put them in a uniform and tell them they have an enemy?**

Like many other British people, I had numerous relatives in both world wars. As a result, from an early age, I have been very interested in military history. I also had the unique experience of spending some time with the British Army on the Rhine, in the late 1970s. I have observed that time and time again history repeats itself; states with a weak military are taken over or wiped out by states with stronger forces. War and the military are associated with barbarity yet, in order to survive, a civilized state needs a strong armed force. The most glaring paradox comes when a civilized state needs to defeat an insurgency. This is our big test today. Can we defeat an insurgency with our contemporary ethics? Or must we revert to the methods of the Romans, for example? Behind these challenges lies the murky presence of religion.

**There seems to be an unremittingly bleak quality to most of your stories and the view of human nature that they embody. Would you say that this is a reflection of something in your own psyche or is Andrew the man completely distinct from Andrew the writer?**

For the most part, the stories do reflect my view of the human context, the problem of religion, and the difficult choices that lie beneath the veneer of western civilization.

**You have very few female characters in your stories, or male characters displaying what we might think of as female characteristics. Why do you think this is?**

This was unintentional; however, aside from a couple of stories, it is true that there are few females. I think this stems from a couple of factors. From a very early age, I was raised in an all-male environment: boarding school from the age of 8 to 17. In those days, conditions in these schools were no different from Borstal. A number of the stories I have written are based, either on my own experience, or on tales I heard associated with my father and his colleagues, who had been tested by war and life in the colonies. My main preoccupations are also associated with problems largely created by men: corruption, religious dogma, war, and subjugation.

**Do you have any ambitions to write a novel, or what other writing projects have you got in the pipeline?**

I have been working on a novel and a novella since the mid-1990s. Reflecting your previous questions, I think the novel portrays a much more feminine type of man, and the novella creates a more positive view of human potential than many of my stories. It will be interesting to see how these work out. With this collection of stories completed, I intend to work more regularly on these projects.

**Is the possibility of monetary gain from your writing something that you think about or does your motivation lie entirely elsewhere?**

Monetary gain has never been a motivation. Writing provides a purpose and meaning that create a balance to the banal, often absurd rituals of work and daily life. At some point, as a periphery result of success, it would be nice to make money from writing in order to dedicate more time to the craft, but it is definitely not what drives me.

**What is the event in your life as a writer of which you are most proud, and why?**

Having this collection of stories published, because it is the culmination of many years work. I never thought it would happen, and it is the realization of a dream that started on a Scottish hillside in late 1997, when I was at a very low point in my life.

**What imaginary future event would give you the most satisfaction as a writer?**

Publishing the novel and the novella I am working on, and becoming established with a wide readership.

**What would be your advice to someone setting out to learn the craft of short story writing, or attempting to reach an audience with stories they have already written?**

Read the very best authors as widely as possible, especially the Modernists for their style. Write from the heart; develop a unique voice to create a story that is original, interesting, meaningful, and layered with metaphor. Revise extensively. The story might take a day to write, and a year or more to perfect. Ruthless proofreading for basic errors and repetition is essential. Besides completing many drafts, it is helpful to leave the story for a while and come back to it later. Problems will emerge that were initially missed. A trusted friend or associate is very valuable for objective, even brutal feedback. They represent the market. Do not be offended by criticism, use it to make revisions or see the story from another angle. When everything seems to be ready, research the market for suitable magazines using one of the annual listings, and follow the editor's guidelines exactly. Do not be dismayed by rejection. Keep working on the story, keep submitting. If the story has the necessary qualities, eventually it will be accepted for publication.