

# Edinburgh Makar Launches Ghost Moon



EDINBURGH MAKAR LAUNCHES 'GHOST MOON' – a convivial evening at Blackwell's

Ron Butlin says he is a lucky man,

'I still wake up in the morning with the same enthusiasm that I had in my twenties. I can't wait to get on with my work in progress.'

He's been Edinburgh's Makar for six years, counts Neil Rankin, Irvine Welsh and Alexander McCall Smith amongst his admirers, has written novels, short stories, poetry, operas and plays, and is now launching his latest book, Ghost Moon, the story of Maggie and her son Tom. It's a story of cruelty, intolerance, shame – and ultimate redemption, of Edinburgh society in the early post-war years when 'nothing was open on a Sunday and the swings were all locked up.' A society that shuns a young pregnant woman, a woman who flees to the Western Isles only to have more doors slammed in her face.

It's also the story of Maggie today – back in Scotland and suffering from Alzheimer's – and of how the disease allows her to confront her pain and come to terms with her past.

In conversation with David Robinson at Blackwell's, Butlin described how the idea for the book came to him at a very difficult time in his life. He heard an inner voice saying just a few words, about a woman walking up and down a ship's deck. Butlin has a great deal of time for inner voices, 'the only thing in the world that is on your side'. He listened, and realised that the woman was in fact his own mother.

Pregnant and unmarried, she had been thrown out by her own family in 1949; her desperation was such that she sailed to Canada to find distant relatives. They opened the door, saw her and shut it firmly.

Butlin and his sister did not discover his mother's past until he was in his thirties and already a writer. Photos of Canada were dismissed as 'holiday snaps', and his mother was always reluctant to talk about her past. He stresses that the novel is a work of fiction – many blanks remain in his mother's story, blanks which he has filled in for Maggie and Tom. Writing the book gave him an understanding of his mother's suffering, and of how magnificently she fought through it, but he is saddened that she died before he was able to share this with her.

Although Ghost Moon's themes are sometimes bleak, there is plenty of humour. Butlin is a happy person whose love of life is shines through in his animated readings and conversation. Humour, he says, is fundamental, it illuminates dark moments and 'takes you right to the heart of things.'

And the title? Butlin was once asked to suggest a name for the moon when it is seen in the daytime sky, when it is there but a little bit out of place and time, half seen but intangible. Ghost Moon seems a fitting term for that, and also for the touching story of one woman's survival and ultimate peace.

Ghost Moon is published by Salt Publishing and available from Blackwell's, Edinburgh

Submitted by [Rosemary Kaye](#)